Moving and Mattering with the Wall-ed Feelings: A Posthuman Movement between Possibilities and Impossibilities of Becomings in Educational Research

Shiva Zarabadi
UCL Institute of Education, UK
shiva.zarabadi.15@alumni.ucl.ac.uk

Abstract

Taking an affective and material turn, this paper maps British-Bangladeshi Muslim schoolgirls embodied and embedded experiences of racial harassment in London. I explore how mattering and moving, with where and what matters for them, enable different affective and material entanglements to emerge. To work with the affective and material experiences of racial harassment, empowerment and belonging, I stayed attuned to the emergence of objects, spaces, times and feelings in their everyday ordinary lived experiences. My posthuman entry point to their experiences and stories happened through trans-material relations with matter, objects, stories and feelings that emerged during our walking intra-view and photo-diary making. I explore how embodied and embedded senses of belonging and empowerment is experienced, not through the language of the white western hu(man) citizen, but through the agential and vital materiality of wall, Brick Lane and a sewing machine. These entanglements allow for different material forms of becoming, belonging and empowerment between human-other, non-citizen, non-white, irrational, and illiterate which are normally stayed ordinary, unseen and unsaid.

Keywords: Trans-mattering, racializing assemblages, thing-power, refrain, wonder, Prevent policy

Introduction

Engaging in a series of diffractive movements, I work with the ethical vitality of mattering and moving in posthuman educational practices to map human and more-than-human collaborative formations. I suggest that material interventions into things, bodies and stories that matter and move with the missing people (Braidotti, 2018) of my study, British-Bangladeshi Muslim schoolgirls, can open possibilities for subalterns who can’t speak (Spivak, 1988) to become otherwise. Thinking, feeling and moving with images, stories and objects that emerged, mattered and moved in my PhD research enabled different and creative ways of educational research. Inspired by the power of pedagogies of mattering (Gravett et al., 2021), I draw on various affective and material relations to argue that matter and materiality have the potentiality to make impossible things and bodies matter, revealing the beings and becomings of voice-body-relations for those who do not matter. I propose that matter having thing-power (Bennett, 2010) enables a more-than-human-voice agency for affected, racialized and gendered bodies of those who cannot, or should not, speak to become otherwise. I think and work with the vital materiality of movement, to suggest how experiences and feelings that cannot be said or seen in educational practices can be walked and made. Wall, sewing machine and Brick Lane are those material agencies that emerged in Farah and Reema’s embodied and embedded experiences of racial harassment, the materiality of...
struggling to fit in/not-fit in, and the material *empowerment* of missing people that is felt, experienced, and lived differently from normalized post-feminist neoliberal understandings of empowerment.

**Moving and Mattering with the Wall**

*The wall is a finding. Let me summarize that finding: what stops movement moves.*

(Ahmed, 2017, p. 137)

In my research, the wall as non-linear and nomadic transgressive data (St. Pierre, 2011) emerged through series of wondering and wandering with human and more-than-human bodies, spaces, stories and feelings. The wall was part of Farah’s affective and relational becoming with her experiences of racial harassment, exclusion, shame and fear. It manifested as data that is not fixed and textualized by representation that pulled/pulls us from one space/moment/matter into another. In my study, wondering and wandering with wall during our walking and photo-diary making was experienced as a posthuman feminist praxis of trans-mattering (Taylor, 2020), not only did it enable entangling with virtual and actual material and immaterial moments and experiences, but it also revealed diffractive movements between spaces, bodies and feelings. Trans-mattering (Taylor, 2020) also enabled moments and experiences of human and more-than-human bodies to move, stop, matter and make. This collective moving and mattering enabled through the material and relational approach of this study resonating with the notions that being and knowing are not a human affair but are rather matters of human/non-human entanglements (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). As Farah and I wondered and wandered with walls throughout our research encounters, my methodological thoughts could not-know/feel/think wall as merely a data/theme/concept/method/theory in my research. Wall became a proposition for moving with matter, and a call for learning to move (with/in) educational research. In this paper, I wonder/ wander with mundane ordinary objects, things and figurations as transgressive data to materialise the complex experiences of racism, racial harassment, inequality and discrimination.

