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Everybody is just Manchester: mothers' perspectives on (non)engagement with services  
as a lens to trouble a neoliberal equality discourse in early years policy.

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Everybody is just Manchester: mothers' perspectives on (non)engagement with services as a lens to trouble a neoliberal equality discourse in early years policy.

Abstract

In 2006, the UK government piloted free childcare for two-year-olds from disadvantaged families, expanding this into the 'two-year-old offer' (DfE, 2014). Despite efforts to widen participation, families from minority ethnic communities appear less likely to take up the offer (DfE, 2012). Research into non-engagement by families, particularly mothers, from minority ethnic communities frequently find reasons such as language barriers, a lack of service awareness or issues relating to isolation. These conclusions reflect cultural and political tensions that locate problems within communities and do not question powerful normative discourses.

Through the narrated experiences of a small group of mothers from Pakistani and Somali heritage, whose young children have engaged with the two-year-old offer, this study interrogates discourses of (non)engagement. The study moves away from focusing research 'on' participants, to trouble the neoliberal discourses of equality that shape early years policies, constructing ideas of (non)engagement. By putting a postcolonial feminist lens to work with the stories shared by women in this study, nuanced discussions emerge that entangle their experiences of (non)engagement with broader experiences of sameness, difference and belonging that hint at invisible, powerful equality discourses.

The impact of working with postcolonial feminism as a theoretical tool and methodological approach enabled me to think differently about the women's stories, offering an important focus for analysis, whilst also unsettling the many assumptions and taken-for-granted knowledges I was carrying with me, as a doctoral student. Ruptures, ambiguity and precarity became themes to analyse, not only the study topic of (non)engagement, but also the experience of conducting the research.

## Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	1
<b>Contents</b>	2
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b>	8
1.1 Thread one: the two-year-old offer	11
1.2 Thread two: sameness and difference	13
1.3 Thread three: (non)engagement	14
1.4 Discourses of equality	15
1.5 Researching across difference	17
1.6 Postmodern research: method and methodologies	18
1.7 Weaving the web: structure of the thesis	20
<b><u>Part One: Literature Review</u></b>	23
<b>Chapter 2. (Non)engagement in early years policies: (in)equality and the ideal parent</b>	24
2.1 Introduction	24
2.2 Section one. The neoliberal model of equality, ECEC policies, the two-year-old offer and social equality	25
2.3 The neoliberal model of equality in education	25
2.4 Neoliberalism and the two-year-old offer, ECEC policy: discourses of equality and engagement	30
2.5 Homogenising characteristics and language of (non)engagement	35
2.6 Policies and belonging: Prevent	38

2.7 Mothers as boundary-markers	39
2.8 Section two. Engaging a postmodernist approach to difference	40
2.9 Derrida and différance	41
2.10 The stranger mother and the liberal bargain	44
2.11 Conclusion	48
<b>Chapter 3 Thickening the web: theoretical silks</b>	<b>50</b>
3.1 Introduction	50
3.2 Thread four: Postcolonial theory, Feminism and Postcolonial Feminism	52
3.3 Strands of Postcolonialism	52
3.4 Weaving feminist theories, intersectionality and postcolonial feminism into the theoretical web	55
3.5 Threads of intersectionality	56
3.6 Threads of postcolonial feminism	60
3.7 Black feminism and situating differences	62
3.8 Spinning transversal politics into negotiating differences	63
3.9 A postcolonial feminist web	64
3.10 Thread five: Haunting spectres and boundaries	65
3.11 Boundaries	68
3.12 Conclusion	69
<b><u>Part Two: Methodology</u></b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Chapter 4 Postcolonial feminist research</b>	<b>72</b>
4.1 Introduction	72
4.2 Qualitative postmodern feminist methodology	73

4.3 Studying up to research a ‘problem’	74
4.4 The role of women’s experience in feminist research methodologies	75
4.5 Postcolonial feminist methodology: negotiating differences and learning about decolonising ‘my’ study	77
4.6 Conclusion	80
<b>Chapter 5 Methods, ethics and processes</b>	<b>81</b>
5.1 Introduction	81
5.2 Section one. Method	81
5.3 Narrative inquiry through focus group discussion	81
5.4 Rationale for small sample size	83
5.5 Narrative inquiry	86
5.6 Focus groups as a data collection tool for narrative inquiry	90
5.7 Critiquing narrative inquiry in relation to postcolonial feminist methodology	91
5.8 Data analysis process	93
5.9 Section two. Ethics	96
5.10 Institutional ethics and ‘becoming’ an ethical researcher	96
5.11 Feminist ethics and troubling	97
5.12 Responding to ethical dilemmas raised by feminist ethics	99

5.13 Impossible ethics: struggles with the ideals of feminist research ethics and taking responsibility for the study	100
5.14 Section three. Unsettling privilege: engaging with shadows and silences in research	102
5.15 Insider/Outsider Positionality: strangers on the margins	103
5.16 Whiteness	105
5.17 Voices: silences and silencing in/and (mis)translations	109
5.18 Negotiating access: Suspicion and whiteness	111
5.19 Conclusion	112
<b><u>Part Three: Analysis</u></b>	114
<b>Chapter 6</b>	116
6.1 Introduction	116
6.2 Section one. Ambiguity and mimicry: the demands the language of neoliberal equality discourse places on policy makers and mothers.	116
6.3 Ambiguity and precarity	121
6.4 ECEC policy language and Interpellation	124
6.5 Section two. What the experiences of mothers might offer to professional expectations about sameness and difference in enacting ECEC policies	127
6.6 The freedom early years professionals have to build relationships with families they cannot force to engage.	129
6.7 Parental engagement as passive.	130

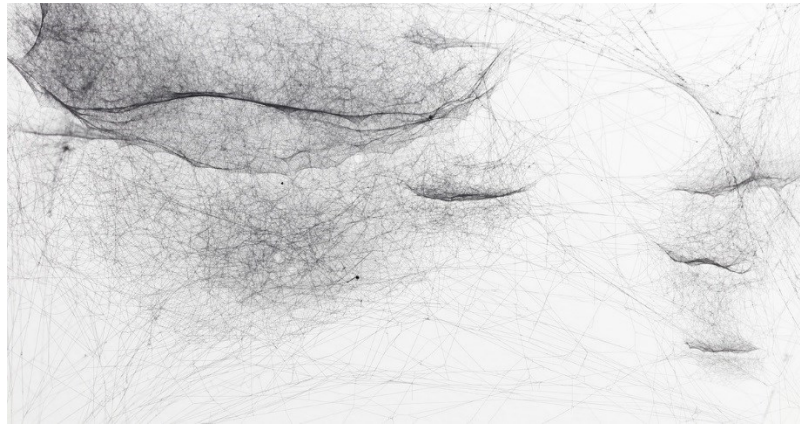
6.8 Entangled childhood memories	133
6.9 Conclusion	137
<b>Chapter 7</b>	139
7.1 Introduction	139
7.2 Section one. Broader encounters of (non)engagement	139
7.3 Unsettling experiences	147
7.4 Section two. (Non)engaged citizens: Encounters of not/belonging	150
7.5 'They': disturbing difference, sameness and Othered others	153
7.6 Precarity and (non)engaged citizens	159
7.7 Transversal politics	161
7.8 Section three. The challenges, affordances and contributions made by engaging postcolonial theory feminist research	166
7.9 Conclusion	170
<b>Chapter 8 Conclusions</b>	171
8.1 Introduction	171
8.2 How might the language of a neoliberal equality discourse in the two-year-old offer and wider ECEC policy, shape encounters early childhood have with mothers from BAME communities?	172
8.3 What might the experiences of mothers from BAME communities offer to professional expectations about sameness and difference in enacting ECEC policies?	173
8.4 What might mothers' encounters of (non)engagement with professionals outside ECEC practice do to unsettle notions	



of sameness and difference beyond ECEC policies?	174
8.5 In what ways might mothers' experiences of (non)engagement contribute to ideas of (non)engaged citizens?	175
8.6 Methodologically, what are the challenges, affordances and contributions made by engaging postcolonial theory and feminist research in a study working with women from BAME communities in a small area of South Manchester?	176
8.7 An outline of the contribution this study makes to practice and scholarly knowledge	177
8.8 Limitations to the study	179
8.9 Implications for my practice	180
8.10 Future postdoctoral work	181
<b>Reference list</b>	183
<b>Appendices</b>	i
Appendix I	i
Appendix II	xxxvi
Appendix III	i

## Chapter 1

### Introduction



(Rossetti, 2015)

This thesis documents how experiences, shared by a small group of eight women, two early years professionals and six mothers from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities, might challenge the ways neoliberal discourses of equality shape (non)engagement with early childhood education and care (ECEC) practice and policies. It also tells how, as a doctoral student researcher, I integrated my experiences of conducting this research into the study. This thesis becomes a space across which I spin a web, bridging the span between two anchor points, women in this study and myself as researcher. The concept of a web is set out in more detail in chapter 3, however spinning it begins in this introduction. This starts with the overarching research question:

In what ways might the experiences of a small group of mothers from BAME communities, who are engaging with the two-year-old offer, help unsettle expectations of engagement and non-engagement with ECEC policies and beyond?

In order to answer this overarching question, I ask the following questions:

1. How might the language of a neoliberal equality discourse in the two-year-old offer and wider ECEC policy, shape the way early childhood education and care professionals encounters mothers from BAME communities?
2. What might the experiences of mothers from BAME communities offer to professional expectations about sameness and difference in enacting ECEC policies?

3. What might mothers' encounters of (non)engagement with professionals outside ECEC practice do to unsettle notions of sameness and difference beyond ECEC policies?
4. In what ways might mothers' experiences of (non)engagement contribute to ideas of (non)engaged citizens?
5. Methodologically, what are the challenges, affordances and contributions made by engaging postcolonial theory and feminist research in a study working with women from BAME communities in a small area of South Manchester?

The process of responding to these questions has created a web, where silk threads of theory, data and discourses weave. Threads find places to fix and connect with each other, pulling and twisting in new directions. It is complex but it is not chaotic, it is spun with care, as I engage a methodology underpinned by feminist and postcolonial theory. I attempt a reflexive account of a woven web, suspended between the two anchor points of eight women and myself. Feminist and postcolonial theory also trouble my (non)engagement, as a white, middle-class female researcher, in a study with a group of women from BAME communities. What develop are fine, barely visible threads it is possible to move along and bridge these anchor points; but there is no single path, no simple line to follow towards a direct response. At every junction in the web, voices from within the study speak of alternate paths and different possibilities.

The thesis represents something of the cacophony of voices from various narratives, calling across the web. I struggle to ensure one voice (particularly mine) does not drown out others, yet in attempting this my presence risks being overly visible and loud<sup>1</sup>. Voices of mothers, writers, spectres and I mingle, as whispers, shouts and cries; and the ongoing tussle to resist re-centring myself causes the web to vibrate and sing.

The voices of mothers seep into every page, sometimes physically with data being included, at other times they influence the narrative or theoretical threads as they develop. They are

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the thesis, I use footnotes to record my presence in the study. I do not want to render my role in constructing this study invisible as I am part of the process and want to find a way to acknowledge the power my researcher voice plays. In engaging with postcolonial and feminist theories, footnotes become a way to manage my experiences whilst attempting to avoid colonising the study and women who participated. Later in this chapter, I introduce hauntings and spectres that have become part of this process, tangling me in both the study process and topic.

integral to the writing of this thesis and entangle the process of research and substantive topic. This study seeks to shift the focus of (non)engagement away from the communities women in the study live in. I take the narrated experiences women share of engagement, as a lens to study the discourse of equality found in ECEC policies, such as the two-year-old offer. I suggest that if research is unwilling to look beyond the equality discourse in ECEC policies, it might continue to frame parental lack as the cause of children's disadvantage, and narrowly defined education targets as the solution. This is more likely to repeat rather than question normative truths within the equality discourse (Urban, 2015).

This study attempts to unsettle an underlying equality discourse that creates 'truths' and that frames solutions around reducing difference and increasing 'sameness' in order to fit with these 'truths'. Therefore, throughout this thesis, I put data to work in different ways. I include extracts of the women's narratives in all chapters, to acknowledge how their conversations influence my thinking throughout the research process<sup>2</sup>. A web cannot be spun by travelling a single clear, linear path. In this research, I move back and forth, spinning threads between literature, theories, methodology, data and analysis. As I do, threads from women's narratives tangle with these, drawing the web into new shapes and on to new planes.

To give a structure and strength to the web, I lay down three framing threads, cast into the space between mothers and myself at the start of this study. The first thread is the policy context of the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014), the second the theoretical idea of sameness and difference and the third, the concept of (non)engagement. These three threads bend and twist during the study, as additional threads emerging from theory, methodology and data attach to them, placing them under tension and dragging them in different directions. However, they prevail; they are pliable and strong, indeed recognising and connecting with the other threads changes and strengthens their ability to stretch across the space between mothers and myself. Here I present an initial introduction to these threads that I build upon in this chapter and throughout the thesis.

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<sup>2</sup> The voices of women in the study are not restricted to the analysis chapters. My approach to this research into (non)engagement was to find ways the women's experiences might trouble more powerful discourses of equality found in policies. These discourses are rarely themselves the subject of questioning and analysis and so including data early in the thesis aims to help the reader navigate this choice of disruptive organisation.

## 1.1 Thread one: the two-year-old offer

Over the last two decades, free childcare has seen increasing state intervention and funding (Paull, 2014). Yet, whilst more women are in employment, fewer women are likely to occupy senior positions and are more likely to be working part-time, in perceived 'family friendly' public sector jobs or on temporary contracts (OECD, 2011). Consequently, while women may have increased financial independence, they continue to earn less than men (OECD, 2011). In part as a response to this, successive governments have expanded the provision of free childcare (Taggart, 2016) to support maternal employment (in both accessing employment and working more hours) and to improve outcomes for children attending ECEC provision (Blainey and Paull, 2017).

However, the two-year-old offer's (DfE, 2014) primary aim is not to encourage mothers into employment. It targets families on moderate to low incomes (£16190 per annum), in receipt of specific benefits or allowances (DfE, 2014). The two-year-old offer reflects an ongoing relationship between free childcare and disadvantage. It aims to "... provide additional support for disadvantaged children" (DfE, 2014b: 7) in order to improve their academic attainment and future employment prospects. The focus on academic achievement is unpicked in detail later in chapter 3; for now, I raise it to suggest how government policies focus on specific and measurable goals.

The two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) forms the starting point from which I explore issues of engagement and non-engagement in the context of ECEC policies and practice, as well as broader experiences beyond ECEC provision. As a piece of contemporary early childhood policy, free childcare for two-year-old children represents an experience all the women participating in the study share. The premise of free childcare, started in 1998 with the introduction of the national childcare strategy 'Meeting the Childcare Challenge' (DfEE 1998: 16), this irrevocably linked policies on free childcare to "... children from disadvantaged backgrounds". In 2006, the Labour government launched a pilot programme of free childcare for two-year-old children targeted at 'disadvantaged' families. Its primary aim was to "support child development - enabling disadvantaged children to access educational provision at a younger age [and] is intended to have a positive impact on children's cognitive, social and behavioural development" (DfE, 2012: 6). It does not exist as a single policy document but rather appears across national and local government

websites and in ECEC policies underpinning a discourse of disadvantage, child development and failure draws upon an ongoing premise of “... supporting parents to meet their responsibilities to their children ...” (DFES, 2005: 1). The discourse leading to the creation of the two-year-old offer not only lays down ‘truths’ about what the disadvantages for children are (their cognitive, social and behavioural development) but also who is responsible (parents) and what the solution is (earlier educational provision).

Therefore, free childcare for two-year-olds aims to counter “... the potential negative effects of living in circumstances that do not facilitate children’s cognitive and social development” (Gibb et al, 2011: 11). This forms the latest part of an ongoing legacy of policies focussed on early intervention in children’s lives as a means to combat perceived parental failure and develop children’s cognition and social skills. I continue this discussion in chapter 2, (2.3 The neoliberal model of equality in education).

Mothers participating in this research are women from BAME communities who have taken up the two-year-old offer of free childcare for their children. The narrated experiences of mothers in the study are, therefore, of women who are engaging with an ECEC policy shaped by language of ‘disadvantage’ and their children’s perceived need for ‘additional support’. The same language also shapes the narrated experiences of the early years professionals in this research, as women concerned with promoting engagement with the two-year-old offer to families in the local community.

The two-year-old offer spins through this dissertation as a shared thread. Yet it is a thread where complex experiences of sameness and difference narrated by women in the study become ‘stepping off points’ to explore wider experiences of (non)engagement with other services, such as medical and support services. Therefore, within this research, the two-year-old offer acts as a shared space to unsettle ideas of sameness and difference shaping mothers’ encounters with professionals involved in the care and education of their young children. Notions of ‘disadvantage’ and ‘additional support’ identified in ECEC policies reappear in multiple encounters mothers narrate. The study does not seek to focus solely on early years provision and free childcare. Rather, the two-year-old offer works as a starting point of policy from which I explore women’s wider experiences of difference and ‘disadvantage’.

Sameness and difference tangle with complex ideas of self-identity and belonging that move beyond, and challenge, assumptions of 'disadvantage' forged in policies, such as the two-year-old offer, and in doing so offer insights and new perspectives. The two-year-old offer and ECEC policy start the discussion and hence form part of the research questions. However, the research questions and the research aims seek to explore the ways policy lies within broader sociocultural experiences of (non)engagement women in the study share. Therefore, I move on to introduce the second thread, namely the theoretical idea of sameness and difference through which this unsettling might begin.

## 1.2. Thread two: sameness and difference

Gedalof (2013: 121) argues that sameness "... consumes or colonizes the space of the other, rather than respecting a space of difference", encapsulating an important struggle threading through this study. 'Sameness' appears to offer certainty in the face of uncertainty, frequently framed as 'difference'. 'Difference' threatens the normalising 'sameness' of the dominant group that Gewirtz (2001), argues is represented by the white middle-class family. It is this normalised and ideal 'sameness' in relation to academic achievement and future employability that the two-year-old offer seeks to open up for 'disadvantaged children'. This could be understood as difference presenting a risk, a 'hard to reach' difference that disturbs the 'ideal' sameness and necessitates policies in order to secure individual and national financial security. For example, if successful, the government predict the two-year-old offer might "... add £56 billion to UK GDP by 2050" (DfE, 2014b: 7).

In this study, I engage postcolonial and feminist ideas to trouble some of the exclusionary positions placed on sameness and difference, and question their workings within social discourses (Hughes, 2002). Working with a feminist perspective, troubles 'universal truths' about 'ideal' sameness as a standard to measure conformity (Fahlgren et al, 2011). The study provokes the ideas of sameness and difference embedded within an ECEC policy such as the two-year-old offer, using gender and culture to unsettle their workings. This does not mean to diminish or ignore other potential categories such as class, sexuality or (dis)ability that might intersect with gender and culture, and these do enter the study and tug at the threads at times. However, my focus lies with gender and culture in an attempt to make the thesis manageable.

Perhaps more than the other threads, this thread traverses so many planes, as I struggle with the methodological challenge of completing this research process. Other threads tangle encounters of sameness with difference in the research process. Across the web, in every chapter of this document spectres drift. I use footnotes as a way to include the sense of their ever-changing presence. I might learn to live with them, but the feelings of discomfort and unease they are able to generate snag at the third initial framing thread, (non)engagement.

### 1.3. Thread three: (non)engagement

Engagement in the two-year-old offer is not compulsory, yet the implications of not engaging holds particular significance for families from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities. A study by Gibb et al (2011: 41) argued that a lack of uptake in the two-year-old offer by ethnic minority families was because families “... preferred to look after their children themselves as early education was not part of their culture”. Indeed, research into non-engagement with families from minority ethnic communities frequently frame ‘culture’ as problematic (Royston and Rodrigues, 2013). These conclusions reflect cultural and political tensions that Crozier (2001) relates to a ‘one size fits all’ approach to parental engagement. Concentrating on engagement or non-engagement with policies such as the two-year-old offer could be understood as a process of concealing and failing to question the ideology of ‘equality’ shaping the policies that individuals are being expected to engage with. Under such circumstances, ideas about the meaning of equality become something naturalised and embedded within policies.

