

# Rememory, resistance and the geographical: adult and community education as spaces of possibility

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# Rememory, resistance and the geographical: adult and community education as spaces of possibility

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## ABSTRACT

This paper attends to the educational narratives of South Asian Muslim women who grew up in an inner city area. Using walking interviews, each individual took me around the neighbourhood where they grew up, identifying places of educational encounter on the way. There was a pertinent sense of a past that was in many ways, still present. Their memories transcended a place abandoned by the state and its residents by adopting a hauntological perspective and decolonial feminist inquiry. The work of *rememory* illuminates narratives that uncover some unsettling truths about how the intersection of race, gender and migratory settlement have provided more than voice and agency. Despite deficit stereotyping, a notable and rooted choice prevails from participants. There is a will to remain in what is externally framed as a place of social and economic deprivation. There follows a critique of how adult and community education has anchored and provided a foundation for agency, creativity and a commitment to future forming an informed community.

## KEYWORDS

Adult community gender  
assimilation resistance  
hauntology

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore how a methodological approach evoked rememory and an embodied sense-making (Somerville 2007) for participants and their relationship to adult and community education. This approach was underpinned by hauntology (Gordon 2008) and decolonial feminism (Rhee, 2020). This paper is positioned as part counter-narrative and part provocation to the often deficit discourses and limiting assumptions that are attributed to groups and individuals deemed ‘marginalised’ and places that are ‘deprived’.

Drawing on the findings of a doctoral study, the paper outlines the agentic nature of adult and community education as encountered by a group of South Asian Muslim women. As daughters of economic migrants, their narratives consider adult and community education as a key to identity construction and broader home-

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making practices (Cieraad 2010, Sandu 2013). The study was situated in an inner-city area of North Birmingham in the West Midlands of the UK. This scene setting matters for a city historically known for both industry and migration; two connecting factors that informed the environment for the participants' narrative accounts that will follow. The area itself is known for being home to a famous football club which has a prominent physical occupation as a symbol of whiteness, in what is otherwise known to be a racialised and transient geographical location. Following the second world war, the area witnessed the arrival of many migrant communities from ex-commonwealth countries, particularly the Indian sub-continent. Here, they made their homes, raised their families and navigated a language, culture and systems that were alien to them. On a positionality note, I am of South Asian Sikh heritage and lived close to the area that I researched, in my formative years. My parents also arrived from India as economic migrants though their 'success markers' involved 'upgrading' to more affluent, often white neighbourhoods. Returning to the area was a curious and unsettling endeavour and there were aspects of the participants' narratives that were highly resonant.

The significance of methodology for participatory, creative and co-constructed research in relation to adult and community learning has more recently attracted a re-visioning of method and approach alike. Mary-Rose Puttick's (2021) work for instance, re-frames traditional notions of participation by centring the 'bottom up' approach of critical pedagogy and research; this was more authentically responsive to the migrant women she was teaching as part of a family literacy programme. Much of this came from the pedagogical *and* research principles of critical reflexivity and a commitment to a continuous and active deconstruction of her own positionality. By exploring the experiences of motherhood, migration and literacies, Puttick's work marks an invested labour in interrupting colonial approaches and assumptions through pedagogical ethnography. Her invitation to her participants to use artefacts that symbolised features of their identities, demonstrates a power shift in the traditional relations of the researcher and researched.

Lewis (2020) critiques the role of creative arts in adult and community learning with a particular emphasis on the benefits on mental health. She considers the wider debates around creative arts in learning and the specific processes of these activities, attending to how these promote self-exploration and reflection. She also cites earlier work by Narushima (2008) which evidences a strong sense of collectivity and how participants valued 'togetherness' and benefitted from caring for one another. Despite this project involving an older group, there is much to take from this in terms of alleviating isolation and engaging in activities for the first time for all ages and of course, of different backgrounds. The notion of care is central to the work by Duckworth and Smith (2018) in their 'FE in England – Transforming Lives and Communities' project. Drawing on a number of case studies, Duckworth and Smith (2018) highlight the positive impact that adult education has on motherhood by highlighting one of these:

Anita's narrative illustrates how when mothers' confidence and expertise is re-positioned as valued and needed knowledge, they can develop new literacies, advocate for their children and contribute to their literary progress.