Wall emerges, feels and lives in the wondering and wandering experienced in our walking and photo-diary making through the “conceptual play of the zigzag” that is “the crosscutting path from one conceptual flow to another” (Deleuze, 1989, p. xi). The trans-materiality of the wall makes it impossible to obediently comply with codification rules that categorise data in groups or themes; rather it exhibits “a vibrancy that does something to the researcher”, a “wonder” and an intensity emanated from data, a “glow” (MacLure, 2013a, p. 228; 2013b, p. 661). Working with wonder to engage with data are those affective moments when “we may feel the wonder of data in the gut”, “the quickening heartbeat”, and “the cerebral disappointment of failing to find the right code or category in which to park a particular piece of (what now presents itself as) data” (MacLure, 2013a, p. 229). The wonder of wall grasped me, when it first appeared in my face-to-face interview with Farah at her school in Bethnal Green in southeast London. Wall emerged through our posthuman trans-mattering moments and experiences in walking, story-ing and working with the images in this paper. In those material moments, the boundaries of bodies, walls and walkings were disrupted becoming series of doings. As if we walk the walls and wall the walking, embody the walls and wall the embodiment, and wonder the walls and wall the wondering.
**Wall-ed Feelings**

Farah is one of the agential actants in these trans-material affective moments and movements. She studies in year 12 in a local secondary (high) school and has many experiences of racial harassment. Farah is a Bangladeshi-British Muslim who wears hijab fully, never going on and off. She is the oldest sister of three siblings, where the family of five live in a one-bedroom flat with no balcony in Bethnal Green in London. Her parents occupy the only bedroom, where Farah studies on the floor. Similar to most other participants of my PhD research, Farah comes from a low socio-economic background. Apart from the size of their home and living in an overcrowded household, her family cannot afford shop-bought clothes; her mum makes all their clothing, and their grocery shopping comes from a cheap local supermarket.

Wall, as part of Farah’s gendered, racialised and sexualised becoming assemblage and as immaterial, haptic/optic experiences of her body, appears and re-appears in different moments of my encounters with her. The first time was with a ‘nasty’ event at London Tower Bridge, then when talking about her university choices and future career, and later in her photograph taken from the window of a rooftop classroom at school showing layers of social housing and the City and Shoreditch’s skyscrapers in the background. The animate actual and virtual presence of this wall stayed with us in and out of spaces and moments even when Farah was not directly pointing it out.

Farah was just 12 years old, when she was racially harassed by several ‘white’ men:

*My aunt came over and we went to Tower Bridge, there were few people shouting few nasty things, I really don’t want to repeat what they said, I felt so scared that they might physically attack me, sometimes I think not go out but you have to get over it eventually. When I got home that day, I just felt really insecure about me wearing hijab and me being Muslim and me being Asian and looking different.*

Farah highlights the relational materiality between her experience and her hijab, body, race and religion. For most of my PhD research participants, their hijab makes them a bigger target for racial harassment. They were aware of how public opinion perceives Muslims, their representation in media as having the “visuality of suspectness” (Heath-Kelly, 2012, p. 69), therefore being dangerous. Salem, Bailey-Tarbett and Nordstrom (2019) argue that the headscarf as a cloth of prejudice and intolerance, “strips the human body from its humanity to deem it disposable and foreign within the politics of belonging” (p. 243).

Farah describes her feelings about what she called the ‘nasty’ incident:

*I felt really restricted like there was a wall against me, there is nothing I can do to stop that, it made me feel like being myself was a bad thing, I didn’t know what to do, because there is nothing I can do to change myself, being Asian is nothing I can change, nothing I can do to change being a Muslim, so I felt I was being limited into this box where I was only this person and I couldn’t explore as much as I wanted to be, to become a bigger person, I couldn’t do that because I was being limited by that comments about my race and stuff.*
The emergence of the wall in Farah’s experiences of her body and its relationship to others, matters. The wall’s trans-materially becomes a component of affective assemblage of Farah’s hijab, body and being a Muslim girl. Farah materialises her experiences of racial harassment as a wall and her body becomes limited to “this” box. The actualisation of her experiences as wall and box matters. Inspired by Ahmed’s notions of “wall as a finding” (2017, p. 137), wall as hard histories and life description as wall description, I consider this wall as an actualisation of a virtual state of being/feeling/thinking giving materiality to the affective presence of racism and discrimination. I believe that feeling a wall against you does things to Farah’s body to make it act, think, and feel otherwise. Inspired by Raymond Williams’s (1977, cited in Ahmed, 2010) structures of feeling, Ahmed coins the notion of “feelings of structure” (2010, p. 216) to suggest feelings become structures that get under the skin. Moving beyond the wall as feelings of structure, the vital trans-materiality of the wall diffractively wondered us, “reaching out from the inert corpus (corpse) of the data, to grasp us” (MacLure, 2013a, p. 228), and Farah materialised her material and affective wall feelings and experiences through walking and working with photos (Figures 1, 2, 3). As Gravett, Taylor and Fairchild (2021) suggest, such relational and affirmative educational practices can provide a greater opportunity for students to voice their experiences and engage in new ways of producing knowledge. We walked, created, felt and wall-ed Farah’s walls. We experienced wall as a doing and becoming-with rather than an already known, named, and signified dead matter.