Throughout this study, I work with the hybrid term (non)engagement in an effort to portray the complex meanings and consequences associated with engagement and non-engagement. For example, the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) targets parents either on moderate to low incomes or in receipt of specified benefits. The result is that choices about (non)engagement with this policy places families from specific targeted groups under surveillance in ways that other families do not experience. This surveillance bridges the divide between the supposedly private sphere of family and public sphere of social responsibility (DfE, 2011) in the name of achieving social equality for children. This complicates not only what it means to engage or not, but also who is asked to engage and the consequences that not engaging might bring.



Having introduced these three initial framing threads, I move on to introduce further threads. What they bring to this study helps the web to take form. I begin with how discourses of equality thread throughout this study.

#### 1.4. Discourses of equality

*'... and then I thought of her future. I think she stay at home and just speak Urdu. I think I have to do something for her. And she's not like some time speaking with me ... That's why I think I have to give her to school or nursery. She will learn and now I am happy'*

(Dalal, through Liaison Worker Beena, Appendix III: lxi)

Recognising the potential ambiguity in language use / translation in the data above, Dalal's phrase 'I have to give her to school or nursery' could be read as striking at the heart of the neoliberal imperative within the two-year-old offer (2014). Dalal's willingness to 'give' her two-year-old daughter to the education system in order to influence her future, tangles with what Fahlgren et al (2011) argue is the main tenet within a neoliberal discourse, the promotion of the individual, the individual's rights and the individual's responsibilities. Within a neoliberal discourse of equality, the individual has the right to become part of 'normalised' society but it is the individual's responsibility to fit within the parameters of what that society determines as 'normal'. Once part of that normality, it becomes the individual's responsibility to maintain harmony within that society. 'Normality' lies central to neoliberal equality. Therefore 'normal' becomes both the goal and measure of an individual's and society's success at achieving equality. This study disrupts how such a discourse of equality relies on promoting the desirability of normality and the risks and management associated with what is not 'normal'.

The two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) reflects how UK governments tread an increasingly neoliberal path in their 'use' of education as a means of social reform (Wright, 2012). The marketization of education continues to emphasise empowerment and individual choice in order to overcome social inequalities. Early childhood has become a site where governments use policies to encourage families' early engagement in this process (Batty, 2013). Indeed as I noted earlier, making a direct correlation between equality and economic prosperity that includes a monetary value (£56 billion by 2050) in a policy aimed at two-

year-old children, might suggest this. So too does the emphasis on 'school readiness' and attainment in assessment. I discuss these in detail in chapter 2.

Yet this neoliberal approach to education has consequences. One is the articulation that education is a quantifiable commodity, providing access to social progress through measurable outcomes and specific social goals (Ozga, 2009). The second is an emphasis on the role of the individual, child or parent/carer, in decision-making and responsibility for gaining maximum benefit from the education goals offered. This model of education relies on parents engaging and making choices about their children's education, consequently engagement and non-engagement between education settings and parents become particularly important to this process (Crozier, 1998).

For women from BAME communities, this is further complicated when policies such as the two-year-old offer intersect with conflating historical and contemporary threads spun from ideas that ingrain 'truths' about belonging, equality and difference ECEC professionals, mothers and I live within. For example, I investigate how the Prevent strategy (HM Government, 2011) intersects the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) creating underlying tensions borne from mothers being able to 'prove' citizenship and that they 'belong' in these social structures. Government and ECEC professionals have a role in defining such 'truths' about what constitutes sameness and un/acceptable difference, in their approach to (non)engagement by mothers in the study.

*'Yeah, even for myself when I was growing up. Although I was born and bred here and I went to school here and I had English friends and things. There was still that role at home where ... you know it's ... there's more culture there. And you feel quite divided'*

(Badr, Appendix I: xx)

Within this sociocultural and highly politicised backdrop, this study aims to interrogate perceived narratives of (non)engagement by mothers from minority ethnic communities. Unlike many previous studies on 'hard-to-reach' families (Evangelou et al, 2013), or studies that prioritise professional perspectives and define engagement in terms of 'parent partnership' (Cottle and Alexander, 2014); this study seeks insights mothers from BAME communities bring. Their experiences are mobilised in the analysis of (non)engagement, belonging, sameness and difference embedded within the neoliberal equality discourse

threading through early childcare and education (ECEC) policies. This study shifts the responsibility and discourse of blame away from mothers, and simultaneously re-centres the mothers and their communities, as they offer critical insights into the powerful neoliberal equality discourse shaping narratives in early years provision.

Conducting research that seeks to re-centre the experiences of mothers unsettles some of the problematics of researching across difference. The complexity of the web across the space between mothers and myself speaks of the experiences and encounters arising from my decision to take this approach. The process of engaging with postcolonial feminist theory has both supported and challenged this process and cast threads into the web that speak of how histories haunt the present.

### 1.5. Researching across difference

Wright (2012) notes how ideas of empowerment, with its suggestions of increased social equality through parental and professional freedom and choice, conceals the power and control a neoliberal view of equality exerts on individuals. Yet this study and research process is not immune from the influence of power acting in the lives of the participants and myself as researcher. The influence of the ethical threads emanating from postcolonial feminist theory, resonate throughout the web I weave in this thesis.

By documenting narratives of mothers from BAME communities, I sought to reach beyond recognising the importance of women's experiences (Akman et al, 2001), and to tease out how notions of sameness/difference running through the discourse of equality in ECEC policies, risk subsuming cultural difference into an over-arching assimilation of sameness. Narratives became a lens to examine margins of acceptable and unacceptable cultural difference. These differences are hinted at in such discourses as "shared values" (Rietveld, 2014: 51) and 'British values' (DfE, 2014c), that I discuss in chapters one and six, and that influence the practice of professionals both in health and early years practice.

*Bahja: Yes, they tell their stories 'we used to ... when we came here, we had hard time, we were like ... we used to work at home, we used to look after our children.' One thing is that time was different. Now is different ...*

*FSW Beena: ... and they sometimes compare 'Oh, you have got so lavish lifestyle. When we were here, we used to bring coal in for doing the heater ... and, you know, no washing machine, and ...'*

*Bahja: ... they make us feel guilty! Laughs*

(Bahja and Family Support Worker Beena, Appendix III: lxxviii)

In this study, narrated experiences of marginalisation entangle personal histories with national histories of colonialism and migration. Crozier (2001) suggests how marginalisation can lead to the invisibility of parents from BAME communities and further impede their attempts at engagement with their children's educational settings. This study weaves postcolonial feminist readings into women's narrations, challenging ways women from BAME communities are problematized, whilst more powerful groups are constructed as 'normal' (Sprague, 2005). This is important at a time when communities are already under scrutiny from a social and political climate of suspicion and fear over topics such as radicalisation (Choudhury, 2017). I argue that the experiences of women from BAME communities offer important perspectives with which to analyse how (non)engagement with national and local governmental ECEC policies trouble certain homogenising 'truths' about 'shared values', that inadequately account for, or respond to, the complicated realities of a culturally diverse society.

I work with postmodern literature from Homi Bhabha (1994), Sara Ahmed (1998) and Jacques Derrida (1973), to attempt a more nuanced relationship with sameness and difference in my troubling of discourses of equality. I introduce these in chapter 2 and explore them in greater depth in chapter 3. In the study, Bhabha (1994) and Derrida (1973) speak of possibilities that challenge unitary approaches to difference, offering third spaces where the complexity of difference might be valued. Ahmed (1998, 2000) helps me to question how the equality discourse within policies such as the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) and Prevent (HM Government, 2011) might create women from BAME communities as 'stranger' mothers, beings of risk and fascination.

#### 1.6 Postmodern research: method and methodologies

Narrative inquiry forms the research method in this study. It offers a way that threads of shared meanings, drawn from collective experiences, might mobilise 'truth claims' embedded in the discourse of equality influencing ECEC policies. It also helps me draw attention to how the act of writing this thesis might make visible or hide the processes involved in 'making' research' and 'telling the story' of this study. Narrative inquiry supports

the process of making my choices visible as I search through, deconstruct and reconstruct multiple layers of 'truths' in narratives spoken by participants and in policies. It offers a way to explore how postmodern research approaches the impossibilities of finite claims to 'truth' emerging from this process. Building this relationship between narratives and 'truth claims' also insists that voices from the study leak into chapters, speaking to louder dominant voices such as my own as researcher, the readers, and others.

*'You have to be two persons ... one at home and one outside...'*

(Badr, Appendix I: xx)

Like Badr, complex encounters with sameness and difference in the planning, execution and writing of this research mean ethical considerations arising from postcolonial feminism lead me to reflect upon my presence in this work. Although I am in the encounters, I recognise that I cannot speak for women in the study. However, by being in encounters and recognising the impossibility of speaking for women, I carefully and closely turn the narratives women share, to disrupt the more powerful narratives of judgements about (non)engagement. Yet my attempts at this are troubled and uncomfortable, and so a theoretical thread of spectres (Derrida, 1994) haunts this study, expressing the uncertainty my presence stirs up.

It is impossible to fully separate discussions in different chapters without recognising how they drift across each other and away into the distance, evading my capture. For example, voices whispering from the analysis chapters, haunt discussions of interviews within the methodology chapter. I create boundaries to provide clarity and structure to this research, yet so often the research topic and experience thwart me. There are ruptures in the boundaries created in this thesis, that echo ruptures in boundaries of sameness/difference found in (non)engagement with the two-year-old offer. Throughout, spectres haunt and pass between spaces of un/certainty as I attempt to make sense of what is happening in the study, and present this within the narrative of the thesis.

In an attempt to represent these hauntings, I include footnotes throughout that illustrate and reflect upon these experiences of rupture. These are sites where changes occur and things happen. The footnotes attempt to capture the story of these hauntings but again they resist my attempts at presenting them as a contrapuntal narrative to the thesis, and

leak into the main text. Hauntings become an analytical lens for examining encounters and my responses to them. However, they do more than this, my experiences of spectres is sensory<sup>3</sup>.

### 1.7 Weaving the web: structure of the thesis

The web-like structure of this thesis builds on this initial frame as more threads weave and create manageable parts, chapters and sections. The thesis has three main parts.

Part one reviews literature surrounding major themes running through this research study. This provides context to the study topic and research process. In chapter 2, literature, including contemporary research, is examined to consider narratives of (non)engagement in ECEC policy that build upon ideas of sameness and difference. Discussions about the 'ideal/engaged' parent and the 'hard to reach/unengaged' parent emerge. I examine the relationship between a neoliberal discourse of equality and ideas about individual and group rights to draw out how this discourse risks problematising families, particularly women from BAME communities, as blocks to community engagement, making them subjects requiring management and control (Gedalof, 2007). The chapter moves to a poststructuralist perspective on sameness and difference and draws on Derrida's (1978) discussion of *différance* to problematise how this equality discourse attempts to contain difference within boundaries of characteristics, fixed in time and place. This concern to create terms necessary to manage difference, leads to the identification of the role boundaries play within both the study topic and research process. I work with Bhabha's (1994) thinking to explore difference within boundaries and Ahmed's (2000) examination of the role boundaries play in creating ideas of the stranger mother.

Chapter 3 introduces the main theoretical threads weaving through this thesis. I argue for a postcolonial feminist approach to this study, and examine how it relates both to the study topic and research process. By engaging intersectionality of race and gender, I draw upon

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<sup>3</sup> At times, I see and feel spectres change around me, as mists change to water and water changes to ice crystals so spectres change in the study, shirking linear paths of order. I also hear spectres whisper, call and shout in languages familiar and unknown, speaking to me of chaos and fragility. In conversation with my supervisor she talked about how this analogy reminded her of the way the threads of a spider's web hold onto droplets of morning dew, momentarily glistening, diffracting light, tiny spheres of water or life that encapsulate something and everything of the world around them, before they fall off, splash and disintegrate.

Crenshaw's (1991) analysis of how experiences of women from BAME communities, who do not embody the white female, not only go unrecognised, but also risk being undermined by institutions, feminist theory and race advocacy. Postcolonial feminism not only troubles how dominant white western feminist discourses risk silencing the ways women from BAME communities represent themselves. Postcolonial feminism also challenges how white feminist discourses can silence historical experiences of struggle and instead represent women of colour and women from majority world nations as "... passive victims" (Liddle and Rai, 1998: 508).

In part two, I weave my methodological response to this. Chapter 4 spins postcolonial feminist methodologies to open the reading of mothers' conversations in more nuanced and less certain ways. The chapter builds from a base of feminist research principles to consider what advantages a postcolonial feminist research perspective might bring and the accompanying challenges this presents to me as a white doctoral student researcher.

Chapter 5 produces a fine adhesive thread that builds a relationship between the methodological approach and the methods I have chosen. The chapter weaves postcolonial feminist research theory from chapter 4 into the ethical challenges this raises for both the study topic and research process. It reflects upon insider/outsider relationships, whiteness and voice as significant to this study. I set out the research method of narrative inquiry and my choice of focus group as a data collection tool. The suspicions that initially arose from the community form part of this section.

Finally, in part three I spin three more threads to present and analyse the data collected. '*Ruptures, ambiguity and precarity* are used to analyse how the narratives of women in the study speak to the ideas of Bhabha (1994), Derrida (1994) and Ahmed (2000). In chapter 6, ambiguity and ruptures in boundaries suggest a means by which the narrated experiences of women might challenge problematic difference within neoliberal discourses of equality. How this discourse influences not only language in ECEC policies, but also ways professionals act, forms part of this analysis.

In chapter 7, *ambiguity* and *ruptures* mix with threads of *precarity*. Precarity haunts the narratives of women in the study, and emerges to question an equality discourse particularly reliant on normalised views of sameness. Boundaries rupture as conversations

by mothers drift beyond ECEC policy into broader discussions of motherhood and belonging reflecting how (non)engagement and equality discourses cannot remain confined within borders of ECEC policy as the chapter moves on to explore ideas of the (non)engage citizen. 'Truths' start to appear fragile and spaces are created where mothers offer counter interpellations and responses to demands for conformity the equality discourse makes.

In chapter 8, I draw these together to consider the conclusions from this study. I consider what this may add to the body of knowledge on the topics raised and I present how this research might progress.



## Part One: Literature Review

In this first part of the thesis, the review of literature contextualises the study. This places the study within wider social discourses about belonging and (in)equality that underpin contemporary British society. Chapter 2 examines literature that helps frame (non)engagement in UK early years policies and how neoliberal ideas about (in)equality construct the 'ideal' parent. In chapter 3, I explore theoretical literature.

## Chapter 2

### (Non)engagement in early years policies, (in)equality and the ideal parent.

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of literature that focuses on the ways UK ECEC policies can lead to the construction of women from BAME communities as ‘stranger’ mothers (Ahmed, 1998), and “boundary-markers” (Gedalof, 2007: 91). The interrogation of literature foregrounds how narratives of (non)engagement risk constructing dichotomies of sameness/difference in order to meet the political discourses of (in)equality operating today. Such dichotomies effectively mask alternate perspectives, limiting ideas about (non)engagement, (in)equality, being and acting as the same/different. In attempting to acknowledge other possibilities, this chapter considers two important and related aspects to equality. First, how approaches to defining and measuring equality rely on assumptions about sameness and difference that shape policy-makers’ attitudes to (non)engagement. Second, how analysing these assumptions might indicate ways to disrupt equality discourses and create possibilities for individual narratives of women to redirect scrutiny towards governmental narratives of discourses of equality.

Therefore, this chapter is in two sections. Section one begins by discussing the neoliberal model of equality and how this model plays out in in ECEC policies. It goes on to examine how ECEC policies created to address social (in)equality in contemporary society, can generate further disparities. As some families become subject to the gaze of state and professionals, others retain their privacy under the assurance they function without need of support or surveillance. The two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) and the families identified as needing/entitled to its provision focus wider discussions on engagement, equality and choice. Reviewing literature about (non)engagement suggests how research can further homogenise parents entitled to the two-year-old-offer (DfE, 2014), characterised as ‘ideal’ or ‘hard to reach’ parents, risks cementing (in)equality discourses into characteristics of sameness/difference.

The second part of this chapter turns to postmodern literature to help destabilise some of the hidden structures embedded in these discourses of equality. This begins by outlining how a postmodern perspective might disrupt the equality discourse threaded within ECEC

policies. Engaging Derrida's (1973) discussion of *différance*, I consider how individuals and communities absorb identities of the stranger that are complex and powerful. Literature about encounters along boundaries might offer ways for this study to navigate these complexities.

## 2.2 Section one. The neoliberal model of equality, ECEC policies, the two-year-old offer and social equality

### 2.3 The neoliberal model of equality in education

Connolly (2013) explains neoliberalism as a social and political economic philosophy embedded across capitalist western nations. As a model of equality, it has become an omnipresent feature for describing social challenges within contemporary society, a "... political-cultural project ... in which different places are invited, seduced and compelled to join" (Clarke, 2008: 136). Neoliberalism has therefore become more than economic; it encompasses the political and cultural, a means of describing and analysing contemporary social discourses of equality. Yet critics of neoliberalism's omnipresence argue it is now overused and therefore risks becoming meaningless. Venugopal (2015), for example, argues that unless neoliberalism is specified within an academic study it is no more than a rhetorical device. Speaking of social qualitative research, Venugopal (2015: 183) goes so far as to contend that neoliberalism has become a means "... for critical social scientists outside of economics to conceive of academic economics and a range of economic phenomena that are otherwise beyond their cognitive horizons". Never the less, what this points to is, as Molyneux (2008) suggests, a risk that research can become reliant on the term 'neoliberalism' as a shorthand to describe the political landscape of policy. Presenting neoliberalism as a totalising and coherent market logic does not recognise the fragmented and complex variations and alternate approaches in play within a model of equality described as neoliberal. Therefore, I set out here a discussion of a model of neoliberal equality that is relevant to this study.

This study draws upon a view that in contemporary Britain, governments have taken an increasingly neoliberal approach to equality, through an "...inordinate confidence in the unique, self-regulating power of markets" (Connolly, 2013: 21) to increase economic prosperity for individuals and a nation. Equality is bound to economic prosperity. The

consequence of this approach is that governments organise national systems and apparatus of state (such as education and welfare) and link the freedoms of individuals (including women in this study) to market forces.

Connolly's premise is significant for this study, as it contends that embedded within government policies, educational institutions, families, workers, consumers and media threads a notion of the self-regulating power of markets. This thread ties decisions about policies and social welfare to economic prosperity reliant on national and international markets. In defence of a neoliberal model of equality, research by Dollar and Kraay (2002) make two interesting points relevant to this study. First they argue that open market forces aimed at increasing economic growth, reduce poverty and social inequality because economic prosperity "... on average benefit the poorest in society as much as anyone else" (Dollar and Kraay, 2002: 219). The second point they make is the importance of education for paving the way to a nation's economic prosperity, as it helps ensure the poorest in society are able to participate in a country's economic growth. However, Merry (2013) counters this argument, contending that neoliberal economic policies aimed at increasing the power of markets, has resulted in greater social inequality. Merry (2013) argues low socioeconomic communities and families are hardest hit by a neoliberal approach, as they are least able to keep up with fast moving market demands for a more technology-based economy that is less reliant on low-skilled labour.

Within education, Colclough (1996) makes the case that, from a neoliberal perspective, decisions about equality benefit from the application of market forces. For example, a neoliberal equality discourse would premise that through the provision of private education, wealthier, middle class parents might choose to remove their children from state education, so freeing up resources for those that remain. However, for Connolly (2013) this reflects how neoliberalism negatively impacts those at the lowest end of the social and economic scale through, for example, a developing sense of marginalisation. In the case of private education, those that can and cannot afford to pay become segregated, as wealthier children benefit from the trappings of private education and poorer children are confined to the provision offered by the state. However, as Crozier et al (2008) identify, this apparent dichotomy is not as simple as it might appear, and masks how even when middle class parents apparently refrain from such choices and remain within state education, they

continue to benefit. Citing neoliberal inspired programmes such as the 'gifted and talented' scheme that favour the habitus of middle class children, Crozier et al (2008) echo Molyneux's (2008) premise, to illustrate the complexity within a neoliberal model of equality through demonstrating how marginalisation for children from lower socioeconomic classes can persist.

