Pluralising (im)mobilities: anti-Muslim acts and the epistemic politics of mobile methods

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ABSTRACT
A critical agenda towards pluralising the politics and practice of mobile methods can enable more diverse epistemologies of uneven mobility and urban knowledge. In this article a challenge is offered to normative treatments of mobile methods including walking practices that inscribe dominant ways of seeing the city in anticipation of a liberal, secular, and sovereign subject. Taking empirical examples to ground conceptual insights on ‘fields of power’ and social difference, I suggest that researching together with Muslim women in UK cities (Manchester, Leicester, Birmingham) challenges normative approaches in Euro-American social sciences towards producing knowledge about people and place. It addresses two key questions: how do different Muslim women’s experiences of urban space and anti-Muslim acts impact upon walking practices? What are the everyday politics and conflicts that shape multi-layered and entangled temporalities of urban walking practices? Drawing on Urry’s movement/moorings dialectic, I advance that we need to take seriously stasis caused by physical and perceptual barriers to mobility, such as threat of violence, and to rethink entirely our right as researchers to orchestrate the movement of others. By re-framing mobile methods we can become more attuned to mobility justice and distinct registers of difference in the politics of knowledge production.

Introduction
In this article a critical agenda is advanced for diversifying epistemologies of (im)mobility and urban knowledge by rethinking mobile methods. Addressing the challenge of how we research together in contexts of social difference an epistemological argument is outlined on how we come to know the spaces we inhabit and the politics at work in how we write knowledge into geographical research. Drawing on John Urry’s movement/moorings dialectic, I suggest that we need to take seriously stasis caused by barriers to walking, and to rethink entirely our right to orchestrate the movement of others. In making this point I foreground the social and cultural politics at work within how mobile methods are normatively discussed and deployed. The grounds for my conceptual argument for pluralising (im)mobilities draws on empirical research in the UK cities of Birmingham, Leicester and Manchester. Taking the example of walking practices I suggest that researching together in cities requires a careful, fairer, and more inclusive way of producing knowledge about place. In researching the experiences of Muslim women uneven power is exposed within dominant Euro-American field approaches to the new mobilities paradigm. New emphasis is given to religion and religious hatred in understanding uneven mobilities in urban public space. In this article I therefore advance that by
pluralising (im)mobilities we can become more attuned to mobility justice and distinct registers of social differences in the politics of knowledge production.

A useful starting point, then, is thinking about what we mean by mobility before moving on to considering how to pluralise thinking and practice around this key concept in geography and social sciences. Well rehearsed in extant literature is the incisive definition of human mobility by Tim Cresswell (2010) of ‘practiced mobility that is enacted and experienced through the body’. Cresswell identifies the need for a politics of mobility in which walking – with dancing, driving, flying, running, and so forth – is recognised as a practice shaped by different bodies. A longstanding concern in migration studies (see Cadwallader 1992), geographers’ writing on a politics of mobility developed the concept’s imbrication with power and relationality. For instance, in attending to unevenness that might involve the human (migrant women, the homeless, or refugees) or more-than-human (communications, infrastructure, ecologies) (Ady 2006, 83; Cresswell 1999; Silvey; Cook and Butz 2018). As Peter Ady observes, ‘Mobility, like power, is a relational thing’ (2006, 83). Informed by feminist geography and specifically Doreen Massey’s theory on time-space time-space compression (or mobilities) does not impact everyone equally (Massey 1991, 1993). Illuminating a tendency towards viewing mobility through a generalized, hyper-mobile subjecthood, and thus flattening social difference, feminist geography and feminist geopolitics have been especially insightful in the articulation of social inequality and exclusion in the new mobilities paradigm – for example in foregrounding immobility, waiting, or being left behind (see Blerk 2005; Conlon 2011). We might think of women and families stuck at borders subject to hostile and xenophobic migration controls, or immobilities from everyday patriarchal violence that segregates space and movement.

Addressing the epistemic grounding of a politics of mobility, we should take pause to reflect on how our research practices come together with social difference. An understanding of patterns, representations and practices of movement asks for new kinds of ethical attunement. Cook and Butz (2016, 2018) use the notion of ‘mobility justice’ with recognition of mobility as socially structured movement in particular ‘fields of power’ (2018, 5; see also Sheller 2018a, 2018b). For instance they suggest uneven mobilities are shaped and contained by a series of environmental and social structures such as the more-than-human, micro-scale embodied relations and governance, and troubling aspects including climate change and marginalised groups. Making sense of the choreography and constellations of human movement, the multiple ways different cultural groups converge in the city, and distinctive attitudes towards walking practices asks for attention towards a mobility justice that is attendant to social pluralism and methodological enquiry, its scope, and limitations. This challenge is multi-scalar with the micro-politics of our bodies a crucial aspect. As Sheller (2018b, 24) writes:

The problem of mobility injustice begins with our bodies, and the ways in which some bodies can more easily move through space than others … Consider the spatial restrictions on the mobility of wheelchair-users, or the limited mobility of racialized minorities under police regimes of white supremacy, or the constrained mobility of women under patriarchal systems of violent domination, or of sexual minorities under heteronormative regimes.

Mobility justice requires equal consideration for those who are enabled and constrained, those who have learnt public spaces hold potential and promise, and those who have learnt to fear hostility and violence through personal and collective experience.