I turn to affect theories to entangle with Farah’s feeling wall against me as wall-ed feelings, the actualised materiality (the wall) of a virtual feeling that modulates the capacities of her body, her relations to her body and other bodies. Farah’s becoming as the ongoing and relational identity formation happens in-between these walls and other human and more-than-humans. As we walk, it becomes intelligible that these wall-ed feelings matter as they agentially re-modulate the micro-intensities of space, time and everyday life (Ivinson & Renold, 2013; Juelskjaer, 2013) of Farah’s becoming-assemblage. Farah relates her insecure and wall-ed feelings and being limited to this box to her hijab, being Muslim, Asian and looking different.

The experiences of racial harassment, shouting ‘nasty’ things materialised and felt as wall agentically work as affective partners of “racializing assemblages” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 43) that not only affect the capacity of body to act and change the relations of my participants’ body, to other human and more-than-human bodies, but also act as a racializing refrain hold the racialised body of (Muslim) other in the historical and colonial repeating loops of racism. Refrain in music or poetry implies repeated lines and can be the state of “holding together of heterogeneous elements” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 376). What I call racializing refrain enact the flows that enable the re-positioning the body with different intensities and tonalities in the emerging racializing assemblages every time racial harassment happens.

Wall-ed feelings condition the racializing refrain to emerge, marking the territory of Farah’s veiled-body and its movement. Walls as Farah experiences them, work as the affective material figuration of virtual-Farah-veiled-body and refrains that enable an organisation of “a limited space” with a “circle” drawn around it (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 311), a veiled-body refrain-ed back into racializing assemblages (Weheliye, 2014) of terrorism/counter-terrorism. These racializing assemblages include the Prevent policy, a UK directive that has been premised as an anti-radicalisation strategy. This policy has been enforced in UK schools (and in other facets of life) since July 2015 (HM Government, 2015). The Prevent policy is threaded through
this paper and linked to the affective moments of both Farah and Reema. Prevent becomes an agential factor in enabling racializing assemblages, where those affected are living with the present fear of uncertain threat of what may or may not happen in the future (Zarabadi, 2020; Zarabadi & Ringrose, 2018).

**Wall-ed Livings**

Diffractive movements not only lead to collaborative formations between my participants and things that matter for them, but also a trans-mattering (Taylor, 2020) of moments and experiences where subject, object, space, time, are affectively and diffractively relocated. These trans-material experiences that multi-sensory PhEmaterial³ (Strom et al., 2019; Ringrose & Niccolini, 2020) methodologies enable, provides a posthuman praxis to intervene directly in the material processes and assemblages that allow and support the endurance of racism, hetero-sexism, and ableism as they are not immaterial ideologies but economic, institutional, “biological”, and medical matters (Snaza et al., 2016, p. xix). Trans-material methodologies enable different thinkings and doings about the materiality that shapes the political struggles of human and more-than-human around race, gender, sexuality, class and Muslimness. These trans-material moments and experiences happened, for instance, when in our photo-diary making encounter Farah materialises Ameera’s (year 12) body-space-feeling as squashed. Ameera is another participant of my PhD research and, like Farah, she lives in an overcrowded household with 19 other members of her family and extended family. The series of trans-material photos (Figures 1, 2, 3) in this section was taken by Farah for her photo-diary in response to map things that matter for her:

*It’s from the roof of my school [Figure 1], the view all the way to Canary Wharf, this is like all of East London, every lunchtime when I am with my friends we come here, these are like community state council houses and over there is all the rich houses.*

This window is an affective opening to the wall-ed feelings and vital materiality of walls, where the dominant presence of buildings covering the whole picture. The photos do not just show solid and concrete buildings as non-human dumb matter with the same colour and build, they are trans-material and affective assemblages of various material agencies that contribute to Farah and her subjectivity-becoming assemblages. In Figure 1, all the arrows point into the picture rather than outwards, the big orange arrow shows all of East London that is close by, and the narrow and furthest away arrow shows Canary Wharf. There is nothing other than buildings; even the sky adds nothing special, just dark, grey, and cloudy.