(Duckworth and Smith 2018, p. 9)

Aside from the literature on participatory methodology, this paper speaks to Tara Yosso's work which advocates for the idea of cultural community wealth. Yosso's (2005) conceptualisation of cultural wealth objects to the traditional deficit model attributed to ethnically diverse students. Yosso specifically opposes the absence of any recognition of the homogenised white, middle class culture as being inherently standard for institutional life. In a paper titled 'Whose culture has capital?' Yosso (2005) suggests that ethnically diverse students bring a much broader range of capitals to the classroom beyond the traditional Bourdieusian capitals. Yosso identifies these capitals as social, navigational, linguistic, resistant, familial and aspirational.

A similar argument is upheld by Duckworth & Brezski (2015) who assert that students from traditionally marginalised communities, bring a range of diverse 'literacy practices' to the classroom. Often, these practices are outside of what is recognised in the prevailing discourses and environments and are consequently, overlooked.

These works offer a useful context in terms of the associated methodological and social concerns that inform a broader understanding of this project. However, this paper also draws on a conceptual framework that assembles the hauntological with a decolonial feminist perspective.

## Conceptual framework

In this study, I adopted hauntology as an ontology; as a way of seeing and being. This aligns with a decolonial feminist approach that refuses to 'divide race, sexuality, and class into mutually exclusive categories' (Verges, 2021, p. 20).

Hauntology registers the spectral appearance of the unresolved in everyday life through acknowledging the subversion of time. Hauntology is as much about the social, political and cultural as it is the personal. It is captured here by Avery Gordon's (2008) explanation:

Those singular and yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what's been in your blindfield comes into view ... haunting is not about invisibility or unknowability per se, it refers us to what's living and breathing in the place hidden from view: people, places, histories, knowledge, memories. (Gordon 2008, p. 3)

Gordon (2008) alludes to what is present in seeming to be absent. For Gordon, the ghost is the unspoken that surfaces; it's re-appearance is a repeated request to be seen.

In addition, I consider decolonial feminism as an endeavour of re-memory (Rhee, 2020). In this respect, the hauntological inquiry aligns strongly with the notion of decolonial feminism as re-memory. The intersection of spatial and educational encounters reiterates many voices and narratives that have a relationship with and particularity to that location. This study was certainly no exception given its location within an industrial migrant city.

Who we are and who we become is the work of re-memory, a different way of being/knowing/doing that recollects our ghostly connections, relations and connectivity across geographies, culture, time and language. (Rhee, 2020, p. 20)

Rhee (2020) conceptualises re-memory as a complexity that enmeshes past and present – ‘temporality is not linear’ she states, adding ‘space and time are intertwined’ (Rhee, 2020, p. 3). This happens by centring the seemingly peripheral. The enmeshing is distinct for a decolonial feminist approach as Rhee (2020) reminds us of a deep subjectivity where there is no separation between ‘a self and her environment’ (Rhee, 2020, p. 3).

Using re-memory as a decolonial feminist approach, affords a closer exploration of the educational narratives of South Asian Muslim women who grew up in inner city Birmingham in the UK. This paper seeks to present a contextual and conceptual framing of how community education offered a powerful liminal space for young migrant women growing up in the UK during the 1980s and 1990s. The narratives, the identities of the participants and their relationship to the geographical location, are offered through adopting a hauntological (Gordon 2008, Rhee, 2020) lens.

Gordon (2008) draws on the notion of displacement as a feature of hauntology and for this project, there is a cultural displacement evident in the migratory moment; in its political intent and up-rooting of home. The unfamiliarity of home goes beyond the idea of de-familiarisation. Gordon suggests a disconnect that calls for attention and resolve. The location of this disconnect can be found in what is remembered or forgotten. In many ways, hauntology surfaces through rememory (Rhee, 2020) and is therefore, a feminist practice in that it ‘opens up an enclosed (Western) notion of individual and self’ (p. 5).