As a model of equality, therefore, Atkinson et al (2012) contend that neoliberalism generally plays down the significance of wealth disparities and endemic inequalities in society, in favour of fostering an image of equality as supporting the 'responsible' individual citizen, who is free to make choices and is not constrained by societal forces.

Under a neoliberal discourse of equality, this competitive individualism might at first glance appear to reflect a meritocracy, recognising effort and 'responsible' choices regardless of race, gender sexuality or any other social categories. A neoliberal equality discourse normalises certain 'truths' that become so embedded as to be invisible. 'Truths' about freedom of choice, responsibility and competition appear 'natural'. This places an unquestioned value in individual rights that remove the individual and his/her rights from a shared sense of group rights (I explore this further later in this section).

As Reay (2008) points out, this neoliberal equality discourse acted out in education also dissolves boundaries and distance between home/family and school/state. Under a neoliberal equality discourse parents become consumers of education, apparently 'free' to make choices, yet parental accountability and what that choice might look like leads to an aspect of a neoliberal equality discourse particularly relevant to ECEC policy.

If it is the 'right' of the individual to make choices, then it is also the responsibility of the individual to ensure those choices are 'responsible'. Consequently, the 'right' of the individual to make choices is tempered by the role of government to act to ensure choices are 'responsible'. As Connolly (2013) argues, within the neoliberal philosophy shaping British society as well as other western nations, the apparatus of state functions to support the successful workings of the market. Therefore, markets shape the lives of individuals as the apparatus of state is used to define not only what 'responsible' and 'irresponsible' choices look like, but also to survey, inspect and police those choices. ECEC policies, become ways that governments not only define normalised truths about what responsible choices

by parents look like, but also monitor how well individual parents perform at making those choices and how well schools and early years settings perform in what they offer as choices for parents. In education, a neoliberal equality discourse generates a complex web of state observation, assessment and measurement of performance by parents, schools, early years settings and professionals in order to ensure the rights of the individual child to “... fulfil their potential ...” and “... make the most of their abilities and talents as they grow up” (DfE, 2014: 5).

In ECEC policies, Robertson and Hill (2014) conclude that this neoliberal marketization has led not only to increased competition and privatisation within early years provision, but also to the premise that early childhood education and care works as a site for ensuring ‘school readiness’. They argue these normalising truths appear within the curriculum to map out young children’s development in linear and universal terms that can be observed, assessed and measured.

*‘Because this two years funding, this concept is new in the Asian community. ... Now there is two, so if we want to break this concept we have to go through long way. ... Your children learn how to share, how to do potty training. Or open up their coat and shoes. But you know it is, I think, in five years’ time it will be clear in our communities.’*

(Family Support Worker Beena, Appendix III: iv)

What this neoliberal discourse means for ensuring social equality to support those considered ‘vulnerable’ has become a feature of twentieth and twenty-first century liberal societies (Fuchs, 2007). Governments frequently use policies to create, disseminate and enact equality discourses that permeate throughout society. However, ideas of equality do not exist in isolation. For example, discourses of social equality are set within and intersect equally powerful discourses of individual and group rights and responsibilities. Hughes (2002) contends that individual rights have come to dominate neoliberal equality discourses within contemporary policies. It is the individual’s right and responsibility to succeed (measured by conformity against codified outcomes) that has become the indefatigable route for ensuring wider social equality. Consequently, group rights have come to operate within a secondary space, that is often less clear (Fenton, 2011), possibly unstable and threatening, and certainly subject to challenge and controversy (McClaren, 2013).

Indeed Goodwin (2011) notes how actions aimed at benefiting groups of people can become subject to criticism under a neoliberal approach. For example, complaints of preferential treatment through positive discrimination or quotas, may reframe social equality for groups as unfair. However, as Gedalof (2013) suggests, the universalising language that often accompanies group or individual rights discourses, rarely recognises the cultural and historical context this 'language' reflects. Consequently, governments and policy-makers can reframe the notion of rights to fit into a discourse of social equality that reflects a current neoliberal discourse of equality through economic stability and social progress for the individual.

Such an approach relies on 'truths' about what is 'normal' as a standard by which to measure the individual (Fahlgren et al, 2011). Economic success of the individual as a path to wider social equality now weaves through government policies. Such policies disseminate discourses of equality based upon adherence to normalised, generally middle-class, values and characteristics associated with individual success and social mobility such as choice and engagement (Crozier, 2001 and Gewirtz, 2001). While individual rights might absorb this equality discourse and its reliance on individuals agreeing to the same characteristics and values of what it means to be 'normal' or the same, group rights appear more problematic as they suggest the need to recognise and work with difference.

*'... it was based on relationships which to me is more important than anything else, however, doesn't seem to be now. So those groups have been changed. But they were ... about a safe place, those were safe groups'*

(Liaison Worker Alex, Appendix II: xliii)

The uncomfortable relationship this equality discourse has with difference (and its apparent masking of this by promoting ideas that relate more closely to sameness) underpins much of this study. This reflects what Reay (2008) argues is the way a neoliberal equality discourse can compound existing educational inequalities, by assuming families share the same experiences of supporting their children's education. In neoliberal terms, when the state defines 'disadvantage' around parental lack (Reay, 2008), then 'difference' becomes associated with 'problematic'. For families defined as 'problematic', parents' approaches to education and care might not only go unacknowledged by the state, but particularly for British Muslim families, might also be defined as 'risky' (Coppock and McGovern, 2014).

Nussbaum (2013) builds on this idea, arguing that neoliberal equality through sameness appears to offer safety and security, often framing difference into something that threatens the dominant group. Therefore, sameness comes to shape not only what equality looks like, but also the appearance and properties of difference. Fanon (2008: 127) proposes “... the white family is the guardian of a certain structure” that Gewirtz (2001) extends to the white middle-class family, as a model for equality built into a national discourse of normality. Bhabha (1994: 69) adds that ‘sameness’ derives from a “shared consciousness” of the past. To this end, it might be helpful to consider how an equality discourse in contemporary ECEC policies, derived from such a ‘shared consciousness’ of white, middle-class values and beliefs, limits the capacity of policies for action and reform (Nussbaum, 2013).

#### 2.4 Neoliberalism and the two-year-old offer, ECEC policy: discourses of equality and engagement

Taggart (2016) points out how successive governments have increasingly focused discourses of equality onto early childhood education and care (ECEC) policies. ECEC practice has become a site where governments can demonstrate their commitment to ambitious contemporary social equality. For example, the provision of free childcare started in 2006 under New Labour (DfES, 2006), that drew upon ‘Meeting the Childcare Challenge’ (DfEE, 1998), actioned social inclusion through revitalising the labour market and role-modelling good parental behaviours (Ball and Vincent, 2005). This continued through the Coalition government’s ‘More great childcare’ (DfE, 2013) that ‘encouraged’ parents to return to employment in an effort to reduce national benefit payments. Under the current Conservative government, the Childcare Act 2016 continues this trajectory, using the provision of free childcare to support economic stability, manage austerity and reduce inequality (Lewis and West, 2017).

The language of a neoliberal equality discourse threads through successive ECEC policies (Reay, 2008). For example, neoliberal discourses of ‘choice’ appear throughout ECEC policies, promoting the marketization of provision that “... will expand the choices of parents and improve the prospects of our children” (DfEE, 1998: 4) or will enable “free providers to offer more high quality places, with great flexibility to invest in high-calibre staff and more choice for parents” (DfE, 2013: 5). This discourse also tasks parents with the responsibility to support their individual child’s right to social equality through their



educational success. The statutory early years framework, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2014: 15), for example, speaks of a child deserving to “... fulfil their potential ...” and “... make the most of their abilities and talents as they grow up”. From a neoliberal perspective, for a child to successfully achieve his/her potential s/he must become “... a fully responsible subject” (Stranger, 2018). As Podesta’s study (2014) points out, if the individual child is to achieve equality through educational attainment, both child and parent must engage with this perspective. The result is a contemporary view that the sooner children and families engage in preparing their child for the education system the better. Consequently, government policy-makers focus on parental engagement in ECEC policies that move ever-younger children away from the private space of family and into the public space of ECEC settings. Indeed, Erel (2011) notes how it has become a common feature over recent decades for young children to spend increasing amounts of their time in the public space of early years provision. Working with parents features throughout the EYFS (DfE, 2017), and Neum (2016) notes how parent’s engagement with ‘high quality’ pre-school provision and ‘school readiness’ is cast as fundamental to children’s later educational success.

The role education plays in achieving social equality has become an established part of the lexicon of contemporary social reform (Freire, 1969, Gewirtz 2001). Within ECEC policies, narratives drawing upon the language of “school readiness” to support “... future progress through school and life” (DfE, 2014: 5) have become a recurrent theme, offering opportunities for social equality through individual achievement and social mobility. This common theme of ‘opportunity’ renders education a particularly valuable tool for neoliberal discourses of equality in policies. Targets for educational achievement become one measure of social equality, as epitomised by Education Secretary, Justine Greening’s (2017: online) speech: “Our defining challenge in Britain is to level up opportunity; making sure that all young people get every chance to go as far as their talents will take them.”

Gibb et al (2011: 5) identify ‘school readiness’ as the overarching aim of the two-year-old offer “... to improve disadvantaged children’s social and cognitive outcomes so that by the age of five they are as ready as their more advantaged peers to start and fully benefit from school”. So the language of ‘disadvantage’ and ‘choice’ in ECEC policies as “... parents from disadvantaged areas are far less likely to have a choice of high quality provision ...” (DfE,

2013: 26), merges with the language of 'school readiness'. 'School readiness', in neoliberal terms, has become progressively more bound to educational attainment and success in adult life. In 1998, Meeting the Childcare Challenge (DfEE, 1998: 16) saw 'school readiness' as "better outcomes for children, including readiness to learn by the time they reach school and enjoyable, developmental activities ...". By 2013 'school readiness' in More Great Childcare has moved on to position children's early education and care in terms of "... equip[ing] them to thrive in school and later life." (DfE, 2013: 34). In 2017 The Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2017: 5) sees 'school readiness' as promoting "... teaching and learning to ensure children's 'school readiness' and gives children the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life".

The neoliberal equality discourse, demonstrated in the evolving definitions of 'school readiness' above, chart the progressive move towards young children being 'made ready' to meet educational targets in order to improve their adult life chances. So increasing importance is now placed on children's performance at four years of age, in specific areas of curriculum including Literacy, Mathematics, Understanding of the World and Expressive Arts and Design assessed at the end of the Foundation Stage (DfE, 2017). What this focus on a pre-primary educational approach reflects, is how ECEC policies strike a balance between 'school readiness' as an individual child's preparation for a primary school curriculum, and broader ideas of school preparation for "... life beyond the school-based curriculum" (UNICEF, 2012) found in Nordic and Central European countries. Indeed UNICEF's definitions of 'school readiness' emphasise this as more of an ongoing transition involving children, families and communities.

However, in the United Kingdom, the two-year old offer represents a more neoliberal approach to 'school readiness' through free childcare for two-year-olds. The two-year-old offer does not exist in any single policy document but within policies on free childcare for three and four year old children (DfE, 2006) and on national and local websites. As an additional offer of free childcare it is targeted at "... the 40% most disadvantaged children" (UK. Gov, 2016) within the population. By aiming to reduce the attainment gap, evidenced in the EYFSP (DfE, 2016a), entitlement to the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) through 'school readiness' targets low-income families in receipt of certain benefits or who have a

statement of special educational needs or disability living allowance (HM Government, 2017). As ECEC provision falls outside statutory education requirements, parents have no legal obligation to engage with the two-year-old offer of free childcare (DfE, 2014). However, in 2016, 182,000 children accessed the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2016).

Targets based on income and SEN in the two-year-old offer construct a neoliberal path based on equality of opportunity that render gender and ethnicity (DfE, 2016a) less visible. Success appears not only linear and rational, but also measurable through statistical analysis of educational success in assessment by children entitled to the two-year-old offer. However, success in these assessments requires a willingness on the part of parents to engage with the characteristics and values embedded within the neoliberal equality discourse that created them. This discourse also plays out in ECEC policies in ways that render ethnicity and culture as problematic in how parents, particularly mothers from BAME communities, engage with the rhetoric of 'school readiness'. The belief that engagement with this discourse is required for success, feeds into Said's (1993) argument that western societies increasingly shape such data into narratives of (in)equality that lack any obligations to please or persuade non-western audiences of the values embedded within their approach. This forms an ongoing theme throughout this study and I will raise it again and examine it further in chapter 3.

Governments use the codified outcomes from assessments to evidence the success of early interventions in the name of 'school readiness' within this neoliberal discourses of equality. This target driven approach is a feature of a discourse that constructs an ideal child as one who is ready for school in a neoliberal education system. As Stranger (2018: 50) argues, this child is "... rational, unemotive, innately capable of academic success, and if not, then at least compliant and hardworking in pursuit of this goal". The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) (DfE, 2016a) is an annual statistical measurement of individual children's performance in teacher assessments at the end of the EYFS (DfE, 2017). The data records children's ethnicities and measures of family income (for example, through free meal entitlement), and so displays the statistical performance of children from different ethnic and socioeconomic groups participating in this assessment. The statistical data from the EYFSP (DfE, 2016a) issued in November 2016, suggests that on average children from any white or mixed ethnicity performed slightly above the national average with 70% (white)

and 71% (mixed) achieving a good level of development. However, when the results for children from different ethnic groups are broken down, children from Asian and Black ethnic groups number the lowest proportion achieving a good level of development at 68%. Within this, Chinese pupils achieved 69%, while 62% of children from a Pakistani ethnicity achieved a good level of development. Pupils from an Indian background were the highest percentage of children to achieve a good level of development from the profile at 76%, whilst Gypsy/Roma children had the lowest percentage with 26% achieving a good level of development. The profile is interesting in two ways.

First, it suggests policies not only implement discourses of equality, they also actively construct them. As Neum (2016) contends, using statistical outcomes to measure success at supporting children's 'school readiness' mean those aspects of children's development that are apparently observable and measurable become so embedded in meeting the individual child's rights, they begin to actively drive this discourse. Consequently, the skills and characteristics required to succeed in these assessments become the habitus of contemporary education. However, the use of assessment, inspection and the concept of 'school readiness', though interesting, are not part of this study and so I do not explore these beyond the role the language of the EYFS (DfE, 2017) plays in constructing narratives of childhoods by participants in the study.

The second interesting point from data in the EYFSP (DfE, 2016a) cuts to the heart of this study. Measuring achievement of individual children across different sociocultural categories including ethnicity and socioeconomic status, presents an interesting problem for government policy-makers. If assessment at the end of the EYFS (DfE, 2017) is a measure of the success of various interventions driven by discourses of equality threaded within them, then it is essential that all children perform well. If the statistical data identifies groups of children are underperforming, it becomes necessary to address this. One approach ECEC policies take is the role of parents. As Podesta (2014) notes, the inextricable link between the first three years of a child's life and later educational success, makes parents the focus of governmental and professional gaze. This is particularly true for parents whose children fall within both this age group and sociocultural categories seen to be performing less well in the EYFSP (DfE, 2016a).

This is reflected in government initiatives for free childcare started in 2000, with an entitlement for four-year-old children to receive free childcare in England, extended to three-year-old children in 2005 and two-year-old children in 2014. However, although social class and poverty might frame all these entitlements, the aims of free childcare for three and four-year-olds focus on parents accessing employment, whilst free childcare for two-year olds, as discussed above focuses on the ‘school readiness’ of children from families identified as disadvantaged.

In 2016, the 182,000 children accessing the two-year-old offer arguably represent the relationship between the individual child’s rights to educational success, with more complex understanding of group rights. From a governmental perspective, reducing attainment gaps between different groups of children makes engagement critical. Effectively, (non)engagement illustrates the complexity of combining individual and group rights into this discourse of equality. Bhabha’s (1994: 69) observation of “shared consciousness” in discourses of equality combines the group rights of families from low socio-economic groups with an expectation they make the choice to engage with a shared white, middle class consciousness of individual success in performing the skills and characteristics measured by the EYFSP assessment. As Lewis and West (2017) point out, government policy on free childcare for two-year olds ties ideas concerning an individual child’s rights to educational success, with ideas about the rights of the socio-economic group that child’s family occupies. A group right of entitlement to free childcare brings with it an expectation that parents will choose to engage. The result is families from particular socioeconomic groups become the subject of government and professional scrutiny, whilst others retain their privacy as they already function without the need of support or surveillance.

### 2.5 Homogenising characteristics and language of (non)engagement

*‘Yeah, she’s come on a lot. She like knows really hard words she’s like saying ‘delicious’ ‘exciting’ and she talks and like her vocabulary is really good. Which is quite, I’m quite surprised, you know and she’ll say ‘That’s disgusting!’ Laughs’*

(Badr, Appendix I: xxvi)

In Callanan et al’s (2017) study into why parents engage in the two-year-old offer, highlighted how socialising with other children benefitted language development,

confidence and independence. Parents also identified access to equipment and facilities that supported their child's physical development and opportunities to gain feedback about their child from staff. The final motivation parents identified was that free childcare enabled them to return to employment or spend time with their other children. Parents judged the quality of local early years provision and whether to engage in the offer, through "word-of-mouth reputation" (Callanan et al, 2017: 74). The language Callanan et al (2017) use in used describing parents' responses echoes the language of ECEC policy and practice. For example, parents' responses precisely match the prime areas of "communication and language; physical development; and personal, social and emotional development" outlined in the EYFS (2017:7). This appears to suggest how adherence to a notion of sameness begins to define characteristics of the engaged parent.

Indeed, McMillan (2005) argues that discussions of engagement frequently confine an 'ideal' engaged parent within the perceptions and expectations of parental engagement found in the language of ECEC policies. Consequently, the characteristics of the engaged parent, that Callanan et al (2017) observe, simply echo ECEC policies. In many ways, such research become self-fulfilling prophecies, normalising a neoliberal equality discourse of consumer service, where ideal parents, as informed consumers, will naturally choose to engage. This suggests the successful integration of middle-class characteristics of active consumers, making informed choices, that Gewirtz (2001) identified New Labour had sort to instil into working-class families in the 1990s. Integral to the ideal parent's characteristics of engagement with ECEC policies is communication. As Callanan et al (2017) observed parents communicating with the setting on their child's development and by word-of-mouth within their community were important features of engagement.

Communication as a characteristic of engagement with ECEC policy recurs in several studies. Like Callanan et al (2017), Anderson and Minke (2007) identify parents accessing communication directed at them, as significant in their decisions to engage with education settings. Constructing the ideal parent open to communications about the value of engaging in their child's educational success and using the language of policy, sits comfortably with a neoliberal discourse of equality. In the research studies, 'ideal parents' act the same way and in accordance with the characteristics embedded in the equality discourse of individual success. Yet whilst these studies identify characteristics and language of engagement, they

simultaneously create less visible but equally powerful characteristics and language of non-engagement. Creating characteristics of (non)engagement with ECEC policies risks problematising difference within (in)equality discourses. If the 'ideal' parent embodies characteristics of engagement and therefore sameness, then the non-ideal, 'hard to reach' parent embodies characteristics of non-engagement and difference. In policies such as the two-year-old offer, that target families on low incomes, these overarching characteristics of 'hard to reach' difference risk being subsumed within socioeconomic and class characteristics in ways that can be problematic. Not least because, as Gedalof (2013) argues, aspects of race and ethnicity risk being silenced in an overarching focus on class.