It is clear that the tools we use to research others and to represent the environments we share are pertinent for analysis when the very idea of a public space that is oriented physically and traversed bodily has been destabilised. The global pandemic placed on lockdown, partial or complete, an unprecedented half of the world’s population (lea 2020). Tied up with unequal access to safe outdoor space are issues of social inequality, anxiety and mental health. Wider debates on power and mobility are resonant here, which asks for a rethinking of the oft taken-for-granted; a process that is sensitive to diversity and spectrums of anxiety and health (see Morris, Guell, and Pollard 2019). But in this piece I seek to extend understanding of power and mobility further (Middleton 2010, 2011a, 2011b; Conlon 2011; Cresswell 2010; Merriman 2014). Foregrounding religious identity in the design
and use of mobile methods, an expanded understanding would recognise the importance of religion and anti-religious acts in tandem with other measures of social difference – gender, ethnicity and health – for urban (im)mobilities.

More particularly in this article I consider anti-Muslim acts through the incendiary call for ‘Punish a Muslim Day’ to reflect on how urban walking practices might involve entangled temporalities, past experiences and future imaginaries, of hate and violence. Researching Islamophobia, the recent work of Kawtar Najib has defined anti-Muslim acts as discrimination or prejudice that targets Muslim or presumed Muslim communities and institutions, including verbal abuse, harassment, and physical assault (Najib 2020; Najib and Hopkins 2020). The spatial logics of anti-Muslim acts are investigated. Patterns in Paris reveal Islamophobia is more likely to be institutionalised and takes a centre-peripheral relationship, whereas in London anti-Muslim acts are comparatively spatially diffuse and occur more typically around secular spaces of everyday life, such as shops and public transport, and mosques (Najib and Hopkins 2020, 471). Far from a neutral or straightforwardly empowering act, researchers engaging with public walking practices must contend with environments that might be unpredictable and hostile for research participants, and to squarely address that experiential difference in urban research. It challenges us to call out inequalities that might be less visible for those who are more privileged, but nevertheless are circulating and conditioning public space, and creating different spatial logics. This leads to a contestation of truth claims about conviviality, shared space and redirected power.

Understanding the movement/moorings dialectic for (im)mobilities

The movement and moorings dialectic has offered significant insights into social difference. Sociologist Urry coined the movement/moorings dialectic that has been influential in geography and in wider social sciences. Writing in 2003, Urry observed that ‘complexity derives from the dialectic of movement and moorings’ (2003, 138). Understanding mobility involves finding ways of tracking beyond the single subject in order to see the processes that create both movement and stasis, or combinations of movement and moorings. This requires consideration towards the power and politics of discourse and practices of mobility (Hannam, Urry and Sheller 2006; Cresswell 1999). Mobilities are made sense of and described relationally, that is with a reference point to the ‘necessary spatial, infrastructural and institutional moorings that configure and enable mobilities’ (Hannam, Urry and Sheller 2006, 3). Or what David Harvey (1989) understands as spatial fixes. In this thinking deterриториализation is always accompanied by territorialisation, movement by mooring (see Bauman 2000 on liquid modernity; Shurmer-Smith and Hannam 1994). Brenner (2004, 64) argues that the ‘contemporary round of global restructuring has entailed neither the absolute territorialization of societies, economies, or cultures onto a global scale, nor their complete deterриториализation into a suprateritorial, distanceless, placeless, or borderless space of flows.’ In a poetically titled piece, ‘If Mobility is Everything Then It is Nothing’, Adey (2006) unravels the significance of thinking about relative states of movement, or movement and mooring. As he observes everything to some extent is mobile, everything changes, and is on the move (see also relational ontologies, Escobar 2018). So, for mobility to remain meaningful as a concept it requires analysis of the contingency of relations between movements, rather than simply a focus on the object, subject or idea and its discrete movement through points in Cartesian space.

For feminist and anti-colonial theorists especially there is much said about how bodily movement in place is highly differentiated, with new technologies and infrastructures accelerating the movement of some, whilst containing the movement of others. This has been explored in relation to immobilities and border crossing (Mountz 2011). As Tesfahuney writes (1998, 501): ‘Differential mobility empowers reflect structures and hierarchies of power and position by race, gender, age and class, ranging from the local to the global’. Furthermore, the very concept of mobility has attracted critique from feminist theorists, especially confluences of privileged, often masculine subjects and cosmopolitanism for establishing certain ways of seeing (Kaplan 2006; Skeggs 2004). Or as
idealisation, fetish even, that ‘depends upon the exclusion of others who are already positioned as not free in the same way’ (Ahmed 2004, 152). Informed by her own travel experiences in Europe, for bel (hooks 1992) differential mobility empowerment are revealed by racialised systems of border control. To travel and to be impacted by (im)mobilities such as these is to encounter the terrorising forces of white supremacy (hooks 1992, 174; see also Tesfahuney 1998). In some quarters, mobility itself might have been seen as suspicious, or as threatening, and necessary for governance (Cresswell 2006).

The new mobilities paradigm can offer a transition towards thinking about relational bodies, objects and space that ‘eschew(s) a romance with flows, networks and borderless spaces’ to consider the intimate connection between mobility and immobility from individual embodiment to international geopolitics (Conlon 2011, 324), and their raced, classed and gendered positions. Waiting, stasis and pausing have distinct social and temporal dimensions and occur as ‘a dynamic effect of international geopolitics’ and ‘a lived facet of social structures’ (Ibid. 325). In attempting to understand more carefully urban (im)mobilities we therefore need to become more attuned to how our methods themselves direct movement and momentum in ways that can be read as alienating, insensitive, or inappropriate.

Racing forwards (or standing still) with new mobile methods?