More specifically, there is a *cultural* hauntology (Kaur, 2021) at play here which acts as a point of resistance and of departure from the unspoken expectation to assimilate. In particular, it mobilises a more dynamic identity construction that goes beyond hybridity (Bhabha 1994). Cultural hauntology is rooted in a deep-seated internal colonisation that continues to unsettle, forget and re-member the imprints of erasure; the imprints of opting for Western-centric assimilation instead of holding to account the injustice created by displacement and dispossession.

## Participants

The research participants were South Asian Muslim women who had grown up in the Aston area and still lived in or around it. These women had moved with their parents, into the Aston area post WW2; a particular social and historical moment which became the unspoken landscape and backdrop to the narratives that were shared. This paper will draw on the conversations with three participants; Sara, Mashkura and Fozia. All three women were in the early forties and had migrated to Aston as children and were now living in or close to the area. A shared identity that we all had was motherhood. This was significant because it seemed natural to steer conversations about the future and engage in discussions about diaspora and generational issues. Whilst there was a re-memory at play, there was equally a future forming theme that underpinned many of our conversations.

## Walking as hauntological inquiry

Given that hauntology acknowledges and subverts linear time, walking complemented this inquiry as it captured the temporal nature of place and memory.

Walking as a method of inquiry was favoured in order to map the spatial relations between places of significance in the area including home and other sites of educational encounter. In the spirit of decolonial participatory research, the intent was to centre participants' experiences through a narrative that was visual, spatial and embodied.

Whilst Emmel and Clark (2009) offer a practical 'toolkit' for conducting walking interviews in urban neighbourhoods, others have since enriched the notion and practice of walking in social science research in other ways. Walking as a method has been celebrated for its participatory nature (O'Neill 2018, Emmel and Clark, 2009), as an embodying, relational and sensory act (Springgay and Truman 2018). It is also important to note that the sensory is equally about affect as highlighted by Osgood *et al.* (2020):

Affects tune into sensory experiences in ways which make it possible to disrupt the over-reliance on sight and the dominance of ocularcentrism, so common to Western modes of knowledge-making and, indeed, those associated with the privileges of the masculine flaneur.

(Osgood *et al.* 2020, p. 599)

The reference made here to Western modes of knowledge-making aligns with a decolonial feminist stance in terms of creating a collaborative space. Walking as inquiry has initiated conversations around how it allows a de-familiarisation of the spatial (Truman 2022). I would add that it also revealed a disruption to linear temporality through its hauntological inquiry, complementing therefore, the ontological foundations of this research. Re-memory like decolonial feminism attends to a de-centring and re-visioning of traditional knowledge production for a subjective knowing. This subjectivity declares many voices and therefore many ways to know, whether embodied, sensory, spatial, all of these or more.

The walk was a deliberate transgression in that it disrupted the expectations of the traditional interview in order to *notice* the appearance of the ghost or the unresolved in the spatial for instance; in our encounters of buildings, of roads, signage, paths and childhood parks. I became aware of and interested in the body as a site of unsettlement where the senses were more than 'neutral recorders of experience' (Osgood *et al.* 2020).

As I walked with each of the participants, we passed buildings, signage and goods for sale whilst the scent of cooking oil, Indian sweets and base sauces filled the air. Like Pink's (2015) notion of a ethnography, the walk revealed *more than*. The sensory aspect of occupying and being present in that world, heightened being with each participant and removed any notion of a reductive way of living and being. I was witnessing a rootedness and settlement of communities who had built an economy and with it, had established a decided presence. If there was a high rate of crime, joblessness or desperation, it was notably absent in this landscape or indeed in our conversations. Whilst there was an absence of a coffee shop, deli or florist – perhaps the traditional markers of a desirable place to live - this was a high street unknowingly perhaps, showcasing its heritage and settlement. With it, an undeniable resistance to any external interference of colonial correction was evident. This understanding added to and enriched the counter-narratives; accounts that challenged not only the

external gaze of a spatialised anxiety but one that had long imposed an imaginary of uneducated residents that attracted reductive and stereotypical assumptions.