Here in Bethnal Green are traffic of arrows, lines and words. For her, the main things in this picture are:

*I am not really agreed with the entire set out of this place, I think it’s funny how these are all in one area but everyone who lives here struggles with their life and they really struggle financially and literally 5 min from them you have all these big banks, we went on a trip to Canary Wharf with school, the teacher asked the class what is here like to you? And my friend said gentrification and I agree with because in 5 minutes there are people who live in these flats and I know a lot of them. It’s funny because sometimes it makes me feel like slightly at peace but then it also reminds me of how divided the places are and you know sometimes, I wish it wasn’t like that.*

---

*Cultural and Pedagogical Inquiry, Summer 2022, 14(1), pp. 189-204
ISSN 1916-3460 © 2022 University of Alberta
http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/cpi/index*
The longest arrow (Figure 1) points to Benthal Green: *makes me feel at peace but also shows division*. This note appears more distant – the longest arrow might suggest social imbalance, divisions and struggling that leave little space for things other than the material lived feelings she experiences.

In Figures 2 and 3, Farah uses the chunky arrows to materialise the relations and experiences of her body in spaces: ‘Directly in front of my house’, ‘community centre’ and ‘Eid functions’. There is an affective traffic as she maps ‘mixed feelings’, ‘hit the boys’, ‘girls often scared, stayed close’, ‘I didn’t really want to go there’, ‘directly in front of her house’. The word ‘scared’ appears twice around her house. She writes ‘scared now of the area because of the shooting’ and draws a box around this comment to highlight its importance. It is as if there were things that ‘girls often scared of’ which made them stay close or, like Farah, not to go there. However the shooting affectively and materially took Farah’s relationship and emotions about her living area to a different level of fear. Community, culture, state and council housing are affective spaces that have a powerful presence in her pictures and stories. Farah mapped both spatial affective senses of belonging and not belonging. As Clough and Willse suggest, “belongingness or relationality is itself an effect of the mediated modulation of affectivity” (2010, p. 51). Where Farah maps her house and community centre mixed feelings of togetherness and not belonging emerge: the shootings and the boys who ruin the communal garden, her primary school with a majority of Bengali students that she ‘couldn’t fit’, her ‘culture [that] won’t be judged’ but also girls who stay close and people who volunteer to keep the communal garden alive.
Figure 2. Community Centre

Figure 3. Community Garden
The ‘funny’ difference in her description of Figure 1, glows another time in our walking interview from school in Bethnal Green to Brick Lane. Whilst passing in-between the layers of Council estates, Farah highlights the differences between these two areas:

*Shoreditch is a really funny area to me, there are many differences between Bethnal Green and Shoreditch, in Bethnal Green you can see lot more markets, but here is lot more cleaner, less loud and with bigger buildings here, so many restaurants here which you don’t have it in Bethnal Green, there are so like informal, slightly wrong-done, but you get used to it.*

I ask Farah where she prefers to hang out, she replies:

*They both have their good bits and bad bits, when I hang out there [Bethnal Green] I don’t feel that I have any expectations but when I hang out here [Brick Lane] I feel I need to dress nicely, pretend to be social and active like jumpy and perky but when I am over there I am just relax and chill. I can just be myself and I can make jokes but here I feel it might be a little inappropriate.*

Farah’s body relations are materialised differently between these two spaces. In one she feels relaxed and herself, and in the other she pretends to be active and social – the spatial experiences of self, body and others, the space that becomes the body and more-than-body, where you belong and where you pretend to belong. The presence of Canary Wharf and Shoreditch area in Farah’s photos and stories resonates with Gulson’s analysis of Canary Wharf as “a foreign body” (2005, p. 146), as both “symbols of capital and renewal and the embodiments that reinforce the disadvantage of the adjacent areas” (p. 151). Focusing on the associations of urban change and educational policies, Gulson argues how the presence of Canary Wharf for students in the deprived area of Tower Hamlets provides the symbolic and concrete representation of worthy aspiration and achievements. In my study, Farah and her story takes Gulson’s study of the discourses of policy, educational achievement, aspirations and places into a micro and lived embodied and embedded experience of Muslim schoolgirls in the deprived adjacent side.