As introduced in the section above, the new mobilities paradigm (Shelley and Urry 2006) has gained considerable traction over the last 15 years. Mobile methods are a prominent aspect of the new mobilities and its forwards-looking appeal. In part driven by a perception of failure of social science’s conventional or traditional methods to provide accurate data, mobile methods are now almost ubiquitous research tools. So, in recent years, we have seen a vast expansion and innovation around mobile methods. Researchers have followed people, animals, objects, ideas, images, data, connections, in order to trace movement, fixity and blockages; and increasingly have sought new tools to grasp towards our world’s (seemingly) dizzying and fast-evolving complexity. There is now a clear trend in qualitative methods around mobile methods, with a fast expanding literature exploring their myriad possibilities. To signpost but a few: the walking ‘go along’ (Kusenbach 2003; Middleton 2010; Evans and Jones 2011; Warren 2017; Ratna 2020); cycling/along (Spinney 2006, 2011; Jones 2012; Aldred and Jungnickel 2012); car ride-along (Laurier 2004; Ferguson 2010); ‘wheel-along’ (Parent 2016); photographic, video and virtual ethnography (Pink 2001, 2006; Cook and Butz 2017), and mobile technologies, including GPS (Hein, Jones and Evans 2008; Jones 2020; Wilmott 2017). These methods have typically deployed more conventional interviews, participant observation or ethnography with technology to engage with thematic exploration of the more-than-human (human-technology; human-animal), non-representational theory and practice; embodiment and (inter-) subjectivity; urban and rural diversity, including anti-racist, feminist, queer and disability studies; social justice; sustainability; health and well-being; globalisation; geopolitics and power; to psycho-geography and participatory arts practices.

Amidst all this activity an academic debate has been staged around the strength of rationale underpinning mobile methods and their deployment. For instance, Büscher, Urry, and Witchger (2011) argue that methodological innovation and diversification are often positioned as a necessary result of the epistemological shifts in mobility theory, in particular, around interest in non-representational theory and embodiment (also see Spinney 2009, 2011). However, ‘a note of caution’ has been urged by Merriman for those researchers ‘who wholly embrace such calls for innovative ‘mobile methods’ (Merriman 2014, 168). In fact, ‘Methodological innovation is seen to be a natural and necessary response to the emergence of new theories, technologies and practices of mobility in the world’ (Merriman 2014, 168). Instead of abandoning conventional methods altogether – such as interviews, questionnaires and discourse analysis, or archival research – Merriman calls for rethinking distinctions between desk-based and field-based research, where ethnographic and participative ‘field-based’ methods are increasingly seen as
necessary or, even superior, in their provision of up-close, accurate, authentic and close engagement with embodied subjects, practices and live events (Ibid. 178). A more balanced, critical discourse around mobile methods is called for, ‘to maintain a plural sense of what mobilities research is’, thus ‘expanding and diversifying their repertoire of approaches’ (Ibid). A distinction is made between methods that facilitate the research of mobilities to a preoccupation with methods that require a moving together with the research participants. Merriman suggests reopening the conflation of mobile methods to more accurately consider methods for mobility research to show the contributions that a range of scholarship across social sciences and humanities can offer to the new mobilities paradigm. We might be persuaded that claim-making attached to mobile methods as being closer to, and moving together with participants, and to see with them, focusing on the physically active subject, can be at the expense of broader understandings of materialities, practices and events.

Garnering these insights for rethinking methodology enquiry in the mobilities paradigm can support research into (im)mobilities in socio-spatial contexts of social pluralism. Understanding movement and moorings of mobile methods with the researcher and researched requires attending to dynamic and still moments in ‘fields of power’. It might combine conventional and innovative elements, such as interviews with photographic diaries, in order to uncover immobilities. Or pluralising thinking about practice, considering the active and inactive dimensions and temporalities inherent in any act of doing, e.g., planning, delivering, reflecting. Moving beyond Merriman’s distinction between the desk and field – all methodological and theoretical enquiry constitutes the field, I would argue – this research accords with the subtlety of the notion that research into practice over time reveals different insights into the context, meaning and views of those practices. Merriman considers embodied practices in motoring in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain. But these insights are pertinent, too, for reframing walking practices and the walking interview that need not be physically walked together in contemporary urban spaces, and gaining view of their lived temporalities.

Rather, we might rather see the merits in triangulating methods new and established, turning over received methodological assumptions, and grappling with new theory in tandem with empirical approaches. It requires looking again at the subtlety of scholarship to date. There is a coterie of academics already engaged in this work on thinking through mobility and methods (Shaw and Hesse 2010; Schwanen 2018). For example, DeLyser and Siu (2014, 303) call for methodological pluralism that is open and generous around methods ‘an open embrace’, ‘to methods not one’s own’ (e.g. big data). In discussion of the intellectual value of a pluralist approach, they write:

Engaged pluralism . . . is precisely what is needed across our discipline methodologically: one need not switch to new methods, but all will benefit from open embrace and validation of the methods of others, and all can avoid dismissing out of hand works grounded in traditions not our own, endeavoring to reach across methodological and theoretical divides, and laboring to dispel the power asymmetries vested in different methods and knowledge communities (DeLyser and Siu 2014, 303)

Also, as Barnes (2011: 303) points out, ‘the complex problems of our times will demand both the greatest creativity and the greatest diversity of approaches . . . where different and divergent methods flourish to tackle issues from different angles’.