## The participants' accounts

The research itself involved three meetings; the first was a research conversation with each participant about their educational experiences, the walk took place during a second meeting and the final meeting was to go through any photos that participants had taken during the walk.

The narratives of three particular participants will be considered through exploring their relationship to adult and community education and how it alleviated cultural hauntology. These participants reflected on these encounters at length and appeared to give these experiences much more weighting than formal education. A big part of this was the informal spaces encountered and equally, the informal *education* that took place. Sara's participation was in adult and community education. Fozia and Mashkura who had experienced more linear educational trajectories, had been involved in community education as students during their teenage years and in its operations and advocacy as adults. Each of the narratives outlined presents a different perspective which subsequently affects the relationship with adult and community education.

### Sara

The first of the three participants is Sara who has continued to participate in both adult and community education throughout her adult years. Having had her formal schooling interrupted at the age of 14, when her family moved back to Pakistan for two years, Sara often expressed a sense of having missed a rite of passage as she viewed education as an empowering tool and an important capital that served an intrinsic purpose.

During the walk, Sara took me to a park as a place that she had visited regularly with her family as a child. It had been a time before the trip to Pakistan and did not continue when she returned. This was mirrored in her re-memory of it during our walk, Sara's accounts of the time spent in the park also came to a close. This marked a tangled knot of unresolved strands of sorts; the disruption to formal schooling; the purpose of the trip; returning to the UK; and not returning to school. As we left the park, we also left this conversation. Sara's narrative shifted to when she had started a childcare course as an adult. She recalled with this, an affirmative and hopeful environment:

I loved it! On that course there were girls younger than me and my age as well. I felt old studying and a bit out of place but actually, there were women older than me there as well.

Here she reveals how participating in community education brought her into the fold of a collective; an empowering feminised space amongst the company of women of all ages. Her commentaries resonated with the work of Narushima (2008) in terms of feeling part of a community and developing care and relationships with others.



This sense of community was so significant that it gradually took precedence over the course content or indeed the associated qualification. Instead, these occasions served another purpose; offering expansion through an environment where she felt that she was amongst friends. Sara passed her course and was inspired to go on to further study. Again, a shared sense of validation amongst the other learners was encountered; a new community of people in a space where she was not a daughter, mother, sister or wife. This was her space in that time to create and develop a different identity. Sara who had once doubted the passivity of her role as an observer in unfamiliar settings, now re-viewed her disposition as an informed and reflective one which marked an assured self awareness and self knowledge. For Sara to know, to understand and therefore come to accept herself was key. It was not an identity that she had explored or crafted previously given that there had been an absence of an educational space.

Importantly, this initial encounter in adult education served to move Sara beyond the resentment of having missed out on her formal education and consequently, she pursued other possibilities. Some of these were traditional adult education programmes such as Numeracy and Childcare. Sara who had rarely left the house now found herself a young single mother with a busier life. She spoke with fondness about how excited she had been travelling to an unknown place on public transport for the first time:

Catching buses was all new and then picking my daughter up from school and going home with her. It was very fulfilling!

There was an independence here that secured some agentic orientation (Biesta & Tedder, 2007) for Sara. With it came a sense of autonomy and a role to play in the wider world as opposed to staying on the fringes as an observer might.

Sara's own experiences of motherhood and hopes for her children's futures were a welcome counter-narrative for her. There was a firm will for her children to be well educated within a Western structure which revealed how informed she was about a system that would enable access to dominant forms of knowledge that would have developmental and economic benefits. At the time of our conversation, Sara had engaged as much in community education and informal learning spaces as accredited learning. As Duckworth and Smith (2018) have suggested, adult education was a catalyst for empowerment and consequently impacted on future decision making, particularly for Sara as a mother. Sara was clear that these experiences did not necessarily connect to financial goals but understanding her own social and cultural position within society and importantly, within her own life. She sought encounters that could position her establish familial capital that could equally support the hybrid identities of her children. The research process also revealed a distinguished shift in Sara as it reflecting back to her, some of her own inner victories. It also resonated with Duckworth and Smith's work which identified the research approach as becoming

a part of the affirmative practice that helped create the conditions for the transformative learning that participants often experienced.