Other characteristics that define being 'hard to reach' are glimpsed in Knight-McKenna and Hollingsworth's (2016: 389) study, where ECEC professionals are advised about the "... need to overcome apprehension about interacting with families who are different from themselves in order to make the shift towards a willingness to communicate with families." Characteristics of difference placed on parents now make ECEC professionals apprehensive, and require a degree of effort to overcome. In their report on the early implementation of the two-year-old offer, Gibb et al (2011) also place homogenising characteristics of difference upon families identified as 'hard to reach' and not engaging. These include racial and cultural characteristics of disinterest placed on Traveller parents, distrust on 'let-down' parents, insecurity on mothers experiencing domestic violence and language difficulties on refugee and migrant parents. The homogenising characteristic most relevant to this study was that of "[e]thnic minority families who preferred to look after their children themselves as early education was not part of their culture" (Gibb et al, 2011: 41). The common thread linking these characteristics of difference is their deficit; being or acting different might be problematic to themselves, their children or ECEC professionals.

As the scrutiny parents experience, because of their entitlement to the two-year-old offer, places on them expectations about engagement other parents are not subjected to, so (non)engagement might be seen as a conduit of social justice. This raises questions about how categories of 'ideal' or 'hard to reach' parents emerge to become part of the equality discourse. Sprague (2005) argues such approaches to research create narratives of dysfunction that fail to question problems within powerful, elite social groups who define the terms of this dysfunction. Making the least powerful groups in society the subject of

scrutiny, normalises those with greater power, meaning “...their traits, behaviours and social position require no justification” (Sprague, 2005: 11). Yet within the intersecting experiences of race and culture, secondary, homogenised ‘problematic’ differences can emerge. Crozier (2009) recognises how this risks teachers homogenising families from BAME communities (Crozier cites South Asian parents) with stereotyped attitudes and expectations about limited aspirations for their children. For mothers from BAME communities, characteristics of (in)equality and difference relating to (non)engagement with ECEC policies are further compounded by wider social discourses of ‘proving’ citizenship, belonging and identity.

### 2.6 Policies and belonging: Prevent

Giner (2007) also notes how minority ethnic communities have become sites of increasing public attention, shaping political discussions within the U.K. and internationally. The divisive nature that now frames many political and social narratives of sameness/difference have, Goodwin (2011: vi) argues, led to “... an exclusionary form of politics [that is] ... attracting increasing support and influence.” In the U.K. concerns over terrorism led to the introduction of the counter terrorism strategy in 2011, Prevent (HM Government, 2011). The strategy covers challenging terrorist ideology, preventing people viewed as vulnerable being drawn into terrorism and identifying priority areas considered at risk of radicalisation to joining or supporting terrorism. These areas include education. Whilst the strategy also covers extreme right wing organisations the main focus is Al-Qaida and other Islamic terrorist organisations, stating that second and third generation Muslims “... facing apparent or real discrimination and socio-economic disadvantage, can find in terrorism a ‘value system’, a community and an apparent just cause” (HM Government, 2011: 23). Such discourses risk further constructions of difference as dangerous and a threat.

In the weeks following the Brexit referendum in June 2016, police chiefs reported a 42% rise in hate crimes (NPCC, 2016). For mothers from BAME communities these wider social discourses complicate an understanding of (non)engagement in ECEC policies such as the two-year-old offer. For mothers of young children from BAME communities, scrutiny derived from belonging to the socioeconomic group entitled to free childcare, and the group embodied as likely to be ‘hard to reach’ is compounded by additional scrutiny placed upon them by Prevent (HM Government, 2011) and wider society. (Non)engagement



becomes more than a matter of developing equality for their children through educational attainment, it also offers a way to demonstrate citizenship, what Prevent terms “...the principles of civic participation and social cohesion” (HM Government, 2011: 10).

### 2.7 Mothers as boundary-markers

As established above, women from BAME communities, particularly those with young children eligible for the two-year-old offer, arguably occupy positions in society that not only subject them to the professional and governmental gaze regarding (non)engagement in the offer, but also a governmental and professional gaze resulting from the Prevent (HM Government, 2011) strategy. Consequently, characteristics of being ‘hard to reach’, compounded by suspicion of lacking ‘civil participation’ trouble, what Gedalof (2007: 79) terms the “... limits to the amount of ‘difference’ that can be absorbed before a sense of identity is shaken.” This appears symptomatic of what Rietveld (2014: 51) terms the contemporary political move away from discourses of multiculturalism and towards assimilation that emphasises “... national identity and shared values over cultural diversity.” This is, in part, insinuated in the publication in November 2014 of guidance to schools on promoting British values (DfE, 2014c) that feeds into what Gedalof (2007) terms a cross-party political move to create a sense of British identity particularly targeting the cultural and religious identities parents pass to their children. Whilst religious ideas of right and wrong may be held, an emphasis on British values compels schools to “... support the rule of English civil and criminal law” and ensure that children are “... made aware of the difference between the law of the land and religious law” (DfE, 2014c: 4). Uncovering frictions between individual and group rights, renders possibilities to re-examine belonging that I explore in section two of this chapter.

Threading in ‘othering’ characteristics of difference, Gedalof (2007: 91) suggests, presents women from BAME communities as “problematic boundary markers”, binding women’s actions in the private space of home and family to ideas about belonging and notions of what constitutes the ideal family and home. Difference as problematic is, as Jaspal and Cinnirella (2011) argue, further compounded when politicians and the media construct women from BAME communities as a mixture of victims who need saving or hindrances to normalised family identity, a “... troubled figure ...” (Gedalof, 2007: 89), simultaneously an object of concern and need. From such a position, engagement with the two-year-old offer

might present an opportunity to demonstrate compliance with normative values, whilst also distancing themselves from problematic difference. For mothers from BAME communities, engagement apparently offers a means to convey to the government and professional gaze, not only a willingness to engage with a policy but also accept its accompanying discourses of equality. Indirectly, non-engagement risks acting as a signifier to that same government and professional gaze, those individuals and communities not only unwilling to engage with the policy, but who possibly also reject its accompanying discourses of equality.

For that reason, a decision to engage (or not) risks turning an apparently benign policy aimed at early intervention for young children, into a judgement about families that resonates with mothers from BAME communities in ways not immediately apparent. A blanket judgement that "... early education was not part of their culture" (Gibb et al, 2011: 41) not only risks placing characteristics of problematic difference and hindrance to social reform on women from BAME communities, it also risks rendering silent and invisible the experiences and motivations behind that decision. This is important because within such decisions lies a space where individual professionals and mothers enact equality as 'being the same' and 'being different'. Narratives of such decisions made by women create possibilities of a new lens through which to examine discourses of equality embedded in powerful narratives of government policies. If (non)engagement offers a means to explore these discourses of equality discourse, and its underlying themes of sameness and difference, then postmodern theoretical threads might be helpful.

### 2.8 Section two. Engaging a postmodernist approach to difference

In this section, I explore how poststructuralism, as a subcategory of postmodernism, offers a way to unsettle how exclusionary 'positions' become established within social discourses (Hughes, 2002). Social structures arguably limit an individual's capacity to exercise agency when interacting with discourses such as that of equality discussed in section one of this chapter. So questioning how discernible and indiscernible structures buried within the fabric of society can constrain choices, may support a more meaningful examination of mothers' (non)engagement in the two-year-old offer. From a postmodern perspective, narratives by mothers from BAME communities might disturb the neoliberal equality discourse embedded in the offer and challenge 'truths' about individual agency and

characteristics of 'ideal' sameness or 'hard to reach' difference. Therefore, postmodernism might help unsettle deterministic reliance on a discourse of equality built upon such rigid and homogenising divisions.

For Hughes (2002: 180), 'difference' has become a "cluster word", a word central to postmodern feminist theory yet framed by discourses of equality. A more nuanced analysis of difference might benefit, therefore, from postcolonial and postcolonial feminist perspectives on the relationship between difference and the equality discourse threading through government policies. A postcolonial feminist approach might be particularly helpful in examining the equality discourse from the perspective of mothers from BAME communities. For example, Ahmed's (2000) concept of the 'stranger' speaks to the neoliberal equality discourses shaping experiences narrated by women in the study. Yet the concept of stranger also speaks to my position as researcher, as I respond to the mothers' experiences and work with them to unsettle discourses of equality. To begin however, I continue to explore literature that articulates the uneasy relationship between sameness and difference that haunts this study.

### 2.9 Derrida and différance

*'... Because I had this bold personality when I was with my friends, we used to ... and then at home ... I was like loud outside and then at home ... you get told 'Oh, stop laughing!''*

(Badr, Appendix I: xx)

Poststructuralism affords a critique of what Scott (1988) suggests is the reliance of equality on its relationship with difference. What Scott offers is an argument that a feminist perspective should seek to recognise and resist concrete definitions of difference and strive for multiple meanings. This drives the question, what lies behind the meaning of difference in relation to the discourse of equality. To provide a response to this, Derrida (1973) conceptualises how we construct each other and ourselves through our use of language. He argues that language creates systems of sameness and difference, as evidenced in the discourses of (non)engagement and equality presented in section one.

Derrida refers to différance to intimate that, when considering our understanding of ideas, there is no starting point that does not relate to what has preceded it, and what will lead

from it (Wolfreys, 2007). We, like our ideas, remain forever part of a wider set of ideas and the structures they create. Consequently, any examination of the meaning of difference will simultaneously produce both a point that led to the creation of this meaning, and a departure point in relation to where this examination will lead. I find Derrida's *différance* useful in trying to understand the role of difference in the equality discourse threading through government policies. It intimates an endless complex network of ideas, structures and actions rather than a linear path that can be traced back to one original idea or forward to an 'ultimate truth'. This suggests that any discourse of equality exists in complex relationship with difference that is ongoing and unstable.

To unravel this relationship further, Moore (1994: 2) is mindful of contemporary society's "obsessive concern" with difference that rarely defines the terms in which it exists. This speaks to the role difference plays in an equality discourse focused on acceptance of pre-defined characteristics of sameness that in the two-year-old offer, for example, is limited to what EYFSP assessments can measure. If assessment scores can characterise the 'ideal' child, then it is possible that all else that remains is different. For Ali (2007) this complexity of difference challenges ready definitions through grand narratives of western, Eurocentric, enlightenment and universal views. Nevertheless, section one suggests that the focus has come to rest on those objects of difference most frequently under scrutiny, as evidenced in the homogenised characteristics of difference placed on 'hard to reach' parents or 'troubled figures' placed on mothers from BAME communities. Therefore, grounding this study in the "... material and economic conditions of lived experiences" (Ali, 2007: 207) reminds me to be cognisant of the complexity any attempts participants and I make at not only defining difference, but also identifying objects of difference.

Bhabha (1994) adds to the challenge of defining difference within policy context by seeing cultural difference as a process of "signification" (Bhabha, 1994: 50). Through signification, defining characteristics of difference becomes a means by which government policies or research on (non)engagement might create statements that differentiate, discriminate and authorise attempts to dominate and control. It suggests 'knowing' and describing cultural difference, risks creating mothers from BAME communities as 'boundary markers'. This is something I return to later in this section in Ahmed's (2000) creation of the stranger mother. What this suggests is that at the boundaries of cultures, meanings and values are subject to

misreading and misunderstandings that are not the effect of cultural difference but rather a problem with a structure that sees difference in these terms.

Bhabha (1994) argues that the symbols and icons used to define difference do not simply represent difference they also produce meaning, much as Derrida (1973) would see the workings of *différance* in spectres of history haunting and troubling these representations (see chapter 3). A postmodern reading of 'difference' suggests a need for a third space. A space where unconscious understandings and relationships between members of society might consider possible implications regarding what these cultural symbols say and what they construct. The result of sameness acting to shape the representation and meaning of difference, creates an Other, and Bhabha (1994) offers a further consideration, that the meaning of difference created in this way is not the reality it might appear. Framing a third space, as a postmodern discourse of difference, hints that something is not there.

Bhabha's (1994) argument seeks a more complex understanding of cultural difference, beyond the representation of cultures as either unitary or dualistic, to instead consider an unconscious third space of meaning. Within this space, the representations and symbols of culture and the implications these representations have on an individual, exist in an "... unconscious relationship ..." (Bhabha, 1994: 53) to create meaning. Though this third space is not itself represented, it is the condition that enables us to see the dynamic nature of culture. Rather than being fixed with set meanings, difference becomes open to historical translation, appropriation and rewriting. In this study, this reflects spaces created as women speak about experiences of (non)engagement and (in)equality.

In chapter 3, I go on to explore Derrida's (1994) spectres as a theoretical thread running through this study, reflecting hauntings that occur in these spaces. The uneasy relationship between sameness and difference generate spectres that haunt the apparent certainty of (non)engagement and equality in the narratives of policy. These spectres are also present in the narratives of uncertainty about (non)engagement and equality stirred up by women participating in the study. They do not leave. They make me conscious of my presence, my whiteness, in these spaces as I struggle to witness, touch, experience spectres and hauntings and worry about whether my presence is justified. This resonates with a concern Hughes (2002) expresses about the effects of bringing a dominant western, white feminist perspective to understandings of difference within the study. She raises how my approach

to difference risks creating spaces that at least influence the participants, and at worst silence them. With that in mind I now draw on Ahmed's (1998, 2000) understanding of the stranger to analyse difference (Derrida, 1973) and symbolic citizenship (Bhabha, 1994) relevant to this study.

### 2.10 The stranger mother and the liberal bargain

*'... but they are here to learn through play, so learn through play I would say, that's the biggest job of the lot really. Because parents can't see, if they don't understand the value of play, they can't see that they can learn through it. 'They're just playing' is just playing and that's it.'*

(Liaison Worker Alex, Appendix II: xxxviii)

Ahmed (1998) asserts policies such as the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) and Prevent strategy (HM Government, 2011) work as performative systems that aim at ensuring inclusion and diversity, but risk obscuring underlying problems that challenge equality. As Gedalof (2013) points out, a consequence of sameness dominating equality discourses is that the values and beliefs of those most powerful within society become translated into universal 'truths' about what constitutes 'normal'. Hughes (2002) agrees, claiming that western societies tend to recognise and focus on formalising and 'managing' inequality through policy, legislation and intervention that fail to recognise or account for the role these underlying values play in creating inequalities. Ahmed (1998) observes that material inequality based on power makes these values visible only to those on whom it impacts. Therefore employing policies, rights and legislation whilst performing a function are not sufficient to address primary difficulties with (in)equality. These underlying challenges lie more deeply ingrained within all levels of society, and so, Ahmed (1998) argues, mean equality rights are 'done' not owned.

From a postcolonial feminist perspective, the relationship between (non)engagement and the construction and enactment of equality rights emerging from the literature in section one, points to the ways these power imbalances may shape the experiences of women in this study. Discourses of equality that simultaneously champion sameness, whilst constructing difference as either invisible or risky, make the experiences of women from BAME communities an important lens through which to review unrecognised power systems. By unsettling an equality discourse based upon sameness, it may be possible to

unravel how the “symbolic citizenship” (Bhabha, 1994: xvii) this creates, perhaps not only limits engagement with cultural differences but fuels an ethos supporting the surveillance of difference in the name of security.

Unsettling ways government policy and research narratives frame mothers from BAME communities as different, resonate strongly with Ahmed’s (2000) idea of the stranger and Derrida’s (1973) notion of *différance* in considering what is deferred in the meaning ‘to differ’. For Ahmed (2000) the stranger embodies that which is beyond the limits of sameness and acceptable difference. Yet, Ahmed (2000) insists, the stranger is known, she already exists and is recognisable as someone who differs, the stranger is a construct that embodies both risk and fascination. Ahmed (2000) argues that the act of admitting the stranger into the community demonstrates a sense of humanity through compassion for the needs of the stranger, with opportunities to create connections and knowledge, broadening the experience of the community. Yet at the same time, the stranger embodies that which is outside and risky, admitting the stranger risks change or destruction to the community, suggesting ideas and values placed on the stranger become embodying characteristics. This is reflected in how research studies on (non)engagement place homogenising characteristics of ‘stranger’ on ‘hard to reach’ parents. From the position of the stranger, community engagement, belonging and citizenship that have become normalised into invisibility for some, can present barriers to others, creating a sense of marginalisation (Ahmed, 2000).

Sa’ar (2005) hints at a response by women to this marginalisation. Speaking of Israeli-Palestinian women, Sa’ar (2005: 681) refers to a “liberal bargain” marginalised women might make in order to gain whatever benefit they can from liberal societies. Through internalising liberal epistemology, women from marginalised communities may find ways to manage multiple layers of gender and racial oppression and gain benefits from the liberal agenda. However, Sa’ar (2005) recognises a cost to this bargain, as western societies ignore or marginalise women’s personal histories, leaving them to exist only in the small and local. This reflects what Bhabha (1994) refers to as the historical strategy within liberal societies such as the United Kingdom for representing cultural difference. Traditions translate the past and create difference within the present through cultural symbols and icons, such as the representation of Muslim women in the media as victims of oppression or Gibb et al’s

(2011) conclusion that an understanding of early education is missing from ethnic minority cultures.

Considering Ahmed (2000) and Sa'ar's (2005) stance in relation to this study, what emerges is that studies on parents' (non)engagement might be understood to act to produce the figure of the stranger. The promotion of the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) and concern about non-engagement of mothers of BAME and other communities (Callanan et al, 2017; Gibb et al, 2011) conceal ways these narratives construct mothers as the stranger. It takes for granted the 'strangeness' of non-engagement in comparison to the familiarity of engagement and limits the personal histories women from BAME communities might make to this discussion.

In exploring what mothers from BAME communities suspend in order to accept the 'liberal bargain' of engaging with the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014), Derrida's (1973) question 'who differs?' is helpful. This recognises the role policy, such as the two-year-old offer, plays in preparing young children, and to some degree their mothers, for achieving cultural, intellectual, linguistic 'catch-up' by bridging an educational attainment gap and achieving equality of opportunity at its completion. Similarly, Derrida's (1973) question 'what differs?' might consider what it is the mothers defer by engaging in this offer. This is not a straightforward question. Building on Sa'ar's (2005) idea, the 'liberal bargain' requires mothers to engage not only with the concept of equality the policy offers, but also with the deeper liberal values it represents.

Engaging with Ahmed's (2000) reasoning, the figuring of the stranger mother suggests discourses of (non)engagement in policy lack clarity, they do not examine what engagement or non-engagement looks like, beyond profile results that record the low achievement of some non-engaged children (DfE, 2016a). The narratives of engagement appear to focus on mothers simply presenting their children. However, this is not a universal demand made of all mothers of two-year-olds in the UK. In this respect, (non)engagement is a discourse of making the stranger belong; equality suggests becoming the same and so reducing the strangeness/difference of some mothers and their children. If that is the case, then rejecting this invitation to engage, appears to suggest to government and early years professionals a refusal by the stranger to belong. Non-engagement in ECEC policies has an added dimension; it suggests not just a refusal of the mother to belong but also a refusal to help



her child belong. She is not only a stranger mother but also the mother responsible for creating a stranger child.

Taking the 'liberal bargain' and engaging with the policy might not only move mothers to embody the "... good citizen, who has displayed a positive commitment ..." (Ahmed, 2000: 28) but also the good parent. The two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) and its language of 'school readiness' already creates a stranger mother who is lacking, and a child needing rescuing from this failure to be ready for school and the equality it offers. Reading *différance* into a policy perspective, a decision for (non)engagement marks a point for the stranger mother to self-monitor and either prepare, or not, for the future in the present. Yet what a policy perspective is unable to see is the *différance* past and futures only visible to the 'stranger mother'. There is a space where seeing and knowing is visible to the stranger but invisible within current discourses of equality to government, professional and researchers (including myself). That space is worth considering as another meaning of the term 'to differ' and its relationship to this study.

This meaning of 'to differ' forms part of the exploration in the study as it recognises the spaces that exist between different individuals and communities. 'Who differs?' suggests a view of equality that builds on Ahmed's (2000) presentation of the stranger. This might allow an interesting examination of postcolonial feminism that also builds upon Bhabha's (1994) discussion of 'safe' cultures, 'good' and 'bad' migrants. The question 'what differs?' might examine the ways difference identifies and objectifies people. There needs to be sufficient difference to engage in the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) but not so much to be a concern in the Prevent strategy (HM Government, 2011). If the stranger is not sufficiently different she would not require the intervention of ECEC policy, but if she were too different, there would be a concern that equality measures alone will not address, yet the Prevent policy might.