A truly plural methodological terrain in geography signals a broader turn informed by cultural geography and cultural studies – although not reducible to only these traditions – that the world comprises a multitude of entities. A social or engaged pluralist pathway to recognising epistemological diversity is embedded in appreciation for the increasing diversity of human social life, and understanding of research methods as a way of seeing the world. A more balanced, critical discourse around mobile methods is called for that acknowledges the social and cultural politics at play within much fieldwork in this area. To expand and diversify a repertoire of approaches for mobile methods is what I suggest next.
Walking methodologies and uneven mobilities

As a spatialised and embodied research tool, the walking ‘go-along’ can enable responsive insights into the dynamic emotional, affectual and physical relations between people within the everyday fabric of urban life. But what is a walking interview? At its simplest a walking interview is an Interview-on-the-move. It combines participant observation and semi-structured interviewing, both of which foreground context in knowledge construction. Regarding power dynamics between the researcher and researched there is a distinction often made between the guided walking interview with a pre-given destination (Reed 2002) and natural ‘go-along’ (Kusenbach 2003; Carpiano 2009) – where the researcher ‘shadows’ the participant on their everyday routine. In these two approaches the natural ‘go-along’ is commonly regarded as more participatory and inclusive in the production of place-based knowledge (Warren 2017). Walking whilst talking is seen to provide useful insights into nodes of activity, and those places ‘in-between’, biographical and familial resonances, and social-spatial architecture (Evans and Jones 2011). Elsewhere walking-with is engaged in more-than-human epistemologies to centre human ways of knowing and consider materialist and environment actants (Springgay and Truman 2018; Mulvenna 2020), and to disrupt dominant, linear chronologies of time, entangling notions of past, present and future (Springgay and Truman 2019). The go-along positions participants’ lived and local knowledges as that of the human ‘expert’, a move that by turn is discussed as de-centring the ‘expert’ knowledge and authority of the academic (see Elwood and Martin 2000).

Focusing on power and the dynamics of interviews, Anderson has written the walking go-along can ‘overcome traditional interviewer/interviewee power relations’ in order ‘to forge something uniquely collaborative’ (Anderson 2004, 258). He continues, that it facilitates ‘harnessing the power of place’ (ibid.). Walking interviews hinge upon the need for research questions to be ‘framed by a “place” that can be walked’, which means ‘the act of walking will exclude certain types of participants’ (Evans and Jones 2011, 849). But in the instances where social and cultural life is not walked, for any multitude of reasons, other kinds of knowledge on immobility and politics in space begin to emerge. By revisiting some of the assumptions of the walking interview qua social difference, the normative masculist, secular and able body through which geographical accounts of walking have typically been imagined and performed is highlighted in its experiential limitations.

Read together, broad ranging and expansive literature on walking and power reveals there are multiple structural barriers, physical and perceptual, social and cultural, presented in the act of walking for different people. This point is especially apparent and intensified in the busyness and diversity of the contemporary city, although it is at work everywhere. In representing a sense of place, therefore, the multiple ways in which people are in/excluded in the built environment must be fully acknowledged (Warren 2017). A lack of social confidence or freedom to take part in a walking interview, by migrants, minorities or women, does not negate nor reduce the legitimacy of that account of public space. Instead it reveals (im)mobilities that give emphasis to the encoding of public spaces in British cities to multiple and sometimes conflicting values, beliefs and affiliations (Mohammad 2013). This is particularly pertinent to an analysis of who can or cannot exercise power to shape the visible practices and representation of urban public space, and give voice to its different meanings.

Researching walking involves expanding spatially and temporally what walking constitutes. For as Pierce and Lawhon (2015, 656) write: ‘By walking we do not mean just the act of moving through the city on foot but also include related processes of standing, casual interaction, and observation’. Walking involves wandering about, and presumably stopping and thinking about walking (or other things). Especially fruitful in this piece is how it points towards pausing, stasis and stoppages as inherent to mundane acts of mobility. However later it is observed, ‘How researchers come to know the city is typically hidden’ (Ibid. 657). Much can be applauded about tuning into everyday and often taken-for-granted ways we practice urban research. I would like to take these reflections on walking and (im)mobilities in a different direction, however, to also show responsibility and care towards
those spaces of the city that are typically hidden behind closed doors. We might think through a framing of the city where the embodied and socio-spatial experience of walking in public spaces is represented as neutral, or universalized as ‘everyday’ life, whereas for many stuck indoors, it is not. Generalized truth claims based upon distinct perceptual experiences are inappropriate (Abu-Lughod 1999), and thus it is significant to problematize the objective and universalizing voice of the researcher (Foley 2002). Following Noble and Poynting (2010) it might also require thinking through relationally why urban immobilities result from inequalities in truth claims about who has a right to public space and how this can become encoded and policed in ways that are racialised and gendered.

As explored above mobile methods can often combine the conventional and innovative in understanding dimensions of mobility. Advancing the im(mobilities) dimension of this point further I argue that knowledge of walking practices is enriched by an in situ, moored dimension in order to account for those whom cannot walk, or undertake a go-along with a researcher for any multitude of reasons, e.g., issues of visibility, comfort, language barriers; racialised and gendered issues around violence, risk and confidence. Or, put otherwise, that researching walking practices need not be physically walked by the researcher and/or researched. I suggest in the section that follows that we might view mapping and activity diary keeping as dimensions of walking insofar as they uncover through different techniques its temporarities of past, present and future. Unearthing those charged properties of memory and imagination that bind together times-spaces, and are no less real in how they act upon experiences of real subjects.