**Wall-ed Schooling**

Another wall that Farah materialises is the wall of Prevent policy, Farah describes her experience of schooling:

*When they monitor [school staff] us, it means that we have to take into account everything that we say, we can’t be too extreme, I have to hold myself back, or else they might think ‘oh I am becoming extremist’ which obviously I am not. It’s not only you have to be careful what you are saying, but you have to be careful with who you are now, and you need to make sure they do believe you.*

Farah documents the material and affective consequences of monitoring in school where concern about the application of the Prevent duty is reflected in her comment above, where she feels it controls and regulates Muslim students’ interactions. Farah and most of the other Muslim school-girls, participants of my PhD, describe sense of change in their experiences and relations to school, teachers and other students since the implementation of Prevent in 2015. Most of them, like Farah explained, even if they hold themselves back and are careful with what they say, school still monitors them because the issue is not about what they say but about who they are. My
participants explained that this concern resulted in confusion over what they can, or cannot say in the classroom or school grounds. The result and impact of this makes them stay silent and not risk any engagement in wider debates that may have ramifications for how they are perceived. This suggests that the ways in which radicalisation is conceptualised in the Prevent policy works as a fixed, essentialised assumption about Muslims and extremism in schools (O’Donnell, 2016; Sian, 2015), and even students’ non-participation does not help their situation. What Farah maps resonates with the understanding of Prevent policy as a new affective partner of control societies (Deleuze, 1992), where neoliberal counter-terrorism promotes a sense of “acts at a distance” (Lazzarato, 2006, p. 180), not only through the modulation of capacities, or debilitation of bodies and flows of desires and beliefs, but also through forces, memories, attentions and decisions that enable capacities to flow. Unlike disciplinary regimes that regulate students’ bodies in school with discursive forms of power relations and discourses, Prevent controls students’ bodies through its affective modulations, sometimes through vagueness and what Farah describes as holding themselves back (See also Zarabadi, 2020; Zarabadi & Ringrose, 2018a; 2018b).

Walking the Walls, Trans-mattering the Walls

Forest-y Bit

Farah chose the ‘Forest-y bit’ (Figure 4) for our photo-diary rather than a school space. ‘Forest-y bit’ enabled Farah to experience her body-space-desires differently and emerged in research encounters with Reema, ‘Forest-y bit’ is the name that Farah gave to the small corner of a park in their neighbourhood hidden behind some bushes. ‘Forest-y bit’ as an affective relational space glows (MacLure, 2013a) in spatial temporal research encounters with Reema and other participants of my PhD research. Forest-y bit has trans-material agency in the lived experiences of Farah and Reema and potentially other Muslim schoolgirls in Bethnal Green. What Reema describes as Forest-y bit during our intra-view in her house, Farah re-materialises in our walking interview and during our photo-diary session (Figure 4). Walking intra-view is one of the multi-sensory methodologies of my PhD research. I applied Skype video calls using mobile technology to existing walking methodologies to de-centre the positionalities between researcher/participants, space/feelings into new relations. Both my actual physical absence and actual virtual presence, enabled through Skype video calling and mobile digital technology, comprise what I term walking intra-view. The use of intra-view instead of interview is to suggest both the mutual co-constitution of entangled agencies of, say, walking, becoming, participant, and researcher but also the use of technology to walk and traverse the boundaries of bodies, human, space and time.