Sa'ar (2005: 685) describes this as learning not only how to "think white/think male" but to extend that performativity to embracing those values. This requirement to adopt fully the normative values of liberal society also acts to universalise difference within communities. Bhabha (1998) contends this attempt to 'smooth out' difference within the interstitial spaces of communities, sees marginalised communities as 'projects' rather than recognising struggles between various groups within the community. For mothers from BAME

communities, this might mean adapting to and adopting the values of liberal society as part of engaging with the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) in the nuanced experience of their own community. I explore this further in chapter 3 where I present an examination of intersectionality.

### 2.11 Conclusion

The analysis of literature in this chapter suggests any attempt at a postmodern reading of (non)engagement with an ECEC policy and the equality discourse embedded within, it will mean engaging with multidimensional and complex understandings of sameness and difference.

The lived experiences of mothers might offer a perspective that unsettle views of women from BAME communities as “embodying an unhomely threat” (Gedalof, 2007: 92). However, the challenge lies in conceptualising difference in a study that seeks to avoid simply reproducing dualistic pairing between difference and equality, and instead reflects the complex relationships between people and cultures in a society that apparently both encourages and restricts opportunities for equality. The complexity inherent in representing and understanding difference in what is seen and not seen, becomes evident in the framing of (non)engagement in the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014).

Interrogating literature on (non)engagement suggests how mothers from BAME communities can become embodied representations of difference, the Other. Yet I cannot assume that mothers from BAME communities who engage with the two-year-old offer are engaging in a “liberal bargain” (Sa’ar, 2005: 681) and so adopt liberal values. Bhabha (1994: 73) talks about how “this edge of meaning and being ... this shifting boundary of otherness” rebuffs any attempt I might make at a teleological analysis that presents a smooth and untroubled understanding of differences in order to more easily examine policies. Rather he and Ahmed set a challenge, a more unsettled analysis that recognises how encounters along shifting boundaries open spaces that interpret the othered histories of theoretical discourses of (non)engagement and (in)equality in policies. Bhabha (1994: 37) claims “[a] place of hybridity ... where the construction of a political object that is new, *neither the one nor the other ...*”

In the following chapter, I move to build on these threads of postmodern literature. I introduce the theoretical threads that weave through this thesis. I build presents how postcolonial and feminist theories have drawn together into a postcolonial feminist theoretical perspective that runs through this study. This thread not only shapes the study topic but also steers much of research process I have undertaken. As a response to the challenges of postcolonial feminist theory, I draw upon Derrida (1994) and the concept of spectres that haunt the study topic and experience of conducting the research.

## Chapter 3

### Thickening the web: theoretical silks.

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the two key theoretical threads, postcolonial feminist theory and Derrida's (1994) haunting spectres. These threads both guide and challenge every aspect of the research approach. Significantly, both examine the complex layering of sameness and difference evident within the research process and the discourses I analyse. These threads, serve to connect the experience and context of the study. I first saw these connections as a scaffolding frame, providing structure and support as I began the study. As the research progressed, it felt less rigid and more akin to weaving a tapestry. Therefore, warp and weft became a closer analogy. Yet now this process of making connections more closely resembles a spider's web. The threads have become, for me, silk spun into a web<sup>4</sup>. These theoretical threads force me to confront ideas and experiences that catch and entangle in this study.

The fourth thread examines how my growing understanding of postcolonial feminisms thread through the study. The ideas within these theories continuously challenge my relationships with every aspect of this study. Postcolonial feminisms maintain a level of discomfort that have accompanied this entire research process, and which help generate a

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<sup>4</sup> Originally, these threads were the solid metal frames used in modern construction. I saw them as the strong frame on which I would build solid walls and create rooms to present this study. However, I quickly saw this as too rigid. These theories were not metal girders. Things were buckling and could not accommodate the shifting nature of ideas that refused to be easily compartmentalised into separate rooms bordered by solid walls. So instead, the frame became the warp that lies invisibly beneath a tapestry. This analogy allowed me for quite some time to see the theoretical theories as threads that I could follow and that supported a study that resembled a tapestry. I began to weave Ideas into different patterns on this flexible yet predictable warp. However, as the study progressed further into conversations with women in the study this too became too rigid and fixed. It sat on a single plane, and whilst ideas could move through the warp, they were either on one side or another. The tapestry emerging was interesting but it did not represent the ephemeral, hard to touch experiences I had. I began to see these theories as the threads of fine silk a spider spins into a web. They have, perhaps, greater tensile strength than those original scaffolding girders, but now they are finer they take me in unexpected directions. They adapt to the environment I find myself in and at times they shine and at others, I cannot see them but I feel them brush my hands when I reach out to touch them. I can follow these threads but now they cross leading off into different planes. They are there to catch ideas, trap them into the narrative of this thesis. At times, they do this, my theoretical threads catch ideas and experiences and I can bring them into my thesis. At other times ideas hang from the silk, clinging but not caught, they could easily escape; I perhaps lack the skills or am not yet quick enough spinning my web. They are in my thesis, just. Then there are the other ideas and experiences that elude my threads, they pass through the spaces and are not caught, but they cause the threads to move as a web in a draft. I feel them pass but I cannot capture them. I prefer the threads as spun silk, not welded or woven.

sense of rigour that pushes me deeper into myself as a postgraduate research student, into the research process and research topic.

Postcolonial feminist literature contextualises the legacy of imperialist and colonial ideology of (in)equality that continues to bind equality with 'dependency', 'expansion' and 'authority'. The "... will, self-confidence, even arrogance" that Said (1993: 10) refers to, describes how ideologies that control people in lands great distances from the power base, have created legacies that haunt contemporary discourses of equality. This ideology continues to limit equality to an inferior/superior dichotomy today (Fanon, 2008). In this thesis, postcolonial theory combines with postcolonial feminism to create an important lens through which I evaluate contemporary social educational policies aimed at promoting equality for young children and their families. A postcolonial reading of policies such as the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) that engages insights from mothers of BAME communities, might offer new perspectives to the ideology of equality in ECEC policy. Yet the experience of combining postcolonial feminism with engagement in feminist research theory has evoked personal uncertainties during the study that I explain within the fifth theoretical thread.

The fifth theoretical thread, evolves from my reading of hauntings and the ephemeral and disturbing experiences of (un)known and present/absent that has built up as I progress through the study. It moves beyond a metaphor to express the multiple encounters that occur in the research. Hauntings have become an analytical lens to examine these encounters and evaluate my responses to experiences of hauntings in this study. Spectres change like mist becoming water, water becoming crystals of ice. These changes occur, as I experience spectres passing through ruptures in boundaries between sameness and difference in this research. Therefore, ruptures become sites where changes are both triggered and resisted. This study has become drenched with what Barad (2007: 33) terms "intra-actions" that cross boundaries of (non)engagement, sameness/difference, knowledge, communities and postmodern epistemologies. In order to explore the significance of these relationships, I do not intend to force ideas together or collapse them and ignore elements in order to make them fit. It is a matter of recognising how my experiences of hauntings change what emerges from the study.

## 3.2 Thread four: Postcolonial theory, Feminism and Postcolonial Feminism

### 3.3 Strands of Postcolonialism

*'... yes our duty. Another thing, this is not big, but little thing. In here, lots of parents, especially dad go out at night time. Night time when mum on her own, like half past one, two o'clock and mum has to wake up and bring dinner to the husband and then sit down with him and talk to them. And then when like early in the morning they go to bed, and they haven't got energy again to wake up at eight o'clock again, taking their children ... and too much for the mum.'*

(Family Support Worker Beena, Appendix III: lxxvii)

Fanon (2008) argues that contemporary society perpetuates discourses of (in)equality based upon a premise that contends "... the white family is the educating and training ground for entry into society" (Fanon, 2008: 126). In declaring this, Fanon (2008) opens up for scrutiny, universal and contested notions of white and western embedded within equality discourses in western societies. Arguably, ideas of what constitutes white and western have not only come to ground what equality should look like, but also lead to broader unquestioned discourses of social progression that may not adequately reflect experiences of culturally diverse societies such as the United Kingdom today. Such perceived western national ideologies of equality, Nussbaum (2013) argues act as restrictive tracks that may work well until some failure causes derailment. Within British society today, there are perhaps risks of such derailment in the ruptures created when narratives regarding the 'terms and conditions' of equality lodged in ECEC policies collide with wider narratives of difference and belonging in policies such as the Prevent programme (HM Government, 2011).

Within this study, threads of postcolonial theories weave an argument that narratives of who belongs or does not, who engages or does not, contain the visible and invisible echoes of colonial ideology. Such ideology not only restricts rethinking what discourses of equality might become, but also results in narratives that, however unintentionally, act to create and perpetuate ever-changing forms of inequality. Thinking with postcolonial theory within this research not only helps disturb that which is invisible, but also suggests alternative threads that are prepared to recognise the relationship between colonial ideology and contemporary British society. As this study focuses on the experiences of women from BAME communities, a postcolonial feminist perspective allows for the questioning of not

just “... how different differences get made, [but] what gets excluded, and how those exclusions matter” (Barad 2007: 30). Complexity is a trope core to the research approach as well as the research focus.

In learning to deal with overlapping relationships resulting from colonialism, Said (1993: 19) warns that a “... rhetoric of blame ...” too frequently leads to misunderstanding and violence between western and non-western cultures. Rhetoric built upon the portioning of ‘blame’ are too easily susceptible to unquestioned ideologies and noisy narratives of ‘sameness’ that silence other more progressive narratives within culturally diverse societies. Indeed Lyotard (1997) has long recognised this and premises that a postmodern perspective of (in)equality should be prepared to challenge grand narratives that present themselves as stabilising forces within society. This supports a Foucauldian (1984) analysis of power prepared to unsettle polemics, such as narratives about western values that require protection from ‘dangerous’ non-western influences. Thinking with Said’s (1993) work offers a means to disassemble universal and totalising codes of (in)equality created through political and media narratives that maintain a western ascendancy, unhelpful within a contemporary world. In this way, a postcolonial reading raises the significance that metanarratives of (in)equality play in shaping policies such as the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) and Prevent (HM Government, 2011). Such policies not only create normalised indicators that define rights and equality but potentially lead to systems of state governance that legitimise certain actions in the name of supporting stability and freedom.

As discussed in chapter 2, education policy acts as such an action taken by governments as a tool for developing equality. Indeed Lyotard (1997: 32) supports a willingness to question such actions by state governments, writing that:

The State resorts to the narrative of freedom every time it assumes direct control over the training of the “people,” under the name of the “nation,” in order to point them down the path of progress.

Early years education sees this approach in discourses such as ‘school readiness’ in the EYFS (DfE, 2017) and the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) and ‘achievement’ reflected in the EYFSP’s (DfE, 2016a) codified outcomes (see chapter 2). In creating such policies, successive governments also create definitions of equality increasingly reliant on sameness as a stabilising expression of equality, easily measured through “... empirical knowledge ...”

(Bhabha, 1994: 50). For example, guidance to local authorities aspires that from 2016, 85% of children will attain expected assessment standards by the end of primary school (DfE, 2014).

However, this approach does more than define and measure equality for children, it controls actions that define, measure and manage difference. Educational paradigms come to construct equality as aspiring to achieve pre-defined levels of sameness between children. Yet in doing so, they simultaneously construct differences, whether that be ethnic, SEN, gender or income as potentially problematic and probably requiring management. Consequently, this drive for equality through education begins to traverse the boundary of state and home, entering the private sphere of family. In chapter 2, I introduced the view that mothers frequently inhabit boundaries between state and family. I discussed how this can lead women from minority ethnic communities to represent a 'difference' that is often positioned as 'inferior' to the norm, inhabiting a realm Bhabha (1994: xvii) refers to as "symbolic citizenship." A postcolonial perspective examines how this symbolism reflects the problematic ethical issues that arise from contextualising cultural difference and social discrimination within a national discourse of inclusion and exclusion built upon sameness, engagement and belonging.

From a postcolonial perspective, policies such as the Prevent legislation (HM Government, 2011) risks framing difference and citizenship in terms of cultures and individuals who are 'safe' and 'unsafe', those who 'belong' and those who do not. The risk is that these perceptions become so ingrained into a wider social discourse as to become accepted 'truths', apparently stable and invisible. In chapter 4, I examine this in greater depth and explore how challenging such a discourse might become either a risk of betrayal or a confirmation of the need for such policies in order to protect that which is 'normal'.

If this is the case then decisions by women from minority ethnic communities about engaging in the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) extend beyond a decision based purely within a cultural context, it includes ideas of equality, belonging and sameness that reflect wider social discourses moving through the nation. With this in mind, feminist theories offer theoretical threads I can add to the postcolonial perspective. Weaving feminist theories into the theoretical web aids me in questioning whether 'sameness' is a suitable means of defining and measuring equality (Hughes, 2002).



### 3.4 Weaving feminist theories, intersectionality and postcolonial feminism into the theoretical web

So far, the theoretical web presents postcolonial theory as willing to challenge a view of equality built upon a sameness, that leans towards normalised western understandings of a single truth, the "... narrative of freedom" (Lyotard, 1997: 32). Equality through sameness appears to transcend inequality wrought by differences through gender, ability, economics or race. An examination of feminist literature suggests how a position of difference offers a unique view of equality that is perhaps more potent, although no less complex. Indeed, Mann and Huffman (2005: 65) claim that third wave feminism explores difference as an epistemological approach to "... deconstruct essentialism and to decenter dominant discourses." While Bock and James (1992) suggest that equality might be made more meaningful if it is understood as both equal and different, the "... equal liberty to shape oneself in accordance with whatever difference one finds significant" (Bock and James, 1992: 7). What begins to emerge from this are possibilities of numerous differences and potentially multiple actions to engage in order to respond, not only to their significance, but to be able to question whether all differences are equally valid. This is important to this study as experiences of sameness/difference thread through the subject and practice of this research, as I engage, write and present this thesis.

Chapter 2 discussed how women from BAME communities who are mothers become subjects of social and educational policies aimed at achieving ideas of equality through their children. This risks judging non-engagement by mothers as a cultural 'lack', a failure to recognise and understand an opportunity to ensure equality for their children. From a feminist perspective, this mirrors an ongoing social shift emerging from second wave feminism's call for society to recognise and value a unifying female 'culture', built on perceived female characteristics of supportive relationships, nurturing and care (Ruddick, 1995). Indeed, the two-year-old policy (DfE, 2014) appears to recognise and draw upon a view of equality that reflects much of second wave feminism's call for gender unity. However, criticism of second wave feminism cites a failure to account sufficiently for the interconnected inequalities of class and race. Charges of essentialism that antiracist theory and second wave feminism faced when viewed through the lens of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) might equally apply to the approach research studies such as Gibb et al

(2011) take into non-engagement by families from BAME communities. Yet, this study and I are also not immune from such charges.

Liddle and Rai (1998: 509) maintain that, historically, western feminism has not always recognised “...the intimate ways imperialism produces the subordination of women.” Yet finding ways for any feminist approaches to recognise and respond to these experiences is neither straightforward nor unilateral. For example, speaking about Arab feminism, Darraj (2003) argues that in order to bridge divisions in feminism it is also necessary for Arab feminists to move away from viewing western feminism “...as a new form of imperialism” (Darraj, 2003:203). Yet whilst Darraj (2003) suggests an openness to western feminism, it cannot mitigate how finding ways to engage postcolonial feminism theory into this study is not only complex, but also perhaps ultimately not possible. I am forced to confront the reality that being reflexive and sensitive to charges of ‘imperialism’, is insufficient to bridge privilege and differences and negotiate a third wave feminist approach to this study<sup>5</sup>.

### 3.5 Threads of intersectionality

It is important at this point to weave into this theoretical web a discussion of intersectionality within feminist and postcolonial theory engaged in this study. Policies such as the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) that position women “as an active citizen” connect directly with Wollstonecraft’s (1992: 264) eighteenth century entreaty for women to have parity with men and reflect bedrock ideas in first and second wave feminism. However, invisible assumptions underlying this premise have become open to critiques of essentialism. The active female citizen is white European, or if not is at least willing to embody values frequently attributed to women from these communities. The legacy of these values thread through the research on non-engagement with the two-year-old offer I discussed in chapter 2. For example, a view that mothers from BAME communities who do not take up the offer need the policy explaining (by translators) in order to understand and so engage. Whilst the two-year-old-offer is the focus in this instance this cannot be separated from the creation of wider social discourses of (non)engagement and women from BAME communities that draw similar dichotomous conclusions of

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<sup>5</sup> I began to realise that identifying and responding to postcolonial feminist ideas would not necessarily mean I could decolonise my role in this study. The challenge of not only my approaching this topic but also seeking to do so with a postcolonial feminist lens was unsettling.

(non)understanding<sup>6</sup>. These examples, demonstrate how intersectionality reflects multi-layering experiences of inequality and the responses to this.

Carbado et al (2013) outline how intersectionality emerged from black feminism and critical race theory, to become a tool to analyse the ways discourses created by institutions such as governments can maintain power relations that marginalise, while the counter discourses created by movements that seek to resist this power can also continue this marginalisation. Through employing intersectionality of race and gender, Crenshaw's (1991) analysis suggests how the experiences of women of colour and women from majority world nations who do not embody the white female not only go unrecognised, but are simultaneously undermined by both the discourses of institutions and the resistance discourses of feminist and race advocacy. As Foucault (1984) argues, emancipatory theories, such as feminism, are not immune to blindness concerning their potential dominating, elitist or limiting tendencies.

However, intersectionality does more than trouble the ways dominant white western feminist discourses risk silencing how women of colour and women from majority world nations represent themselves. Intersectionality challenges feminist discourses that diminish women of colour and women from majority world nations to "... passive victims with no history or struggle" (Liddle and Rai, 1998: 508). Ahmed (1998) takes up a postcolonial feminist perspective, contending that universal values attributable to the feminine are a western construct that reflect a value base derived from a western view of the world. In doing so, Ahmed (1998) maintains this limits the possibility of feminist debate from other worldviews. Indeed, Liddle and Rai (1998) argue that deep-rooted imperialist structures challenge any discourse of unity amongst women that do not prioritise western feminist

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<sup>6</sup> 18<sup>th</sup> January 2016. Prime Minister David Cameron, speaking on BBC Radio 4, discusses £20 million funding for English lessons targeted specifically at women from 'isolated communities' entering the country on spousal visas. He says: 'the statistics are clear, there are 38000 Muslim women who really don't speak hardly any English at all and perhaps as many as 190000 who speak it very badly'. He goes on to link this as problematic to creating a 'cohesive, one nation country'. He talks about looking in communities that need this and making it a requirement for staying in the U.K. English tests after two and a half years, will be part of a five-year spousal resettlement programme. When asked 'Are you going to test Muslim women?' he replies 'It is not just about Muslim women'. He talks about not blaming women and refers to patriarchal societies where men do not want women to learn English or integrate as not 'in tune' with liberal British values. Funding for English classes to immigrants was cut in 2011, the Prime Minister says this is targeted at 'a particular area of problem', just women in 'isolated communities' and links poor English to being 'more susceptible' to extremist propaganda.

ideology. In this way, multiculturalism aimed at promoting difference combined with community integration can be seen as a “double-edged sword” (Awan, 2012: 1160) when definitions of difference question some citizens about their knowledge and values, as seen in David Cameron’s focus on Muslim women as potentially problematic to liberal British values.

Crenshaw’s (2010) argument is that intersectionality does the job of exposing how racial discrimination by gender and gender discrimination by race, means women of colour and women from majority world nations can be harmed as much from being treated as the same as by being treated as different. Gordon (2016) argues that early versions of intersectionality existed within second wave feminism, maintaining that interlocking systems of oppression, such as race and class, were integral to leftist second wave feminist activism. Yet intersectionality increasingly acts as a tool by which marginalisation might be exposed and dismantled in ways that go beyond the experiences of second wave feminism. Intersectionality offers two important points to this study.