(Duckworth and Smith 2018, p. 6)

In addition, the research approach and process served to bring some resolve for Sara as she came to re-member and re-construct her narrative.



## Fozia

The second participant is Fozia who was then a mother of two young children, working as a drama practitioner within community settings. Fozia had engaged in community education since her secondary school days. During our walk, Fozia pointed out a youth centre which was one of the places that she had frequented often outside of school. Its proximity to both home and school, was symbolic of a bridge between her two known spaces where she had separate identities. Over time and with these spaces for constructing a hybrid identity (Bhabha 1994), Fozia flourished. The youth centre for instance, was significant for introducing a community setting that Fozia would continue to come to and even work in, in years to come.

I did a lot of my extra-curricular activities here like the Duke of Edinburgh award and we did loads of residential. I did a lot of voluntary work there in the holidays, joining in the play schemes and help run it with the youth workers so that was quite significant in terms of my education and learning but also for finding out about the world and what I wanted.

Fozia made frequent references to Saathi House, a community organisation that had been set up as a language project for Bangladeshi migrants. 'Saathi' translated as 'Companion' or one that shares the journey. Initially set up as a language project, it developed over the years to become a space which sought to support the aspirations of women in the area. Fozia explained the role of Saathi House in encouraging young women to think beyond school which would have been a crucial way of exploring possibilities and imagining potential futures.

They did trips to the beach, London Zoo and the Peak District where we went walking, did some cycling and once, we went off camping for two weeks! They were an organisation that encouraged and empowered women to think beyond school. It was a safe place for us to go to and we could do things we wouldn't otherwise do.

In many ways it was a community-orientated and community-driven empowerment project for women; a localised social network (White and Green, 2015) which had the potential to shape the thinking and futures of young women. Fozia's accounts revealed how spaces like Saathi House connected them to external resources – grants, funding and mentors – providing them with the crucial navigational capital (Yosso 2005) in a world that operated in a way unknown to her and her peers. In many ways, Saathi House was a key space for resolve; much like an anti-hauntological mechanism for the community which encouraged individuals to embrace the opportunity to reflect, explore and cultivate identities that were safe but dynamic as opposed to contradictory. In this way, these localised social networks arguably limited the potentially disabling impact of hauntology.

Saathi House was one example of many that offered an informal educational space for her growing up. Fozia also attended theatre projects during school holidays that became a significant space for her, eventually inspiring her to follow this up at university. There was one well known South Asian theatre company who ran summer schemes for drama workshop. Here Fozia secured a place for the scheme during her school years and returned after her degree to take up some project work. The organisation offered opportunities specifically for young South Asian people and here,

Fozia was inspired by strong female leadership; an older Indian woman who was defying all limiting stereotypes and tropes. Throughout her time in both formal and community education, Fozia noticed the presence and more often, the absence of racially minoritised women in particular and this galvanised her at university and beyond, to remain connected to community work. Representation was important for Fozia along with the possibility of an alternative career in theatre related work.

These community spaces had therefore, offered Fozia a freedom to allow additional ways of being, doing and knowing in her younger years. There were instances in our walk where she took photos of a place or building, re-membering another connected story which prompted her to tentatively voice the dissonance of 'home' and the city 'out there'. Whilst there was a strong will to be in the city and amongst people outside of her community, these spaces served a crucial purpose. Here she could create and shape the different layers of who she was and who she became. Within these spaces, Fozia came into contact with mentor figures that played an important role in two regards. Firstly, these figures were foundational as key informal networks that offered support and opportunity. Secondly, they validated an emergent hybrid identity that paid homage to heritage, diaspora and the dominant culture outside of these spaces. These figures were key in Fozia's role as a community pedagogue as her interactions with others during our walk, showed. Fozia had highlighted the complexity of 'being me' or constructing a hybrid identity whilst still in the area and so going away to university had enabled this through a continuous re-negotiation of identity. This sense of defamiliarisation was central to the drama workshops that Fozia led on in her adult life as she was aware that many people amongst the communities she worked with, had never left their neighbourhood.