Forest-y bit trans-materialises the boundaries of human and more-than-human bodies: Reema, Farah, school, photo-diary, walking intra-view and more. Forest-y bit is with them and with their lives. Farah’s perspectives of Forest-y bit resonates with Ivinson and Renold’s understanding of the notion of “wild” (Ivinson & Renold, 2013, p. 370). Even though this space is not mountainous and wild in the traditional sense, for Farah, for Bethnal Green and for her school (with no greenery or garden) it is wild, hidden, bushy, enabling “alternative modes of subjectivity” (Ivinson & Renold, 2013, p. 370) to those offered by school, home, town and local community.
With Reema, Forest-y bit emerged during our Skype walking intra-view as she sat in her parents’ bedroom; her sibling was studying in their shared bedroom, the door was open, and I could hear clearly her parents talking and younger sibling screaming and crying. It was in these moments that Reema trans-materialises this space-time-bodies-assemblage with that of ‘Forest-y bit’. Reema describes her relationship with this space:

> When we have enough and when we just can’t deal with things or if we have just mental break down, we go there and soothe each other, kind of escape moments from the school. We bunk our spare times that we should work, to go there and talk, just to unleash all our angers towards the teachers or the subjects we don’t like.

_Forest-y bit_ is not just a static place, but processes, knots (Ingold, 2000) and events (Massey, 2005), a meshwork of lines, movements, affects and bodies to unleash the anger to talk and to soothe each other as Reema describes. The affective transition of nature walk to _Forest-y bit_ for Reema and Farah reveals a wild, hidden, safe emplaced event – contingent, in-flux, the product of interrelation and always under construction (Massey, 2005). Unleashing anger in the space of _Forest-y bit_ does not only happen through human agencies, but it is also a material event where space is needed to enable transitions from one affective assemblage to another. Unleashing anger is enabled through moments and experiences of trans-mattering between humans and more-than-humans, bodies, nature, walk, hidden, bush, space, spare times, affects and desire;

> …inside school, you never say things and it’s different but when you’re outside you’re much more secure to say whatever you like.
Reema differentiates between the two locations. The Forest-y bit is close, but not in school, busy but having the potentiality to stay unknown, outside school, but more secure to talk. For Reema, school and park are two contrasting places accompanied by constraining and liberating feelings, where the vitality of these escaping moments and spaces in their well-being. For Reema, the space-body-materal (escaping) moments in Forest-y bit open up capacities for “proto possibilities” (Ivinson & Renold, 2013, p. 371) to becoming other, to do things differently by enhancing or diminishing her capacity to act, decide, think or feel, re-assembling new relations and realizations after they unleash their anger. For Farah, the proto possibilities of Forest-y bit are in its calming potentialities and no parents’ zone. Forest-y bit and what it does to Reema and Farah not only reinforces the notion that subjective experiences are often tied to place (Ivinson & Renold, 2013) but also a sense of who they become, materialising in that movement from school to park.

**Sewing Machine and Brick Lane**

Walls trans-mattered through the emergence of a sewing machine during our photo-diary making and walking intra-view in Brick Lane. Sewing machine in Farah’s pictures and story problematises my understanding of the data as known and familiar. It sets in motion thinking about what could emerge when data is not mediated through voice, human or researcher, but through sewing machines and walking in Brick Lane. Data becomes a sense-event (MacLure, 2013b), where ordinary objects, materials, nature and more-than-human entities are affective translators (Christiansen, 2018) opening up new capacities for Farah to become differently. In our walking intra-view, Farah showed me a shop in Brick Lane where her mother learned to sew (Figure 5):

*She built up a lot to get to where she is now, she can’t speak English she thinks that she is not good at certain skills but she learnt to sew here [in this shop] and with sewing she kind of proved them all wrong, that she can do things, she can make a business and she can work here, nowadays she really tries to belong in the community and do it as a work.*

![Sewing machine](image_url)
Farah, walking and Brick Lane trans-matter walls that separate her mother through a sewing machine. These material moments resonate with Ahmed’s notion of what stops and moves. Walls stop, walls of living in an over-crowded household and walls of Farah’s parents’ bedroom, the only bedroom of her house shared with other four family members. However walking and sewing machine trans-matters these walls even momentarily. Attending to the material force of sewing machine as having “thing-power” (Bennett, 2010, p. 2) suggests that “objects make us, as part of the very same process by which we make them” (Miller, 2010, cited in Taylor, 2013, p. 690). The sewing machine, as affective and material medium for empowerment, moves and matters beyond the barrier of language, human body and racialised hierarchised society.