**Methodology**

The research projects my insights are drawn from took place variably in Birmingham (2012–14), Manchester and Leicester (2017–19). Birmingham is a city of just over a million in population (1.1 million in 2018), and the neighbourhood of Balsall Heath is an inner-city area 2 miles from city centre, located within the ward of Sparkbrook. The neighbourhood has been represented, intervened in and challenged as a ‘problem’ area, a ‘priority area’, or a kind of ‘badland’ (Dikec 2006), an unruly migrant space, for over 50 years. Ethnically it is a diverse area – mostly residents identify as Pakistani Muslim with a growing share of residents identifying as Arab, and still some Irish and Caribbean residents although many are since dispersed. Manchester and Leicester are likewise ethnically diverse cities with an established and new migrant population, including different Muslim communities. In Greater Manchester the last census of 2011 documented the largest single ethnic grouping of Pakistani heritage (comprising about 60% of the total Muslim population), with the second largest ethnic group of African heritage (Elahi and Khan 2017). Meanwhile in Leicester there is an especially varied British South Asian population, with Indian Gujarati and East African Asians. Muslims recently overtook Hindus as the largest non-Christian religious faith group, including more recent Somali, Afghan and Kurdish arrivals (Van Liempt 2011). Both cities have received negative national media attention in relation to their minority ethnic populations, most viscerally in Manchester with the Manchester Arena bombing of 2017 and in Leicester and Manchester around migrant labour chains in garment and textile factories.

In the Birmingham-based research walking interviews were used however in the latter project in Manchester and Leicester they were not, building in learning from the former, with participants instead completing activity diaries. In the Birmingham research a classroom-based participatory mapping exercise was used as an initial stage to understand everyday walking practices of the women engaged in the study (n = 26). ‘Live’ walking interviews followed with a duration of between 40 and 180 mins (n = 11). In the latter project, a large mixed methods study, one of the strands of research involved asking participants to complete daily reflections on their activities and weekly reflections on any challenges they encountered, including around experiences of discrimination and prejudice such as, but not reduced to, sexism, racism and/or Islamophobia. Although conceived as two distinct projects conducted at different times and with different teams, there were shared
concerns. The lives of Muslim women were researched, encompassing a range of different ethnic, cultural and denominational backgrounds, and with mutual interest in the mobilities of the subjects and physical, perceptual and spiritual dimensions that shaped everyday encounters with urban public space. Across the studies there also unfolded empirical pressure points that suggested the need to think very carefully about the manifold difficulties arising around mobility in the city for distinct minority people and groups.

As the primary researcher my own identity and positioning are relevant to reflect upon given how it impacts upon the participant(s) and field of research. I present as a white, middle-class, educated woman. There are points of shared characteristics, interests and aims with many participants across the study, especially around gender, women’s rights and education. However I remain an outsider in relation to faith, racism and experiences of Islamophobia, including being targeted in a far-right hostile environment. My experience as a non-religious, white, and privileged researcher might then hold up a mirror to normative assumptions in the academy, social sciences methods, and geographical thinking such as white privilege where the passing through of public space if not uncomplicated (for me at least as a woman), is not subject to the same kinds of erasure of protection often experienced by non-white people.

Interpolating methods such as mapping, activity diary keeping and walking interviews can serve to rework and rethink conventional methods that are taken for granted, namely walking during fieldwork. In fact mapping and activity diary-keeping when used to explore walking practices with marginalised groups can uncover insights into past and imagined dimensions of walking and encountering urban public space that are indivisible from understanding how the subject experiences walking practices and public space. In the field observations that follow I consider both projects in turn to trace how different methods of mapping, walking interviews, and activity diary keeping reveal different dimensions to walking, whilst showing how the temporal and spatial dimensions of these walking activities intermingle.

**A: Fields of Power, The Issue of Visibility**

In the first project I attended a series of classes at a local women’s only college specialising in English for Foreign Learners (EFL) where I met with adult students and supported teaching. Participants were mostly first-generation migrants from country of origin including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan, and Algeria. In dialogue with the students and teacher I discussed the methodology of a go-along walking interview. In terms of ethics the students were offered consent forms for participating in the research both for the initial mapping stage and the walking interviews. Many of the students were interested, not least because they wanted to know why I wanted to learn about their lives and their points of views, and how this counted as academic research. The nature of my research seemed to appear a bit strange. As did the methodology. The majority of the students consented to contribute to the participatory mapping exercise, but, in the end, declined a walking interview. In the classroom-based exercise, participants marked a large A-O sized map with colourful Post-It notes to show places they walked to in the area during recreational time. We then talked through where the notes were placed, what took place there, when and how frequently. Typical places and socio-spatial experiences included attending Koranic reading classes, visiting the library, going to a women’s only gym, and picking up children from primary school.

Meanwhile through discussion and the walking interviews that did take place physical and mental barriers to physically co-walking with the researchers were environmental (e.g. weather, cars), temporal (e.g. caring and other domestic responsibilities), organisational (e.g. memory lapses) and cultural and socio-political (e.g. issue of visibility) (Warren 2017). All were given flexibility in how the go-along would be conducted; with children, husband, another male family member or friend, and/or with a translator. Especially pertinent to the empirical findings was Green and Singleton’s reading of the ‘issue of visibility’ along perceived lines of cultural and religious transgression, with potential tensions over migrant legal status compounding cautiousness in public participation (Green and
Singleton 2007, p. 117). As discussed elsewhere (Warren 2017), and important for this present work, is that some of the students appeared to find the participatory ethos of the walking go-along discomforting. Early attempts to enable the participants to lead mostly failed; there was no renegotiation of power dynamics in these instances in any meaningful way. The methodology was not co-designed with the participants, which had limitations given the intimate geopolitics of the racialised urban landscape. Balsall Heath was highly securitized with cameras under the UK Government’s Prevent programme. There was a spectrum and complexity to the fieldwork findings: some participants seemingly revealed in the opportunity to lead the researcher on their usual routes; for others anxiety and fearfulness were expressed about walking in certain public spaces. Especially for feminist scholars this raises some really critical ethical issues about walking in geographical research and beyond, even when permission is sought and given.