### **Mashkura**

Mashkura had recently re-launched Saathi House as a community venue and project when we met. As a mother of two and formerly in a senior leadership role for the city council, Mashkura's lens was very much a strategic and policy critical one. Whilst Mashkura's commentaries were heavily based on formal education, her commitment to community education had a firm future focus to it. She repeatedly acknowledged the lack of informal spaces that were needed for individuals from her community, to understand and have the practical knowledge about transitions into employment and seeking opportunities. This concern was rooted in the past when she herself had benefitted from this access.

The walk with Mashkura changed tone considerably. The re-memory for her interrupted the busy-ness, the activism and scrutiny of policy. There was a re-turn to home where Mashkura at times didn't finish her sentences or remained quiet. As we approached her secondary school, Mashkura talked about the many break times spent with her Bangladeshi friends, discussing race and multiculturalism 'before it became fashionable and acceptable to talk about it more openly'. This marked the surfacing of a ghost and a topic that she and her friends had felt more comfortable discussing privately. She shared stories about her extended family, where they had lived and the role she played in mediating the world to them and them to her. There was an

exchange of familial and navigation capital (Yosso 2005) in this. She also mentioned that going to the mosque for young girls in the 1980s involved spending time with a community 'aunt' or elder who provided more than a religious education, but focused also on character and a living an ethical life. Saathi House was mentioned briefly as a safe space. Community education for Mashkura then, was quite different to what Fozia had encountered.

Mashkura and Fozia's connection to Saathi House had enabled them to meet others from within and outside of the diaspora. Their interactions allowed them to more confidently understand their own positions within this space and those outside of it. Both mentioned for example, the need to carefully explore and understand what it meant to be British and Bangladeshi with the aim of forming future selves that were independent and discerning. This acknowledgement and recognition of their position was a key part of the process for consolidating a critical consciousness (Freire, 1974), particularly as women living in Britain that came from a Bangladeshi community and heritage. Mashkura expressed a firm commitment to ensuring that a community space with activities for young people in particular was available in the area. Its re-introduction and re-launch in 2016 was based on an intention to bring back a community based provision that had been inactive for a few years.

Resonant with the notion of a social pedagogy (Slovenko and Thompson 2016), both Fozia and Mashkura, identified community education as being pivotal for developing a personal criticality and awareness of their identities rather than frequenting these spaces for any accreditation.

Their accounts highlighted the prominent role played by social pedagogy in their overall educational experiences. It was an approach that centred young people as having autonomy which led to a more conscious participation in spaces. These encounters with community education, enriched their sense of agency and confidence further. This was crucial for providing Fozia and Mashkura with knowledge about these systems and more importantly, giving them the skills and language to navigate (Yosso 2005) their way through the landscape that they encountered outside and after formal education. Their participation and experiences of community education meant that they had developed a criticality; a knowing of systems and structures that upheld and centred certain groups.

Community education played a significant role, particularly in relation to how it impacted the construction of identity and the negotiations that this prompted. Experienced as affirmative spaces, community education resulted in cultivating identities that embraced heritage in many nuanced ways as well as resisting a complete assimilation into Western-centric ways of being.

### Third space

A third space is a liminal somewhere 'in between' location that is essentially, a site of resistance (Bhabha 1994) whilst negotiating a reimagining of cultural identity (Bretag, 2006) or as a disruption that brings history and identity together (Takhar 2016). For a third space to exist, its location is not always material but temporal or spatial. The process is described by Bhabha (1994) as one of becoming and it is to be found in

(postcolonial) spaces that witness a constant and continuous process of creating new or *hybrid identities*.

Bhabha's (1994) argument is that a hybrid identity offers a counter-narrative to the dominant culture and is formed in response to two or more cultural strands; specifically that of the native and host cultures. Hybridity is something in between these strands. Whilst it has traces of each, it is an important part of understanding beyond the postcolonial moment; that is in the impact of migration and settlement.