The first is what intersectionality can offer to an analysis of equality as same not/and different. Intersectionality exposes the limitations policies on equality and antidiscrimination can have for women of colour. Intersectionality helps interrupt the ways that equality as same not/and different remains based upon a standard measure of maleness and whiteness (Crenshaw, 2010). By doing so, it helps foreground not only the power problems such discourses create within society; but also opens opportunities for alliances between movements through recognising both differences and commonalities (Carbado et al, 2013) that might counter such power problems. In these terms, intersectionality is not only located within the subaltern experience (Spivak, 1998), but in experiences that merge socio-economic, class and sexuality. Within this study, intersectionality offers a way to evaluate ECEC policies and to examine how marginalisation is present but unrecognised within its discourse of equality as same not/and different<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> I recall an example of this in my reflections on an experience of hauntings during one of the group interviews. As women recalled their childhood experiences of education in Pakistan. The boundaries of difference/sameness in their experiences of different education systems began to create ruptures through which spectres seeped out, shifting into liquid-voiced stories. One mother slowly began to recall her childhood. She became more and more animated as she talked about strictness and pressure from her parents and school: *‘Well on me it was too much pressure. But when I see, when I think now we say ‘Oh kids can’t do it’. But if I learnt when I was five, I could read thick English, not paragraph big whole book. I could*

The second point intersectionality raises relates to the ethical challenge it sets me as a white female doctoral student, conducting research with women from BAME communities. The methodology part of this thesis picks up this point, particularly in chapter 5.10 that links the discussion here with methodological challenges. Speaking to criticisms about white women usurping intersectionality, Gordon (2016) argues against limiting engagement with intersectionality to those who share attributes within categories. Gordon's (2016) premise is that it is unhelpful to reduce activism to only those within a category and who understand that oppression. That said, as a researcher who is not from any BAME community, intersectionality strongly informs and provokes the ethical path I take through this research. Gordon (2016) and Carbado et al (2013) may argue that intersectionality can promote forging relationships across social and cultural groups in order to challenge powerful discourses that lead to marginalisation. However, it is incumbent upon all engaging in such relationships to be cognisant of the ways power thread through these associations and risks further marginalisation discourses<sup>8</sup>.

Yet in the twenty first century, feminist theories do seek to engage intersectionality to build relationships that challenge dominance, for example, 'Santa Cruz feminist of color collective' (2014: 36) argue that "... we are all responsible for global inequality because of our interconnections", suggesting a shared responsibility to respond. Intersectionality exposes the ways uncertainty drifts through this study but does not devalue the research, rather it makes me aware of the ways uncertainties and ambiguity accompany discourses

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*read English and Urdu, and used to do maths, and subtraction and all stuff. But if I was five and I was able to do this, why can't they do it? They can do it!* As she narrated her childhood story, I felt the haunting spectres of difference emerging through her words. They shifted from a barely visible mist to become liquid that flowed from her as she gave voice to her childhood and went on to compare it to that of her daughter. Within her story, the spectres from a mother's childhood became a liquid that began to mix with other spectres I saw emerging from her description of her daughter's childhood in the U.K.

Yet as I look at that story now, months later, typed on my transcript and I recall its telling in the group; I see within her story a fine boundary separating her childhood from that of her daughter. The sameness of family and culture they share seems cut into two experiences of childhoods that might mingle temporarily during their telling but having been spoken, when left to settle return into two separate phases. My reading of historical colonial discourses haunt both the mother's experience of education in postcolonial Pakistan and her daughter's experience of education in contemporary U.K. In recounting her experiences, spectres from both childhoods became agitated into a family narrative that encompass two very different childhoods. Though these spectres mixed during their telling I do not think they will ever become one. Postcolonial history draws a fine boundary that separates them into two shared stories that have now settled and lie together within the personal history of family and culture but remain separate. She might disagree.

<sup>8</sup> I include the reflection in footnote 7 to illustrate the layers of hauntings in the study and why I do not seek to present an analysis or scrutiny of the lives of women who participated in the study, but rather how their perspective provides a lens that enables a re-reading of early years policy.

of equality, sameness and difference and might be recognised and integrated within the research. Indeed, Chambers and Watkins (2012) propose that postcolonial theory and feminist theories support third wave feminism and the discussion of intersectionality and difference through postcolonial feminism. Therefore, I now move on to present how postcolonial feminism can act as both a lens to evaluate ECEC policies through experiences of women from BAME communities and act as an ethical guidance for how I conduct this study.

### 3.6 Threads of postcolonial feminism

Postcolonial feminism offers threads that progress an evaluation of sameness and difference beyond a western perspective reliant on white male norms. The significance of applying postcolonial feminist theory to a study involving women from ethnic minority communities living in an English city appears complex but significant. Building on the discussion started in chapter 2, complexity arises through examining how women from ethnic minority communities are already represented as a “troubled figure” (Gedalof, 2007: 89), who are simultaneously created as the object of concern and positioned as needy. The significance arises when the complexities of difference figure women from ethnic minority communities as “boundary-markers” (Gedalof, 2007: 91)<sup>9</sup>. Being placed on the periphery and occupying a space of ambiguity and uncertainty between two apparently more certain spaces creates a significance I explore later in this chapter under the auspices of ‘hauntings’ and return to in the analysis.

Liddle and Rai (1998) berate western second wave feminism for compounding this embodiment of a ‘troubled figure’ through universalising women of minority ethnic communities as oppressed and subordinate in comparison to western women’s supposed freedom and control. Postcolonial feminism affords a valuable perspective that weaves this intersectionality of representation, to question how this has led to essentialist discourses that percolate through feminist rhetoric and represent difference as inferior to the norm;

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<sup>9</sup> Gedalof (2007) considers how women from minority communities can be constructed by governments and the media as ‘hindrances’ to full citizenship, occupying a space between the public spheres and the private sphere of the family. In my first reading of Gedalof’s text, I miss read ‘boundary-markers’ as ‘boundary-makers’. Realising my mistaken omission of an ‘r’ continues to trouble me and has led me to question the significance of a view of women from minority communities as ‘boundary markers/makers’. Reflecting the narratives of David Cameron as Prime minister the ‘r’ was also missing in the subtext of his discourse as he constructed women as boundary makers.

what Chakraborty (2007: 104) describes as a “white narrative” that sees sameness/difference in binary terms. Indeed, she continues that this narrative risks further subverting and negating meaningful postcolonial recognition of racial difference by attempting to re-colonise difference through arguments such as “... all of us are Different” (Chakraborty, 2007: 109). Chakraborty’s (2007) argument against seeking to equate experiences of racial inequality shaped by a colonial history with western gender oppression is a powerful one. Postcolonial feminism arguably fulfils a role in countering a prescribed view of difference within feminist ideology and challenges a smoothing over of that difference in ways that smother the experiences of women who do not prescribe to a western feminist approach.

Whenever I turn to discourses of difference in this study, embedded complex power relations remain. Threads of third wave feminism might recognise and embrace multiple, fragmented perspectives of feminism(s), however making alliances between these different fragments is clearly not straightforward. Yet alliances between postcolonial feminist and western feminist perspectives cannot easily escape the suspicion that such alliances might just become another form of imperial colonisation (Hughes, 2002). Fragmentation, Smith (2012) argues, might be a relatively new concept in western experiences, but it is not new from the perspective of a postcolonial experience of colonial rule. That is not to say that there is no drive to develop unified political feminist strategies (Hughes, 2002) it is, however, a matter of recognising the intricacy of how to approach and negotiate these. Within the research study, postcolonial feminism proposes a perspective that suggests how historical experiences of colonialism intersect with contemporary cultural and gendered contexts of (non)engagement for women who participate in the research. Postcolonial feminism reminds me to be cognisant of how my western feminist views sit in relation to the views expressed by women in the study. In addition, postcolonial feminist theory raises the complex ways power differences might influence my analysis of the data collected in terms of generating a feminist perspective on the experiences women share in the study. To help me negotiate and make some sense of how a feminist perspective could emerge from my engagement with postcolonial feminist theory I turn to black feminist theories.

### 3.7 Black feminism and situating differences

As discussed, intersecting experiences of oppressions identified within postcolonial feminism and feminist second and third wave movements contests the idea of a universal feminism. I now turn to Collins (2000) to discuss how threads of black feminism also foreground the intersecting nature of oppression experienced by black women living in the United States and black women of African descent transnationally. Experiences of oppression are simultaneously different and similar when, for example, black women's experiences of poverty in western nations may differ to those black women in Africa, the Caribbean and majority world nations face. Yet similarities also exist in the ways government actions impact black women's experiences.

Miles (1998, cited in Collins, 2000) illustrates this, citing how actions by national governments aimed at resolving poverty for black women within western nations are defined as 'social' issues and managed by policies in education, childcare and health, for example. Yet international policies in education, childcare and health by the same governments aimed at the same issues are generally termed 'developmental'. Collins (2000) continues that national and international actions by governments on economic policies also disproportionately affect black women in western and non-western nations; yet black women continue to be portrayed as "... passive recipients of government handouts" (Collins, 2000: 241), firmly placing blame on the women. What these examples demonstrate is how, globally, black women's experiences of oppression are both different and similar. Black feminism speaks to how layered experiences from the impact of economic policies and detrimental portrayals, can create spaces where transnational action by black women can occur, a global feminism. Whilst the ideas raised by Collins speak to the subject of this research study and the place postcolonial feminism can play in analysing (non)engagement; from a methodological stance, these ideas speak to experiences of racial and cultural oppression I cannot understand. As such, engaging postcolonial feminism does not authorise me to speak for, or on behalf of, women; neither does it permit me to make assumptions about experiences I have not shared. I discuss the challenges arising from this further in chapter 4.



### 3.8 Spinning transversal politics into negotiating differences

Guattari (2015) recognises how a combination of public intervention and media intrusion across social spheres such as health and education, and what Collins (2000) records in the positioning of black women in society, has led to a deterioration in the value placed on customs, beliefs and self-regulation. Instead, Guattari (2015) argues, public interventions in these spheres by political policy-makers place faith in professional knowledge and the research that generates it. However, Guattari (2015) maintains transversal actions might achieve better outcomes by moving away from models of intervention reliant on domination by power hierarchies. Transversal politics suggests possibilities of forming alliances and negotiating across different social groups to form “collective assemblages” (Guattari, 2015: 133) that decide the actions within a local social sphere. Transversal politics, therefore, might offer important insights into negotiating ‘me’/ ‘not me’ inherent in this study and this theoretical web.

Collins (2000) discusses how transversal politics moves from a simplistic linear hierarchy of power and oppression, arguing instead for politics drawing on different forms and expressions of power and resistance across and within groups. This approach recognises that social groups do not remain within clearly defined boundaries. Instead, this sees boundaries as porous and subject to change both from within and externally. In this context, differences become more fluid and recognise how interdependence across groups can also maintain power differences that make interdependence complicated and unstable. Coalitions across groups that are dynamic can form means to resist oppression but they can also mark tensions of inequality between sameness and difference within and across groups. This suggests that, from a postcolonial feminist perspective, I might draw on transversal politics to identify possible value in working across social and cultural groups. This might be important in both the context of this study and how I approach conducting it, but also recognises challenges inherent in me doing so.

Ahmed (1998) helps with this, raising the importance of ethics in connecting and managing a ‘me’/‘not me’ struggle that results from spinning a postcolonial feminist thread in this study. Ahmed (1998: 57) proposes that to counter a universal feminist approach I should reflect on the procedures I place within the study to recognise and deal with conflicting

values and experiences “...to work towards a more mutual encounter by acknowledging the power differentials that make absolute mutuality or correspondence an impossibility.”

### 3.9 A postcolonial feminist web

*‘It’s quite interesting. But even with regards to for example, it’s not only the ethnic minorities. If you see the Western for example, if you go to the fifties, sixties, gender roles were different. You know and now gender roles are different between men and women. I think it’s as time has progressed, it’s to do with time I think more than anything.’*

(Badr, Appendix I: xxxiii)

Postcolonial feminism is not limited to challenging deficit perspectives of difference, valuable though that is. For Ahmed (cited in Antwi et al, 2013) taking a postcolonial feminist stance, means any politics that recognises difference has the capacity to destabilise and disrupt the function of social structures and policies. Using postcolonial feminism as a vantage point from which to engage difference assists not only in recognising and addressing inequality, it also asks norms and structures “... to do a different kind of work” (Antwi et al, 2013: 115). Therefore, postcolonial feminism offers this study two meaningful threads to capture and relate to interesting ways of working with sameness and difference.

First, postcolonial feminism helps me explore how ECEC policy with ingrained perspectives of sameness/difference that a government implements in response to a perceived inequality, will inevitably need to work with other policies that may lack, or indeed contradict, that perspective; evidenced in the relationship the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) has with the Prevent strategy (HM Government, 2011). Postcolonial feminism indicates how this may force policies to work differently in practice. The other thread spinning out from postcolonial feminism, relates to the process of conducting this study. In helping illuminate experiences of sameness/difference within the research process it seeks a response from me, my attempt to “... do a different kind of work” (Antwi et al, 2013: 115). I go on to develop this idea further in chapter 5, section two.

What I am sure of is that postcolonial feminism is capable of analysing sociological experiences of gender, race and culture (Ali, 2007) and so has something to say within this study. The constructions of race and gender that postcolonial feminist theory brings to the surface, opens up for scrutiny the ways in which they lie embedded within ECEC policies in

British society. It also questions the constructions of equality built up over generations and how within these the experiences of mothers from BAME communities support a more meaningful evaluation of the two-year-old offer policy.

However, this is by no means a simple matter. The roles sameness and difference play in examining equality from the perspective of women from BAME communities simultaneously challenges how I recognise and articulate issues of power within any discussion. On its own, postcolonial feminist theory does not adequately articulate the unsettling experiences I have as a doctoral student and my evaluation of the discourses of equality in ECEC policies. This leads to the second section of this chapter and the other main theoretical thread spinning through this study, that of hauntings.

### 3.10 Thread five: Haunting spectres and boundaries

Saltmarsh (2009: 539) suggests hauntings exist throughout history and across cultures as part of "... the coextensive relationships between past, present and future." Hauntings reflect the ephemeral and elusive nature of certainty and uncertainty that varied lived experiences from these histories present. Spectres manifest themselves in these hauntings and disrupt the notion of linear connections between past, present and future. Hauntings disturb attempts at fixing and isolating experiences within set times and frames, as memories from the past/there are written into the present/here and cannot be differentiated or removed. Derrida (1994:48) engages with spectres to undo boundaries between the actual, real present and everything that is opposed to that, the "... absence, non-presence." Hauntings and spectres speak of inaccessible spaces, of un/certainty only they can occupy and the journeys across and through these boundaries of difference, only they can make. For me, the concepts of hauntings were particularly meaningful to a study that felt haunted by the uncertain nature of sameness and difference<sup>10</sup> before I started.

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<sup>10</sup> Sameness and difference are constantly present. At times, they haunted the very periphery of my vision, moving when I turned to focus on them. When I walked into the centres to talk to mothers and staff differences followed me, drifting around me, clinging to my body, to the bodies of others and to the things we touched both physically and in our conversations. At times, difference/sameness felt like a fog, obscuring what I looked at and muffling what I heard. Then moments of clarity came when the fog evaporated (sometimes slowly into mists, sometimes suddenly into clear air) and offered momentary glimpsed images and ideas of familiarity or recognition, before suddenly becoming engulfed in returning fogs of difference. I reached into the fog and felt spectres brush past me, I could not see them but I knew they were there, I felt them moving; I felt their breath on my cheek.

These hauntings also follow me as I go through the research process, of trying to make sense of what is happening in the study and recreating this within the academic confines of narrative of the thesis in ways that do justice to these experiences and people. Experiences of hauntings constantly traverse the boundaries I create in conducting and writing this study. I cannot ignore them.

I find Derrida's (1994) political response to haunting, of learning to live with spectres evokes the unsettling of memories and 'truths' I experience here. For Derrida, hauntings provide glimpses not only of the structures of power that make experiences and the knowledge they produce; they also mark responses that look beyond binaries to recreate different knowledge using the same structures. Derrida's (1994: 114) frame of reference is the inheritance resulting from the "messianic promise" of Marxism, to present the complex relationships between inheritances from the past and responses/debts in the present.

A heritage is never natural, one may inherit more than once, in different places and at different times, one may choose to wait for the most appropriate time, which may be the most untimely – write about it according to different *lineages*, and sign thus more than one *import*.

(Derrida, 1994: 211)

This study is a haunting of heritages, of multiple different places and experiences. The heritage I bring from my experiences mingle with the heritages women in the study share and do not share. The heritages of my supervisors and our conversations in written and oral forms, the political heritage of the two-year-old offer that brings us together also haunt what I write about and how I express the study. Lather (2003) argues that hauntings from beyond these structures offer more than a critique of memories and 'truths' from the past, they analyse 'truths' in the present. Hauntings offer responses that dispel the 'real' in

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At other times spectres of sameness/difference appeared directly in front of me but I could not easily grasp hold of their ideas, they streamed between my fingers. I have gradually learnt to live with this. I learnt not to grasp and grab, not to stare seeking certainty. Neither the muffling of my vision nor the feeling of something clinging to me frightens/disturbs me so much now. I welcome moments of clarity but do not rely on them, or put too much store in them. I accept that this study is haunted and I am part of that; this challenges, excites, scares and thrills me.

I begin to think of haunting as both passive and active, it is there before our actions and experiences, but our actions and experiences also create these haunting spectres and these hauntings also create our actions and experiences.

meanings and recognises instead the “... necessary complicity, the necessity of participating in what is being reinscribed in a way that responds to the call of the wholly other” (Lather, 2003: 261). This is true on an individual and group level and threads through this study, haunting my engagement with feminist research ethics, my encounters with participants and my analysis of the research data. Therefore, hauntings do not just act as a metaphor, they are a methodological tool conceptualising the ‘practice’ of encounters in the research process. They speak of how sameness and difference haunting the physical meetings at children’s centres with staff and mothers matter. In fact, more than matter, as a theoretical thread it has become impossible to differentiate hauntings in the research process from hauntings in the research topic. I feel a responsibility to write them into this thesis<sup>11</sup>; hauntings complicate my work with the testimonies of mothers in the study and the narratives in policies.

As an analytical tool, hauntings express the spectres in my exploration of intra-actions between past, present and future spoken of in stories by women in the study and written into policies by government. I am also a spectre in this study, haunting encounters I write about and analyse threads I follow or do not follow.<sup>12</sup> Hauntings generate anxiety as I come to terms with the realisation that Derrida is speaking about more complex understandings and roles for the theoretical threads I employ in this research. It calls for a response to the diverse meanings of sameness/difference in the research that avoids simply creating another alternative inscribed meaning but instead works with the spectres haunting the spaces between and beyond these structures of knowledge<sup>13</sup>. Spectres might appear like droplets of meaning, condensing from the narratives of mothers, sometimes freezing into ice, crystals of clarity, before melting and evaporating. They continually change the ways

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<sup>11</sup> Actually, I also struggle to write them into the thesis because they just keep changing and escape my attempts to pin them down. When I try putting them into crystals of hard text, they melt into liquid and seep into other ideas and places; they become vapours evaporating, leaving gaps. It is frustrating. So I realise I have to write *of* the spectres that haunt this study, describe experiences but be prepared that they will not remain this way. I find these foot notes the easiest place to do this.

<sup>12</sup> My motivations for conducting this study haunt it. It is impossible to differentiate where I end and the study begins. Consequently, I question myself about the “moral responsibilities and obligations” (Barad, 2007: 9) I have to this study.

<sup>13</sup> I needed to form relationships with spectres haunting these spaces. To work with hauntings and learn from the idea of (not)seeing, (not)hearing and responding to this. As I searched for analogy that would allow me to express my experience I found myself drawn to minute details in small encounters which appear to bring about changes that can be experienced. It was not always clear to me how this was happening but it felt like it helped me to express what was happening.

they haunt this study, but it is at boundaries these changes feel most tangible and it is here that Derrida pushes me to look and respond to them.