**B: Fields of Power, Far-Right Violence**

I now turn to reflect on findings from a diary-keeping exercise where participants lived in Manchester and Leicester. In this case participants who had engaged in earlier stages of a major project were asked if they would consent to complete a diary for a month documenting where they went, whom they met, anything noteworthy they wanted to record, including prompts towards whether they had experienced social prejudice. For the first known time, this diary-keeping exercise gave space to Islamophobia, hatred and violence towards Muslims and Islam, which subjects may have encountered. It also gave prompts around other markers of social difference including experiences of sexism.

While the participants were in situ when writing the entries, a number of diary entries gave important insights into perceptions of walking. They raised social and mental barriers to walking. A crucial example of this is that during the course of the research fieldwork a member of the British far right called for ‘Punish a Muslim Day’. Letters were sent by the man – who has since been jailed – to homes, mosques and public figures calling for violence towards Muslims. A scorecard was attached to points that would be awarded depending on the level of the attack – from pulling off a headscarf to bombing a mosque. The Islamophobic activities of this man was broadcast on the news, including prime time Sky News, and circulated on social media. In diary entries, ‘Faiza’ described seeing ‘only a few men walking the streets’, and how ‘idiots’ have ‘managed to scare everyone into staying at home’. Another participant, ‘Saba’ reflected on how both Muslim and non-Muslim friends ‘deterred me from heading out today.’ Fortunately none of the participants or anyone they knew was hurt.

The incident and responses revealed how materialities and representations in the form of letters and digital information can engender a real impact on (im)mobilities and urban space. For those who did travel it was very locally to the home of their parents, where they felt loved and safe, with all participants avoiding the city centre or public spaces such as libraries, college or university, even when this spatialised practice of staying put placed in jeopardy work and college duties. It compounded concerns around travelling alone, justified through grounded theologies and real practices of violence against Muslim women. For instance, ‘Sara’ explains her predicament that: ‘Generally in Islam it is advised that you shouldn’t be travelling long journeys by yourself, especially if you are female in this modern day as the violence towards Muslim females is becoming much more of a common offence.’ Threat of violence by the far right enacted a psychological and spatialising power, staking a claim over the right to move freely in the city. By the same token, it works to deny the rights of Muslims. The act of racism and threat of violence in the name of national identity impacting (im)mobilities is explored by Noble and Poynting (2010, 502):

> Effective citizenship requires access to and comfort in a multitude of spaces. The consequences of racist vilification are that certain groups lose the ability to act and learn in and through social spaces, they lose the opportunities to develop skills of wayfinding within and across spaces, retarding the capacities to negotiate
within and across spaces, diminishing the opportunities to invest in local and national spaces. Their resources and opportunities for place-making in public space shrink along with their mobility.

Insightful here are the remarks of ‘Naz’, who observed: ‘Sometimes being a hijabi Muslim in this hostile era makes the road to success difficult to reach. I had to postpone my plans for the time being- just to stay on the safe side.’ Her observations are especially striking for the invocation of a metaphor of walking and journeying on a road to success. This ambition and imaginary of a pathway to success is overlaid on the lived reality of everyday violence, which in the UK is often encountered when commuting, shopping, or on busy streets (Tell Mama 2016; Najib and Hopkins 2020). Taken together the comments are suggestive of a linkage between social and spatial mobilities, and the exclusion of women and minority subjects from urban public space. In discussion of race riots in Australia’s Cronulla Beach, Noble and Poyning advance a theory of racialised pedagogy of space where some Australians acquire a sense of their rights to act out their sense of belonging in racist ways, while other Australians acquire a sense of not belonging. Writing on the racial vilification of the Muslim ‘other’ from beachlife, they begin conceptualizing the linkages between space, racism and the capacity for movement. Illuminating some of these important insights into the affectual and emotional dimensions of feeling trapped working from home and the spatialising impacts of anti-Muslim acts, in truncated, poignant form ‘Faiza’ writes, ‘Ebbs and flows of work, stress, energy. Feeling worthless.’

Discussion: Towards pluralising mobile methods for understanding uneven mobilities?

In Human Geography a debate in recent years has opened around the implications of a pluralist turn in the academy. One strand of this debate that is especially crucial to a politics of knowledge is the critical discussion around methodological pluralism or pluralism of method. Pluralism as an idea arises from political theory and especially the US system where multiple different community groups are all given a voice – foregrounding notions and values of dialogue, translation, and politics of difference. In its simplest form pluralism is against monism. Accepting different world views and ways of researching the world has been taken up by economic geographies, urban geographies and those interested in methods as engaged pluralism – marked by liveliness and respectfulness (Brenner 2018; DeLyser and Sui 2014). It has attracted fair critique, however, in the gap between claim-making for acceptance of scholarly diversity and diverse practices and epistemologies, and the actuality of rather conventional and limited scholarly work that is accepted in leading, elite international journals; the vestiges of disciplinary rigour and significance (Rosenman, Loomis, and Kay 2019). Extant limitations if anything fuel the importance of seeking a fairer and more equitable approach to pluralism. In the instance of methods, it calls for a need to apply pluralism to an understanding of the social and cultural politics inherent in mobile methods. Therefore pluralism is part of and productive of diverse epistemologies of our cities. The way mobile methods have been understood, enacted and written about is imbricated with politics of knowledge production that is weighted towards a normative white, masculinist and secular body.