The participants' educational encounters within adult and community education were underpinned and shaped by migratory settlement and evolving diasporic identities. These settings offered the liminality of a third space (Bhabha 1994, Takhar 2016). These spaces were key in affirming the dynamism of an authentic and decolonised self-hood whilst retaining a sense of rootedness. These spaces also offered a safety for an active construction of hybrid identities through recurring visits by participants. Being able to frequent different space opened up possibilities for creating and experimenting with a hybrid identity that could gradually integrate aspects of home life where they were culturally anchored. As a consequence, what could have been a contradictory collision of values and practices, became instead a powerful space for hybrid identities to take form and for aspects of these to be re-negotiated over time. Importantly, this liminal space lessened the unresolved because aspects of identity were more culturally integrated.

Contrary to Bhabha's (1994) stance, the participants' accounts revealed that cultivating hybrid identities did not necessarily alleviate the unresolved; that the whisper of assimilation had to be resisted through a deeper anchoring and by a re-framing of what markers of success were. Each participant sought to avoid cultural traditions and ideologies to avoid a stereotypical labelling. For instance, marriage was mentioned but very briefly and managing the contradictions of homelife and education were again, alluded to in passing. The avoidance of these cultural 'ghosts' signified an active resistance to labelling. There was an undeniable stigma (Tyler 2020) attached to such stereotypes that was less referenced but more inferred.

A significant intention behind this empirical study was to re-stage existing discourses where particular communities and geographical locations are connected to mythical assumptions about educational underachievement and the subsequent economic malaise that ensues. This re-staging is an active 'haunting back' that makes space for the agency of hope in material form. To 'haunt back' is a response akin to the idea of 'talking back'. It has a dialogic quality which seeks to reiterate an action by responding.

Hauntology was an apt lens for revealing power imbalances and injustice as Gordon (2008) outlines:

Haunting is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with. (Gordon 2008, p. 2)

This commentary in particular, raises questions about a system of power that continues to prevail in the expectation to assimilate; to accumulate the capitals to enable this.

## Concluding thoughts

What was pertinent to the participants' accounts was the conditions and impact of migratory settlement that took place post WW2. Whilst it revealed insights into how the British education system was encountered by migrant children of the time, it also offered spaces through adult and community education, that permitted and affirmed the curiosities, tensions and resistances present in the negotiations of their identities. I came to understand how the complexities and intersection of geographical location, identity construction and the community educational space worked together.

Memory occupies a powerful position in sense-making and storying. Consequently, rememory through a hauntological lens, prompted particular insights into the most prominent of educational encounters. In particular, the walks revealed hauntological glimpses of unsettlement the silences, changes in topic and hesitations. These were different for each participant; the volume of conversation – or the silences – highlighted a degree of hauntology.

Each participant revealed a unique relationship to adult and community education that negated either marginalisation or socio-economic deprivation. Each participant told a different story of the social and familial environment, of choices made and at the heart of these, a firm self-realised agency (Takhar 2016) through relationality. This study uncovered uncomfortable truths by bringing into question neoliberal markers of success – whether related to education, identity or indeed how a particular neighbourhood or postcode is framed and perceived. There was a decided rootedness for the participants; an organic and ease-filled relationship that was autonomous in terms of the choices that they had made. For the women I spoke to, adult and community education was an integral part of paving this way forward. Far from any saviourist discourse, it provided an alternative lens where they could be seen and could see themselves as more than the sum of their qualifications and as having fluid, shifting identities.

Whilst the arrival and settlement of economic migrants has been a significant marker of both assimilation and progress over the years, there is often an oversight of any resistance or negotiation that this assimilation brings. Discussions around how groups might relate, conflict and live amongst prevailing cultural and political ideologies are an established conversation. There remains however, an absence of voicing the quiet possibility that sits in the liminality of this displacement. Although the (positive) hybridisation of identities (Bhabha 1994) often forms the basis of conversations about diaspora, the nature and extent to which these have the potential to decolonise, is less attended to. Whilst there is an acknowledgement of the historical moment that is attached to the arrival and settlement of diasporic groups, the present and *future* are often overlooked.

Pursuing a hauntological inquiry has enabled an understanding of identity construction in the adult and community education space. Importantly, it marks the significance of such spaces for those from diasporic communities. This approach revealed how expectations of cultural assimilation provoked an embodied unsettlement, of a strangeness that is never leaving and never quite arriving.

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