It is not just how sewing machine as materiality becomes with Farah, her mother, family and my research but also how we become with sewing machine “in an open, contingent unfolding of mattering” (Taylor, 2013, p. 699). I draw on Carol Taylor (2013) to think about the sewing machine and its agency which is neither “like” human agency in degree or kind, nor only a matter of individual human will, but rather as an agency that is “congregational” or “confederate” (Bennett, 2010, p. 20). Thinking through the material force of sewing machine opens up new ways of seeing and thinking about how Farah’s subjectivity is made, transformed and continually remade through the concerted co-constitutive acts of objects-bodies-spaces and its affective entanglements with different assemblages.

The relational materiality between walking, sewing machine and Brick Lane enabled affective assemblages of moving and mattering bodies, memories, feelings, space, time and objects. We walked the difference, from Bethnal Green to Brick Lane, from a predominantly Muslim community area with layers of council housing, cheap mega superstores, fast food small shops and a crowded cheap market to the shiny skyscrapers, colourful graffities, stylish and cosy coffee shops and restaurants. Within the five-minute walk, the halal fast-food shops, cheap megastores and crowded pavements of high street turn into arty cafés and restaurants, shimmering skyscrapers daubed with colourful, professional graffiti (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Brick Lane
Brick Lane for Farah is an affective space (McCormack, 2013) that is relational, processual, and non-representational. In Brick Lane her mother learnt to sew. Brick Lane and sewing machine materially and affectively enabled new capacities for Farah’s mother to become differently. She does not speak English, but she sews as a job (and makes clothes for her family) and teaches sewing in the community centre. Walking re-materialises the more-than of Farah’s mother and family. Farah in Brick Lane is a different Farah, livelier and freer than Farah in school, more enabled than constrained, her body looks stronger, her voice is firmer, she walks and breathes faster, words don’t reach her mouth fast enough as if the affected body has difficulties to become in the present, the body that knows but the words that stay behind. Walking in Brick Lane, the mind, body and space in a new assemblage, enables the trans-materialisation of struggle and empowerment. The affective “thisness” of Brick Lane (McCormack, 2013, p. 5) in Farah’s material experiences and feelings suggest the impossibility of reducing spacetime to the status of containers for moving bodies.

Conclusion

Drawing on a series of diffractive movements and material moments from my PhD research encounters, in this paper, I explored how moving and mattering can enable different interventions into micro, ordinary and everyday experiences that often remain unseen and unsaid in the educational research. I materialised how walking and photo-diary methodologies momentarily trans-matter the walls of racial harassments, living in an overcrowded household in a deprived area, the walls of Prevent policy and counter-terrorism monitoring that occurs in everyday schooling experiences. The walkings with human and more-than-humans enabled us to cross the boundaries of the virtual/actual bodies, missing people, voice, school spaces, hidden Forest-y bit and more.

Moving and mattering with what mattered for British-Bangladeshi Muslim schoolgirls enabled different understanding of the notions of empowerment, the struggles to fit in, and embodied and embedded experiences of racial harassment. The affective and material moments and lived experiences that emerged during our walkings and working with images showed the different nature of empowerment, belonging and harassments on ordinary days and in ordinary places for some people, is far from the normalized post-feminist neoliberal understandings of these experiences. As Farah materialised it was not the speaking, the language, or the voice but the sewing machine; not the school space but the forest-y bit; not the sitting but the walking that enabled experiences of empowerment and fitting in. Moving and mattering with images, stories and objects allowed my participants to speak with matter and to consider what and how matter makes other matters matter.
Endnotes:
1 Bethnal Green is a predominantly Bangladeshi Muslim neighbourhood located in the southeast of London. This section of Tower Hamlet lies beside Shoreditch, known as both a ‘Hipster Heaven’ and an area that was impacted by the government’s cultural cleansing and gentrification schemes. Since 2015 Bethnal Green’s name intertwined with the story of ‘Jihadi brides’ as being called by media, those three Muslim schoolgirls who fled to Syria to marry Jihadi fighters who came from and used to go to school in Bethnal Green.

2 My participants use the term on and off to refer to Muslim girls who occasionally wear hijab depending on places they visit.

3 PhEmaterialism; this assemblage concept enables the relations between posthumanism(ph), new materialisms (materialism), the feminist (phem) agenda and the ‘feminal’ foremothers, philosophers and educational research and equity (E).

4 Brick Lane is a street in the East End of London, in the borough of Tower Hamlets. It has a long history where many immigrants settled. Currently it represents one of London’s tourist attractions for vintage shops, graffiti, food and fashion.

References


[https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2013.830099](https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2013.830099)