I have taken the example of walking and go-alongs because of the way they are often represented and understood as mundane or everyday. It offers a useful prism therefore to explore often biased and somewhat blinkered understanding around concepts of practice and space that are informed by micro-politics of identity and embodiment but also undergirded by Western and European-centric ideas around liberation and freedom. Walking interviews can reveal insights into the embodied pathways of those who are often marginalised, and highlight some of the cultural and social structures that may shape individual choices on those pathways. The experience of negotiating and navigating the body within a secular liberal public realm may be perceived as risky, insecure and volatile (Green and Singleton 2007; Mohammad 2013, 1810). It is well discussed that the home is not a refuge for many women and children, either, and can be a site of violence. Still walking interviews have limitations as I’ve drawn in the empirical observations above, which
are crucial for careful consideration. It is especially important when working with vulnerable or marginalised individuals and groups, and in social-spatial situations where there is a clear barrier, perceptual, physical and psychological, to traversing physical space together with the participant(s). And yet, the alternative of only researching with individuals or groups that are relatively able to traverse public space without concern is clearly unsatisfactory. As too is the geographical and political insularity of only researching with people like ourselves. So which methodological and epistemological strategies can be engaged to attend to social difference in researching the scope of urban (im)mobility?

In this paper I have attempted to untangle the cultural and spatial politics at play within normative deployment of method methods, and how they might instead more carefully be tailored to contexts of pluralism, especially in fast-changing, often hostile urban environments. It contributes to wider debates on the relationship between power and mobility, but advances these by arguing for the need to recognise contingent systems of religious belief and hatred, along with intersectional markers of gender, race and racialization, in the design and use of mobile methods. This piece critically challenges when walking-with-difference how power operates and for whom. It is suggestive that in many cases we have been too hasty in assuming that ‘enabling’ voice and active participation, leadership, and enhanced visibility in public space is uniformly ‘good’ and is recognisably so for all. It points towards how participation in an academic project might be a highly atypical experience and asks for humility on the side of academics who seek to boost the impact of their work by over-claiming the significance of what might be quite an odd, one-off research encounter. In other words, our work may well lead to transformation, still we need to entertain our limitations and failings as academics. Or to maintain, ‘a commitment to uncertainty, humility and unlearning in the research process’ (Jazeel and McFarlane 2010, 115). There remains a stark need to pluralise methodological and epistemic thinking including ethical dimensions of the movement/moorings paradigm when working in contexts of social difference.

In this piece I have talked about pluralising (im)mobilities through the example of walking practices. But where is the plural at work in this discussion, and how should it be engaged further?

i) Heterogeneity of voices in researched; micro-politics of social difference and the key dimension of religion and belief in everyday movement

A heterogeneity of voices is required in research with marginalised groups, including with migrants, women, minority religious groups, and those living below the law. Intersectional theory emerged from a specific context to consider black female experiences in the U.S. in relation to legal theory, but its lessons have been more broad-ranging. An interrelational approach that appreciates how social characteristics dynamically act and transform one another and how this can shift in particular contexts can help elucidate on the dynamic nature of social difference. By foregrounding religious identity and religious hatred, the volatility of walking urban practices is exposed. All methods need to be understood as geographically situated, and an extension of a preponderantly secular field of power in social sciences.

ii) Heterogeneity of voices in researchers; micro-politics of gender, ethnicity/race’, religion, class, sexuality, disability, ages

There is a need for different voices, perspectives and bodies in the academy as this impacts upon the social-spatial dynamics of the research encounter and thus the findings drawn. There is much to say on inequities of knowledge production in the academy and beyond but in sum here I want to highlight research is always situated, partial and incomplete. Certain social characteristics that rise to the surface might be at work in the research contexts discussed, for instance white privilege in the literal opening of doors of the EFL college and lives of students. It speaks to different and multiple axes of insider and outsider that impact research encounters, points of connection and disconnection, shared interests and concerns, overlaid on power differences around status, culture, intimacy and racialization, and who is in the position and has authority in the ‘doing’ and ‘writing’ of academic geographical research. Other knowledges would have come to the fore if the researchers were Muslim or non-white. These different embodied identities and experiences would push against
a tendency still to presume a kind of universal body and viewpoint within a dominant white academy.

iii) Understand movement and moorings of mobile methods with researcher/researched; both combining the conventional and innovative.

Social, cultural and liberalising policies often attached to mobile methods can be refocused to more carefully trace (im)mobilities. In situ mapping exercise or diary keeping are potential dimensions of understanding walking practices, and of walking itself when performing the act entails considerable preplanning, hesitation, and is mired by unpredictability in hostile environments. Walking involves tracking back and forth between previous experiences and imaginaries, social conditions, and technological information. Mapping, diary keeping and other sedentary explorational activities can thus be viewed inside of an expanded notion of different walking practices.

iv) Grappling with ethical dimensions, including issues around applying the theoretical ‘lens’ of empowerment, autonomy, and liberation onto participatory mobile methodologies and their findings.