### 3.11 Boundaries

The complicated nature of boundaries and boundary crossing has become a recurrent theme throughout this research study. Boundaries seem full of contradictions. At times, they appear solid and immovable, epitomised in the confidence of language in policy narratives. Yet in the same moment, they are uncontrollable, unstable and leaky. People are constantly rubbing up against, crashing into or pushing against them and where they do, boundaries change. They scratch, polish, give way, buckle, dent or spring back. Yet in these moments, breaches, ruptures occur on the interfaces. Interesting things appear to happen at these ruptures, the complication of adding people to boundaries of sameness/difference generated in policies such as the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) or boundaries between women who participate in the study and me as the researcher. These interesting occurrences feel tangible and haunt me at the boundary of being able to explain / not explain. Spectres seem to work best at describing experiences at rupture points on these boundaries and the processes of change.

In this study, the recurring theme of boundaries thread through as interfaces populated by embodied rupture points of difference and sameness and in my knowing and not knowing how to express this. Women (participants and myself) and government policies create ruptures on boundaries where we meet and where I observe hauntings in my attempts at making sense of this in the research process<sup>14</sup>. At times, these ruptures form sites where spectres momentarily drift into the periphery of my vision and evaporate, lost again. At other times, these points are where spectres coalesce into droplets of shared experiences between people populating the study and form ideas I can see and touch. Yet spectres are unpredictable, suddenly becoming crystals of knowledge and experiences of difference and sameness so sharp they might cut my fingers if I touch them.

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<sup>14</sup> In my notes, I recall reading Daza and Huckaby (2014). The authors are discussing the physical embodied experiences of analysing data. As I read the article, I feel haunting spectres that express the embodied struggle with knowing and not knowing how best to analyse data and the uncertainty of sameness/difference that is emerging. Ideas flicker and spectres are unstable they change. It is happening constantly. It is still happening in the periphery of my vision and I suspect it continues when I try turning my back on it.

Yet I also experience subtle smaller and more intimate hauntings in the study. They mark minute rupture points where, if I look closely, I might see a moment where spectres reach through boundaries and stretch to touch each other across time. These small rupture points lie quietly along fine barely visible boundaries, but they mark points of powerful immiscible difference<sup>15</sup>. These barely visible subtle boundaries also help me articulate points of further intersectional differences within the same. Within the text in this study I see boundaries in “/” and “()”. “/” represents boundaries illustrated in difference/sameness whilst “()” represent, for me, boundaries within the same as illustrated by (non)engagement. Acknowledging spectres haunting boundaries helps me to see that it is not just that the existence of boundaries matter but also how they matter. Spectres haunting and experiences occurring at boundaries are all influenced as much by what boundaries separate and do not protect as by what they do protect. Boundaries separate sameness from difference, yet boundaries also separate sameness from sameness, difference from difference. In this sense boundaries as haunted places recur in the study.

### 3.12 Conclusion

This chapter presents the two theoretical threads spun into this study. The combination of postcolonial feminism and hauntings create theoretical positions that shape both the context of the topic under scrutiny, and the approach I take to its examination. Both threads work together to reflect the complexity and challenges of conducting a study such as this in contemporary Britain.

Postcolonial feminist theory challenges a western, Eurocentric tendency to subordinate and marginalise the values of other cultures, and has particular impact on the experiences of women when set against a white European model of women. However, postcolonial feminist theories offer particularly useful insights that can challenge models of sameness as a premise of equality. Postcolonial feminist theory not only examines the processes and consequences of (non)engagement decisions, but how I might work with women’s narratives in order to re-examine grand narratives of equality frequently used by the state.

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<sup>15</sup> There are points where spectres haunting a person’s experience meet and mix when agitated into life through their telling, but once voiced appear to return to different places. Perhaps they will never join, though they seem like parts of the same spectre, like oil and water they mix but then separate again. In this study, these reflect encounters where sameness and difference seem so familiar to each other; they mix but do not merge into one. Different could not join with sameness and same could not become different.

In this study, postcolonial feminist theory is engaged in order to move away from a top down approach to (non)engagement and to shift to consider the possibilities of a bottom up gaze where the experiences of women might analyse and evaluate the grand narratives embedded within educational policies.

Hauntings reflect the consequences of engaging postcolonial feminism within the research process. The complex and challenging nature of postcolonial feminism has generated consequences for me as a doctoral research student that are more unexpected and unsettling than I anticipated. Yet experiencing hauntings also opens new shifts in my thinking that whilst unsteady are important. Changing and unpredictable spectres come to epitomise my experience of hauntings and so I present this as an attempt at explanation. Having laid out the theoretical threads, the next section moves on to examine how postcolonial feminism influences the methodological approach I take to this study.



## Part Two: Methodology

This second part of the thesis is divided into two chapters. In chapter 4, I examine how postcolonial feminism has informed this methodology. This moves into chapter four where I discuss the methods and ethical approach I have engaged with.

## Chapter 4.

### Postcolonial feminist research

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the ways postcolonial feminist research informs this study. I suggest that postcolonial feminist research methodology makes it possible to question, as Harding (1987: 6) contends, “...a problem is always a problem to someone”. I do this through exploring the medium of narratives. Whilst I have chosen narrative inquiry as a method to examine the different meanings behind ideas of (non)engagement, whether from the perspectives of government, professionals or women; narratives cannot in themselves ‘do’ anything with these meanings of being a ‘problem’/‘problematic’. Drawing on what Mann and Hufmann (2005: 69) term “new generation” feminism, I recognised the role personal narratives might play in helping me unsettle ideas that families from BAME communities do not ‘understand’ the value of engaging with the two-year-old offer, and move away from a problem of cultural lack. Postcolonial feminist research and personal narratives of mothers in the study might offer new conversations open to a more nuanced study of (not)engaging. They suggested a willingness to scrutinise possibilities of problems with discourses of equality in ECEC policies rather than communities. Postcolonial feminist research proffers that policies might simultaneously disadvantage women from BAME communities whilst also offering significant advantages<sup>16</sup>.

Therefore, this chapter begins by investigating ways in which feminist research methodologies question, in greater depth, how narratives can simultaneously contribute to and challenge an apparently benevolent policy goal of social equality. Sprague (2005) claims, there is a tendency for research methodologies to reflect the social values, philosophies and politics of privilege. This can create, however unintentionally, processes that maintain hegemonic control. When research methodologies used by social researchers frame research questions from a position of privilege then arguably, a ‘top down’ approach

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<sup>16</sup> I am cognisant to ensure that I do not focus purely on perceived disadvantages borne from a layering of policies that construct women as ‘safe’ strangers (who engage with early education policies such as the two-year-old offer) and ‘risky’ strangers (who do not engage with early education policies or who may require surveillance via the Prevent strategy). I have found that a postcolonial feminist research approach also offers perspectives that open up aspects of (in)equality that whilst invisible to some (I include myself in this) should be valued as a means of giving greater meaning to discourses of sameness/difference within (in)equality policies.

embeds itself within research. Building on Sprague's (2005) premise, the result is a tendency to generate responses that focus problems within the group under study. The group studied, becomes the 'problem'/'problematic'. The consequence of this is to diminish the roles more powerful groups and institutions play in creating/preventing and sustaining/addressing these 'problems'.

Guiding themes within feminist research methodology seek to challenge traditional research approaches. Gender, as a means to examine the role of language and research, offers a possibility to focus on promoting social activism and recognising power differentials (Worell and Etaugh, 1994). These connote opportunities for research methodology to recognise and challenge values embedded within the research process. Relevant to this study, this also offered a means to respond to the influence of white, western, patriarchal values resonating within government narratives of (non)engagement. However, I am conscious that the same hegemonic values haunting research that problematise women from BAME communities also threads within this research study process. My engagement with feminist research methodology causes me to scrutinise my own values and role within this study.

Building on the groundwork in chapter 3 on postcolonial feminism, this chapter explores how, from an initial generic feminist research frame, I sought a more refined approach. I examine third wave, postcolonial feminist research methodologies which I proceed to combine with my growing understanding of black feminist theories. Doing so has led me to scrutinise my own western, white feminist values and their role in this study. These have shaped the methodological and ethical approach I chose and have led me to see this study as an encounter with "...unrepresentable otherness" (Ahmed, 1998: 58).

#### 4.2 Qualitative postmodern feminist methodology

In chapter 5 I explore the challenges of research about (non)engagement, not least, how a decision by an individual or group not to engage makes research with that group challenging. In this chapter, I also explore how research with women who have chosen to engage with the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) was also not without challenges. When, researching (non)engagement, feminist methodologies offer research paradigms that have

enabled this study to progress in a way that is meaningful and presents data that is both interesting and relevant to the research questions.

#### 4.3 Studying up to research a 'problem'

Research seeking the views of marginalised groups who have decided to engage in a policy such as the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014), could focus on examining the experience of being part of a process of social change. However, research that scrutinises families in order to respond to a perceived 'problem' does not, in itself, question or challenge the existence of the 'problem'. Harding (2004) argues that the privilege associated to membership of dominant social and cultural groups, fails to equip those members with the resources (political and intellectual) to be able to identify, and therefore challenge, values that result in assumptive practice. This might include practice such as defining and managing the 'problem' of non-engagement by members of less dominant social groups.

For Harding and Norberg (2005), if social research fails to recognise, for example Eurocentric values, this not only blocks knowledge growth but also fails to recognise or correct the ways these assumptions can shape policy frameworks. Importantly, they go on to maintain that feminist theories challenge epistemologies that render groups least powerful in society, whether based on class, race, sexuality or gender, the subject of study, whilst more powerful, normalised groups that shape policy remain less scrutinised. Consequently, this imbalance "...implies that those with power are normal; their traits, behaviours, and social position require no justification" (Sprague, 2005: 11).

Feminist research methodologies offer a means to overturn this approach, engaging what Harding and Norberg (2005: 2011) term "... studying up ...". In its broadest terms, feminist research methodologies shift the focus of research away from a limited view that 'problems' inevitably emanate from within the research group. Such a view makes it necessary to examine the group, in order to 'reveal' a cause and/or solutions. Rather, they propose research that works with data from participants constituting marginalised social groups to examine how external, powerful social groups create structures that seek to progress positive social change, whilst simultaneously creating structures that fail to listen or respond to the views of people within marginalised groups. Therefore, engaging feminist research methodologies with a study of the 'problem' of (non)engagement by women from

BAME communities might look beyond gathering experiences of being part of 'a problem' community. Rather, I could work with the experiences of women from BAME communities to recognise how more powerful, distant social groups and the narratives they create, have come to define and shape ideas of what engagement 'should' mean and look like. However, the reality remains that I am not a member of the community I am seeking to work with in this research study. As a white middle-class, middle-aged female I am aligned to the dominant social group such postcolonial feminist research methodologies seek to trouble. This compounds how I engage with this theory as part of the research process.

#### 4.4 The role of women's experience in feminist research methodologies

*'... and sometimes in a lot of ways I felt like I've lost myself somewhere, I don't know who I am anymore. A lot of times I've felt like that. But now like meeting other people ... I'm slowly ... I'm still not quite there.'*

(Badr, Appendix I: xxxiv)

Akman et al's (2001) assertion that feminist research methodology should recognise the importance of women's experiences was helpful as it foregrounds the practice of working with women to bring about social change. As discussed in chapter 2, an underlying notion that women from BAME communities are simultaneously a means for delivering social change and thwarting it, is significant in an attempt to 'study up' and examine what the mothers' experiences of (non) engagement imply about broader more powerful groups who create policies for social change.

Yet feminist research also questions the intrinsic power that comes from using research to validate another person's experience. The 'me'/'other' that Ahmed (1998) identifies constrained me in the "...asymmetry of power embedded in the very means of discursive interaction" (Ahmed, 1998: 53). I was simultaneously excited and worried as I struggled to respond to the power differentials that arose not only from the narratives women from BAME communities shared about their experiences of engagement, but also from within the research process itself. I questioned how power associated with 'me', through my role as a white, middle-class researcher related to the power/powerlessness of 'other', women from BAME communities participating in the research process. However, as Crozier (2003: 87) suggests, "... remaining on the outskirts, silent and disinterested, implies an aloofness". Such an 'aloofness' would merely reinforce dominating power relations.

Therefore, 'difference' as a lens that challenges and destabilises power (Antwi et al, 2013) suggested a methodological approach sufficiently relevant to this study. Difference helps point to inherent multiple discourses of power, visible and invisible within this study. Where gender created fleeting glimpses of spaces that connected and bridged the difference between 'me' and 'other', suggesting an 'us'; simultaneously race, culture and language presented chasms of difference engulfing notions of any 'us-ness'. The complexity of sameness and difference appeared at times unfathomable<sup>17</sup>.

It became clear that a third wave feminist methodological approach might open up for scrutiny the multiple usage and impact difference played within this study. Indeed, this remains an integral theoretical thread that spins throughout, returning in the data analysis as a lens by which to analyse the narratives of government and women participating in this study. However, from a methodological standpoint, further research of third wave feminism's varied approaches to 'difference' pushed me to reflect on a deeper and more relevant engagement with feminist research within this study. I needed to respond to the challenges of feminist research methodology in order to face and respond to difference.

Ali (2007), proposes how the postmodern, globalisation of knowledge might challenge western, Eurocentric, enlightenment and universal views of difference. This has helped me to contextualise how I worked with feminist research methodology and the encounters experienced in conducting this research. This postmodern, third wave feminism has led to the "...fragmentation of the category Woman" (Ali, 2007: 195). This reflects how different feminist approaches to knowledge production respond to the challenges arising from the impossibility of categorising a universal Woman. For this study, any identity of Woman defined by 'us' has had to respond to the fragmenting Ali raises to include the 'me'/'not me'.

Therefore, third wave feminism suggested that encompassing postcolonial feminist values into the research methodology, offered a way to recognise and explore ideas of difference and engagement within the category of Woman (the 'me'/'not me' yet also 'us'/'not us')

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<sup>17</sup> At these times, I felt overwhelmed by spectres. As I lifted up layers of meaning, complex relationships between sameness and difference appeared. Of course, I always knew it was complex, but through this study, I begin to glimpse just what that feels like, not only on a broad policy level but also on a small and personal level. I might have to find ways of living with tension and unease, finding some relationship with spectres. This moves from terrifying to exciting and is, for the moment, both.

inherent in this piece of research. Postcolonial feminist research not only challenged the subject of women's engagement in ECEC policy but also the subject of women's (participants and myself) engagement in this research study.

#### 4.5 Postcolonial feminist methodology: negotiating differences and learning about decolonising 'my' study

My choice of postcolonial feminist research methodology foregrounded how power differences existed within the research process. It raised the power difference inherent in me, as a white researcher, employing narrative inquiry to research the experiences of women from BAME communities. Yet postcolonial feminist research methodology also allowed me to identify and navigate these differences in ways that were not overly simplistic, pushing me to a more vigilant, heightened awareness.

As women, gender meant the research participants and I shared one aspect of commonality. From a postcolonial feminist perspective, aspects of difference that privileged not only my western cultural and racial identity but also the influence of western feminism, undercut this. Said's (cited in Dirk, 2004: 47) argument that all representations of postcolonial 'others' are embedded "...first in the language and then in the culture, institutions and political ambience of the representation" struck me how significant that privileged difference was. It influenced the way I approached the participants and represented my analysis of their narratives. Incorporating postcolonial theory within feminist research methodology, to find meaningful ways that recognised these differences represented a good starting point. Indeed, Fanon (2008) demonstrates how postcolonial theory could challenge me to question how far I was prepared to recognise and change, not only the discourses of 'problem' I had identified in policy-makers, but also my own subconscious "myths and prejudices" (Fanon, 2008: 167). Postcolonial theory might have become part of my methodological approach to studying (non)engagement, but it also challenged me on a personal level. That uncomfortable experience led me to include hauntings as a theoretical thread in the study. Whilst I was prepared to live with that challenge, postcolonial theory did not specifically respond to the questions I had about building a relationship between feminist and postcolonial theories into my methodology.

Ali (2007) proposes that marking work as both feminist and postcolonial requires centralising gender in conjunction with a postcolonial stance. Relating this to a methodological approach, it suggests a central tenet of feminist research focused primarily upon gender that subsequently incorporated postcolonial theory within it. It was possible that this would create a more nuanced feminist research methodology. The 'us' of gender could be at the forefront with the 'me'/'other' of race and culture then threaded in. However, Chambers and Watkins (2012) proposes a problem with this approach. This approach failed to recognise how the importance of reflection within feminist research would manage the issues that would inevitably arise from engaging with postcolonial theory. No matter how reflective this study about privilege and difference was, with this approach my relationship with postcolonial theory would be examined through a lens that remained embedded in a western feminist perspective that frames the 'us' of gender. This western feminist perspective meant I sought to challenge social policies of (non)engagement directed at women who may well not recognise, let alone share, my feminist values and representations of gender. If postcolonial theory remained epiphenomenal to a western feminist theory then the "myths and prejudices" (Fanon, 2008: 167) associated with my understanding of feminist theory would go unchallenged. This applied difference to examine women in the study as 'other' but would not equally apply difference to examine 'me' as researcher. It felt like an unintended re-colonising of the experiences of women in the study.

Relating postcolonial *and* feminist research methodologies to 'my' study in this context would be unhelpful. Indeed, Ali (2007) suggests how the increase in white female academics working in areas previously covered by BAME academics, suggests that white female scholars may have taken up postcolonial feminist theory as a means to balance their own research but might do so without examining their own position. Therefore, postcolonial theory might offer insight into the relationship race and culture has to gender, in both the subject of the study and how I conducted it. However, Chambers and Watkins (2012) remind me that without additional specific postcolonial perspectives of feminism, my white, western feminist narrative on the critique of social policy might go unexamined. This concern Chambers and Watkins (2012) express, echoes Ali's (2007) argument that third wave feminism has not only contributed to the 'fragmentation' of a universal Woman, but



also a universal feminism. I had to consider how third wave fragmentation of feminism, particularly in relation to postcolonial feminism, and therefore postcolonial feminist research methodology, spoke to this study.

Hughes's (2002) concern that the Eurocentric feminist perspective risks the concerns of non-western women going unrecognised, speaks to a fundamental aspect of postcolonial feminism. Postcolonial feminism's challenge to any attempts by western feminism to 'speak' for, or on behalf, of others has become integral to progressing feminism forward into the twenty-first century. Postcolonial feminism articulates the compounded and complex differences that arise from recognising and responding to postcolonial experiences of the ways culture, movement and migration affect women. This has resulted in a unique feminist response that spoke to how I approached this study. From a methodological perspective, this response required me to recognise and assimilate into my research the, at times uneasy, relationship between postcolonial feminism and western feminism.

Postcolonial feminist theory weaves a thread throughout this study, starting in chapter 3. It helps to consider that earlier exploration of Liddle and Rai's (1998) warning that western feminism has not always recognised imperialism's subordination of women, and Darraj's (2003) view of the need for Arab feminism to progress from labelling all western feminism as imperialist. However, from a methodological position, it is not sufficiently robust. Purely relying on identifying similarities, reflexivity and sensitivity to counter any charge of imperialism in my methodological approach was a start. Yet it could not adequately bridge privilege and differences running through this research and consider how I might decolonise my role in this study. Drawing on Collins' (2000) discussion of the way black feminism brings forward the intersecting nature of oppression experienced by black women, emphasises how experiences of oppression are simultaneously different and similar. This arguably creates layers of inequality that affect the approaches of local policy-makers and early years professionals to families' (non)engagement in the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014). It might also be present in the methodological approach I take to this subject. Intersectionality underlines that women might share experiences of inequality and oppression that I cannot fully understand. I might raise and discuss these experiences but that does not necessarily allow me to speak for or on behalf of women who participate.

Therefore, taking a postcolonial feminist methodological approach opens a means for me to recognise and respond to encounters of difference in the research. Central to this would be the relationships between women who participated in the study and myself; and their relationship with the values embedded in the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014). Guattari (2015) proffers a postcolonial feminist perspective that I take up in the methodology for this study. He suggests the possibility of forming alliances that negotiate across different social groups to form “collective assemblages” (Guattari, 2015: 133). This offers a means to articulate the ‘me’/ ‘not me’ within the methodological approach that moves beyond a simplistic linear hierarchy of power and oppressions to a more transversal politics that recognises the porous flux of social boundaries between sameness and difference.