Coming back to incompleteness and unevenness in research processes, there is a need to grapple with ethical dimensions, which unfold in often unexpected ways. For instance in recognising the limitation of reading a go-along as empowering for all subjects, and acknowledging the narrative of participation and co-production of knowledge might serve the dominant liberalising ethical and epistemological framework of the academic more than reflect the views and needs of the participants. Also in a deeper recognition of the different degrees of vulnerability experienced in a hostile environment that might distinguish the experience of the researcher/researched. Informed by the first empirical section, we might consider those participants who did not want autonomy in leadership in the strange life of a research project.

Saba Mahmood argues against a universalising politics of research that applies a liberal political lens to all women, showing how female agency is analysed solely in terms of empowerment, autonomy and liberation in the becoming of an autonomous subject (2012[2005]). Along with discomfort in the notion ‘empowering’ marginalised women, and my moral authority to do so, in all its white, imperialist history in research practices (Smith 1999), there is an issue of silencing the subjects, their desires and over-claiming the importance and impact of our research. Likewise we can reflect on the work of Cooke and Kothari (2001) that calls out the tyranny of participation in development studies where the rhetoric of inclusion is undermined by top-down, hierarchical and unjust exercises of power that can serve to reinforce inequalities. Bringing together these insights around (im)mobilities challenges understanding on the realistic extent to which mobile methods such as the interview go-along can de-centre authority, realign power-dynamics and transform subjectivity. It requires us to rethink geographical disciplinary claim-making, challenging the epistemic politics underpinning our research methods and practices in the world.

Conclusion

As Cook and Butz (2018) suggest we need a stronger sense of mobility justice as movement that is socially structured in specific fields of power. Mobility justice is significant when reflecting on anti-Muslim acts and fields of power that we shape as researchers. We can in modest ways in our research and teaching look to reshape those fields of power, at least in the micro-fields that fall within our everyday purview, in order to create fairer environments for our research participants. A new era of culture wars is erupting with the term entering popular discourse in the news and mainstream politics, and with a growth in far-right activity along with tensions from religious extremist violence, fascism and racism countered by anti-racism and decolonial movements. Amidst geopolitical turbulence, insecurity and blockages it seems especially timely to point towards alternative ways to conduct empirical research about the world, and to renew thinking about our place within it. Specifically we might rethink and rework the idea that by engaging mobile methods we must necessarily orchestrate the movement of others. In fact as I have advanced through the example of walking all practices and research tools involve moments of movement/moorings. Thus carrying
through this appreciation of enforced stillness and momentum is necessary for understanding the facets, dimensions, and temporalities of uneven mobility. Walking is a socio-spatial and temporal bodily practice that is subject to cultural environments, histories, and geopolitics, state and non-state actors. In other words it operates within a field of power, of which we are complicit.

On the choreography of movement, Sheller (2018a, 55) writes:

> It is not simply that social factors such as gender, race, sexuality, class, age, and ability shape our capacities and styles of movement in relation to other people, but rather that our capacities for movement shape our bodily experiences and identities within normative social orders and hegemonic mobility regimes.

Sheller reminds us that micro-politics of mobility are situated within spatial environments that act differently upon dominant and marginal people in society, which in turn reinforces bodily experiences and identities, inclusion or exclusion. We might also consider geography and disciplinary geographical research as a field of power where social justice imperatives exist, but might often be sidelined in favour of methodological or theoretical zeitgeist. There is little to suggest conventional research tools or desk-based research are ethically more sound; in fact the very imperative behind action-based research as part of a wider cultural turn and by feminist and post-colonial scholars was to get out in the world, to strengthen the linkages between research and activism, and claim due responsibility for our stake in the field. However we should be wary, too, of too simplistic an interpretation of the tools of our trade, and the work they can do in a research field. Walking methodologies including walking interviews might entail a radically different kind of risk for the researcher than the researched. It follows that we need to move away from notions of any method as imbued with given political qualities such as liberation, freedom or self-actualisation. For this suggests the inscription of a Western-centric, liberal lens onto shared space that is by its nature inherently unstable and plural.

Activity diary-keeping across ‘Punish a Muslim Day’ reveals anti-Muslim acts and the far right by letter and social media disruption to public space not as a singular, lone event, but as a continuum of a hostile era. Of course some of the women in the study ignored ‘Punish a Muslim Day’, mocked it or redirected foci, such as through supporting and circulating its alternative, ‘Love a Muslim Day’, by walking in the street or town centre as usual, or simply through expressing disbelief rather than resignation. We might reflect on these agencies not simply as acts of resistance, following Mahmood, but as ‘modalities of action that exceed liberatory projects’ (2012[2005], preface). The capacities and intentions of any group with certain shared characteristics cannot be homogenized nor determined, again sharpening the need for nuance and for multiplicity of approach. Therefore I seek to challenge whether walking interviews, go-alongs and participatory mobile methods can really be held (if not essentialised) as especially disruptive to relations of domination. Instead a more considered approach to pluralising (im)mobilities is called for, opening up the remembered and imaginative ways that we traverse space at different times and according to our capacities within situated geopolitical environments.

Finally I want to reflect upon the words of Sheller (2018b, 18): ‘Truly addressing the injustices of unequal mobilities requires that we develop a deeper understanding of how uneven mobility relates not only to how we move around cities, but also gendered and racialized colonial histories and neocolonial presents’. To this observation I add that imbricated in the social and historical politics of difference is recognising religious faith as an equally important actant and identity marker within diverse epistemologies of (im)mobility. By researching the experiences of Muslim women this article has sought to expose fields of power that are crucial to reshaping the boundaries of the new mobilities paradigm, giving new emphasis to religion and religious hatred in understanding uneven mobilities in urban public space and the politics of knowledge production.
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