#### 4.6 Conclusion

In this context, differences become more fluid and the interdependence across groups whilst not equivalent, suggest that a postcolonial feminist methodology can form a means of recognising and resisting oppression in the processes and subject of the study. However, in doing so this methodology means tensions of inequality between sameness and difference will continuously haunt this study. This prioritises the importance of ethics, as I connect and manage the ‘me’/‘not me’. Ahmed (1998: 58) urges that how I recognise and deal with conflicting values and experiences lies central to my engagement with women I cannot “...represent”. To attempt this, ethics were fundamental to how I might see the study as an encounter that recognised the impossibility of the power differences between the ‘me’/ ‘not me’. These both supported and challenged how I might create an ethical research study with women I could not represent. This became important to the methodology of this study and I go on to examine this in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5

### Methods, ethics and processes

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the research methods and processes engaged with in this study. It takes up the struggle that came from engaging with postmodern feminist research ideas, particularly the ethical consequences that arose from my attempts at engaging feminist research ethics. In order to do this justice I present this chapter as not only a means of conducting research that applies feminist research principles to the task at hand; but also as a way of recognising how I might create an emerging and responsive ethical practice as a doctoral student that I might build on in future research.

This chapter has three sections. Section one explores my work with focus groups as a method to open up a process of narrative inquiry as I engage with women in this study.

This leads me to section two, where I explore three key ethical threads that emerge from postcolonial feminist research methodology: institutional ethics, feminist ethics and impossible ethics.

In section three, I proceed to investigate how engaging with feminist ethics led to three main ethical challenges, that of understanding insider/outsider positionality, whiteness and voice.

#### 5.2 Section one. Method

#### 5.3 Narrative inquiry through focus group discussions

The study involved eight women. Six mothers, three mothers with Pakistani heritage, one mother with Bangladeshi heritage, one with Somali heritage and one Polish heritage. In addition, there were two professionals, one white British heritage liaison worker and one Pakistani heritage family support worker. The research was conducted via two focus groups and one interview held between October and December 2015. The names of all the participants are changed. The first focus group comprised of two women, Astur, a mother with Somali heritage, and Badr, a mother with Pakistani heritage, and myself. The second focus group comprised of Beena, a Pakistani heritage family support worker who also acted as an interpreter; Abir, a mother with Polish heritage; Bahja, a mother with Pakistani

heritage; Cala, a mother with Pakistani heritage and Dalal a mother with Bangladeshi heritage and myself. I also interviewed Alex, a white British heritage female liaison worker.

Mothers participating in the study had a family income at or below £16190, the required threshold for the two-year-old offer, and consequently represented households that fall below the average family income as calculated by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP, 2017). All the mothers were living with their husbands and two, Cala and Dalal, shared their home with their husbands' parents.

Name in study	Heritage	Country of birth	Country of education	Level of education
Astur Mother	Somali	Somalia	Somalia & UK	High school (UK)
Badr Mother	British Pakistani	United Kingdom	UK	Undergraduate degree (UK)
Alex Liaison Worker	White British	United Kingdom	UK	Undergraduate degree (UK)
Abir Mother	Polish	Poland	Poland	High school (Poland)
Bahja Mother	Pakistani	Pakistan	Pakistan	High school (Pakistan)
Cala Mother	Pakistani	Pakistan	Pakistan	High school (Pakistan)
Beena Family Support Worker	Pakistani	Pakistan	Pakistan	High school (Pakistan) Early Years Level 4 qualification (UK)
Dalal Mother	Bangladeshi	Bangladesh	Bangladesh	High school (Bangladesh)

I conducted the focus groups and interview in what had been two SureStart children's centres in Manchester, a city in the northwest of England. The children's centres both offered free childcare provision for two-year-old children (DfE, 2014), and the mothers in

the study all sent their children to these. The children's centres were run by the same not for profit organisation and were managed by the same team. They are both located within a few hundred meters of each other, within an area of Manchester the 2011 UK census described as 9.7% Black/Black British ethnicity, 55.3% Asian/Asian British ethnicity, 4.2% Mixed ethnicity, 27.1% White ethnicity and 3.7% Other ethnicity (Manchester City Council, 2016).

#### 5.4 Rationale for small sample size

This research is a small study, conducted by a single researcher, as part of an educational doctorate. Its starting premise is a specific area of early childhood education and care, namely (non)engagement with the two-year-old offer, by mothers from BAME communities. The research focus make a large or long-term research study unwieldly and unmanageable. Gaining access to mothers proved a significant factor on the number of participants in the study. As I discuss later in this chapter, several husbands were reluctant for their wives to participate. Therefore, mothers involved in the study represent women who were able and prepared to participate in focus group discussions from two connected early years settings in a specific area of Manchester. These settings were places I had worked to form a connection as I started working at the university. I made the decision to focus this research on the area and settings where I could work with mothers and women as part of an ongoing relationship.

Galvin (2015) argues that in qualitative research, the number of participants that should be involved remains a difficult question to answer and will be constrained by access to participants, time and resources. Galvin (2015) continues that this becomes a particular point of discussion in research seeking a saturation point of data, beyond which no new information can be obtained. Savage et al (2005), for example, used data from 182 interviews in one city, Manchester, in a qualitative research seeking an extensive research aim "... to address 'macro' issues of global change". The aim of this study was not to gather data that required women in the study to represent all women from BAME communities in Manchester.

In seeking to conduct a small research study, Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002: 127) present a feminist research argument for "... taking people's accounts of their experiences as a

necessary element of knowledge of gendered lives and actual power relations.” In this sense, the sample in this study produced a wealth of data on mothers’ accounts of their experiences of gendered lives and power relations that meet the research questions.

From a feminist perspective, establishing not only how experiences matter in research, but also what experiences and why, are important considerations for rationalising sample size, particularly as part of research collecting narrated experiences. As Uprichard (2013) points out, it is a question of whether I wanted to know more about the general population from which the mothers came or whether I wanted to know more about the mothers who participated. Feminist research methodology suggested the importance of the social and cultural context in which mothers’ accounts of experiences occur. This meant that what was valuable for the research aim was data that had depth from mothers who participated in the study rather than engaging larger numbers of participants in less depth.

By focusing on settings and mothers within an area I am familiar with and have built relationships with I am able to reflect Millman and Kanter’s (1987: 32) account of the importance of “... informal, local social structures in which women participate most frequently”. Mothers did not share experiences in isolation though individual interviews, but rather as part of focus groups. Massey (2011) identifies how data from focus groups is unique in that it combines data from an individual and from an individual as part of a group. This proved to be very much the case as mothers told their own stories of experiences and, through sharing in a focus group, analysed these experiences into new data that would not have been possible from individual interviews. The small sample size did not reflect a small selection of experiences, but rather how experiences shared can construct new data streams.

From an ECEC policy perspective, mothers in the study shared nominal social and cultural contexts. All mothers in the study came from BAME communities, their children were all eligible for the two-year-old offer, and they had all chosen to take up this offer and so were all engaging with ECEC policy. In this respect, shared social and cultural experiences of the two-year-old offer were central to the research questions and the role of ECEC policy in mothers’ lives. However, ECEC policy was also a stepping off point for wider discussions. This study is also interested in ways mothers’ individual lived experiences might unsettle broader ideas of sameness and difference, and this was significant in terms of the sample

size. By this, I mean the study does not seek to generate a narrative constructed by mothers identified as sharing a social and cultural experience of ECEC policy. Rather by focussing on experiences in the 'informal' and 'local', this research seeks interesting perspectives on 'official' homogenising discourses that might start in ECEC policy but that looks beyond this into mothers' wider lives. A study involving larger numbers of mothers would not therefore add to strengthening a single counter narrative, as this was not the aim of the study. However, by increasing the number of mothers in the study, and therefore the number of narratives, there would be a risk that the individual lived experiences of mothers might be lost in a larger, generalised narrative.

The nuanced detail of micro-level data in a small sample size was more valuable to this study precisely because it does not intend to create a generalised response to the research questions. Working with the small, specific experiences of mothers, as encounters with "...unrepresentable otherness" (Ahmed, 1998: 58) it arguably resist constructing mothers as already known. In other words, in this study, the individual and unique experiences of mothers holds greater significance, than an externally designated identity as women from BAME communities. This speaks to Urban's (2015) discussion of 'hyper-diversity' and different individual activities and experiences that make identity within groups more fluid and ambiguous.

Crouch and McKenzie (2006) take up the importance of detail, arguing that research into the social context means using a small sample size focuses less on the number of respondents and more on the dynamics, details and aspects of the situation researched. In this study, this speaks to mothers' individual as well as shared experiences of expectations of engagement and non-engagement with early education and care. Yet, focussing on the experiences of a small sample does not mean to present the individual experiences of mothers as unique or self-contained cases. Rather these experiences extend into mothers' wider relations with a broader social world that, in this research, starts with the role of ECEC policy and my framing of the study using postcolonial feminist theory. Therefore analysis of narrated experiences is less interested in codified 'hits' of data and more in the thematic strands that are extracted from the researcher's "... interpretive and conceptual efforts" (Crouch and McKenzie, 2006: 488) at working with data "... where interview yield intersects with pre-existing theoretical knowledge" (Crouch and McKenzie, 2006: 494). This speaks to

a criticism of small research samples, that the findings might be seen as speculation rather than being able to draw firm conclusions. However, drawing on Crouch and McKenzie (2006), it is precisely this detailed interpretation that comes from small sample sizes, that meets the aims of this research.

Further to this, Roy et al (2015) maintain that when researching experiences relating to families, such as mothers in this study, participants should be defined more as “networks rather than individuals within families” (2015: 244). The experiences mothers share represent networks of family migration stretching across national borders and intergenerational changes through ongoing encounters of sameness and difference. This allows greater focus on analysis within a small sample of participants rather than broader focus across a larger sample size. As Roy et al (2015: 247) state, “if the [research] goal is to understand the intricate dynamics of reality construction ... a small homogenous sample may be a better choice.” Of course there are trade-offs with any research decision, but given the research aims and the constraints of time and capacity in conducting the study, the small sample size that yields a useful volume of rich data, I argue, does not reduce the validity of this study.

Later in the chapter, I discuss how the challenge of negotiating and organising the focus group meetings became a significant factor in the research. For now, I start with an exploration of narrative inquiry, as the data collection method in the study.

### 5.5 Narrative Inquiry

Clandinin and Huber (2010) define narrative inquiry as the study of experiences shared through stories, describing it as a relatively new, twentieth century, qualitative approach to research. Of course, sharing stories about experiences is not a new phenomenon. However, as a research methodology, Denzin (1997) reflects how it emerges as part of a response to western, scientific approaches to knowledge that questions whose and what knowledge might be considered ‘valid’. As a research methodology, narrative inquiry builds on the role the researcher plays in the process of gathering data and creating ‘knowledge’. Clandinin and Huber (2010) argue it therefore responds to the links between experiences, identities (be that of researcher or participants) and social understandings of what ‘knowledge’ is.



Pinnegar and Daynes (2012) emphasise the role stories play in narrative inquiry, as a method and approach to study. In narrative inquiry, 'stories' lived and shared, intertwine with theoretical approaches, to consider how these 'stories' might speak to more powerful, positivist forms of knowledge. In this study, narrative inquiry combined small, lived experiences narrated by mothers from BAME communities with postcolonial feminist theories. Together, these work to unsettle powerful 'truths' emanating from neoliberal discourses of equality that shape, not only ECEC policy, but also broader policies of social justice.

Through narrative inquiry, the individual and collective stories women told during the focus group meetings and the interview, opened up complex and multiple understandings of (non)engagement, identity and belonging. These collided with narratives emanating from national and local government policies and research on (non)engagement with the two-year-old offer. Government and research narratives and narratives of women in the study crossed and tangled with each other, haunting the stories and conversations. What united all these stories was their location within contemporary British social structures and views around the role of childcare, early children's education and wider perspectives of childhood and families.

These narratives of (non)engagement hinted at contrasting stories by women from BAME communities, narratives emerging from successive government and from research. For example, the narrative emerging from research conducted for the Department for Education, by Gibb et al (2011) associates the lack of engagement in the two-year-old offer with cultural difference. This tangled with narratives by women in the study, who layered experiences of (non)engagement with the two-year-old offer with multiple experiences of (non)engagement, cultural identity and belonging. These narratives unsettle linear attempts at defining ideas about cultural difference and (non)engagement, and hint at possibilities of collective assemblages (Guattari, 2015) through shared experiences.

Therefore, narrative inquiry supported me with Harding and Norberg's (2005) concept of using research to 'study up'. It enabled narratives from research and ECEC policies to come alongside smaller, immediate, narratives by women from BAME communities. These seemingly quieter narratives dislocated some of the 'truths' embedded in louder policy and research narratives, as women told stories about translating and negotiating broader social

ideas of motherhood and women's roles into their lives and those of their children. Narrative inquiry rendered a space for stories about government, community and everyday lives. From a postcolonial feminist perspective, I was interested in how these experiences existed against a backdrop of powerful political discourses that reflected Said's (1993) judgement on a lack of obligation to please or persuade audiences from BAME communities. Phillion et al (2005) assert that using narratives in this way serves to understand the individual in the context of broader social paradigms. For that reason, my decision to engage a postcolonial feminist research methodology further informed narrative inquiry as a method appropriate to this study.

Narrative inquiry also supported my broader aims of engaging feminist research methodology, not least from the value narrative inquiry placed on recording the small, socially constructed stories of people's everyday experiences (Andrews et al, 2008). This helped to guide a feminist methodology obligation that I not only 'write myself' within the research but in doing so, experience "... the dynamic interactions and flow" (Nettles, 2005: 20) of these layered stories. Therefore, narrative inquiry suggested possibilities to move beyond using women's experiences to examine how government policies affect women in BAME communities.

I hoped that by troubling the discourses of equality in ECEC policies, I might unearth ideas previously invisible to me. Yet Darraj's (2003) warning remains, that finding ways to engage postcolonial feminist theory into this study might be insufficient to bridge privilege and differences and negotiate an approach to 'truths' in this study. 'Studying up' using narrative inquiry suggested to me how women already possessed unique and powerful means to analyse, interpret and adapt policies into their lives. However, it was only through these stories that I was able to unsettle narratives of (non)engagement in ECEC policy and the discourse of equality that drives them.

I began to see that empowerment in narrative inquiry came not through me giving a voice to women's experiences, but rather women giving me a voice with which to analyse policies from perspectives I was not otherwise able to understand. However, from a postcolonial feminist perspective, this also carried a risk. There is a possibility that this could also be seen as my re-colonising of their perspectives and/or taking their stories as the 'only' version of events.

Indeed, Nettles (2005) identifies empowerment, through the act of sharing and voicing experiences, as an important aspect of narrative inquiry. Stories of engagement created narratives that, as Rappaport (2000: 3) asserts, “mingle[d] cultural norms with individual agency”. Spaces emerged where individuals engaged and responded to policies prescribed by state and government. In this respect, narratives of (non)engagement from stories told by mothers mingled with wider, “overlearned” (Rappaport, 2000: 4), narratives of engagement communicated by government. These stories, in the process of their telling, intersected in myriad ways with the possibility of other, untold versions of the experiences women shared and with my own interpretation of these stories. However, narrative inquiry enabled me to explore my engagement with feminist research methodology and the ongoing tussle with issues of empowerment in conducting the research.

What influenced the narratives of all engaged in the study, cuts to the heart of one of the key criticisms of narrative inquiry as a research methodology, namely the relationship between experience and ‘facts’ (Essers, 2012). Narratives of experience inevitably convey elements of fiction within their construction by their authors, be they participants speaking in the focus groups and interviews, local and national governments writing policies or me writing this dissertation. From a postmodern perspective, shared meanings from collective experiences influence not only the narratives within and across these different groups but also, as Rhodes and Brown (2005) emphasise, the ethics embedded in the social construction of any claims regarding ‘truths’ that I or anyone else involved in this study might make. Questions about ‘truths’ inevitably feature in a method seeking the narratives of participants on (non)engagement. Whilst this study did not intentionally engage narratives to produce fiction, it was nonetheless important to draw attention to how, from a postmodern approach, the *process* of ‘making’ research and ‘telling the story’ of this research study could be either foregrounded or hidden in the act of writing this thesis.

Narrative inquiry as a research method advocates that I make visible the choices I, as researcher, made in reading and analysing the ‘truths’ of narratives within this study. This is because narrative inquiry encourages me to weave my narrative about empowerment and the struggle in producing this study, into a relationship with other narratives and ‘truth claims’. This not only helps support a methodology engaging with feminist research principles but also offers a pragmatic response to the ongoing process of reflexivity.

Including my narratives as footnotes, or embedded in the body of the writing has made shedding some light onto the social research practice of story-telling and sharing experiences, part of the study. As Sikes (2010: 13) says, research such as this that engages narrative inquiry to create versions, 'fictions', of people's lives and experiences, needs to make clear from the start " ... the nature of the gaze that is brought to bear upon it". Narratives will to some degree only be 'fictions', there may be other possibilities and constructed 'realities', to the stories women in the study share. However, I am willing to work with these narratives as the experiences offer an alternative, transgressive and subversive 'fiction' to the louder 'fictions' emanating from the neoliberal discourse of equality in ECEC policies.

#### 5.6 Focus groups as a data collection tool for narrative inquiry

*'Bahja: But with that group we used to meet each other and used to learn about new groups and what's going on. It's new things going on for children. Is there any group going on, is something ... but now it's finished.*

*FSW Beena: Finished. All funding cut, cut.'*

(Bahja and Family Support Worker Beena, Appendix III: lxxx)

Caretta and Vacchelli (2015) identify how focus groups have progressively become a central tool for collecting qualitative data through moderated group discussion. Yet with this growth has come increased hybridisation, often through their different uses and the different means employed within focus groups to generate conversations. Within this study, I refer to the term focus group rather than group interview in order to differentiate between these two means of data collection. Kitzinger and Barbour (1999) helpfully identify that focus groups differ from group interviews in that they explicitly rely on participants' interactions in order to generate data. In this study, I encouraged women to talk to each other and share their experiences within the focus groups. This was because I hoped that in sharing these narratives, discussions would take place that might respond to each other's experiences.

My approach was to create a space where a focus group of women could control the direction the discussion about engagement with policies on free childcare. This did not mean I was not engaged in the discussions, I just did not seek to control them. I answered questions and, at times, asked questions to clarify points (although, as I discuss in the

analysis section, I am not sure I was always successful in this). At the start of the discussions, women were naturally hesitant and unsure of what to expect. However, it surprised me how quickly it appeared that a friendly informality grew, as women talked to each other, recounted their experiences, and shared opinions. As they talked, women began to find areas of common experiences or areas where they were able to clarify with each other what they had experienced. Often I was on the periphery of these narratives, I listened as women talked to each other and to me about experiences I could not add to or share, as they differed so widely from mine. In focus group two, tracts of narratives tipped into home languages that had to pause for either Beena or one of the other mothers to translate and co-translate each other's experiences back to me. The experiences in the women's stories seemed to cross into each other as they shared their hopes for their children's futures and recalled their own childhoods. The data that emerged was complex and multifaceted.

Waterton and Wynne (1999: 128) recognise this complexity in data arising from focus groups. They reported how, as researchers, they realised that

... feelings and beliefs were not 'ready-made' (unlike the supposed 'attitudes' reported in polls); they had to interpret them from a wealth of data. Therefore, the way we interpret focus group data is of vital importance.

I realised that data interpretation was important, particularly from a feminist research point of view. Consequently, the way I represented myself in the focus groups needed to form part of the analysis. This was because I needed to consider how the relationship between the participants and myself formed part of the context in which narratives were constructed and analysed.

### 5.7 Critiquing narrative inquiry in relation to postcolonial feminist methodology

Differences in experiences between participants and myself framed my position and representation in the focus group. How those differences manifested within the focus group, seemed particularly evident in the moments when women translated their stories for my benefit or explained certain shared ideas to me. Storrs (2000) identifies hierarchical powers that come from interviewing participants in their non-native language. Storrs (2000) argues that communicating through shared language and culture more easily establishes a relationship of trust between the researcher and participants. The variety of languages and

their use within this study meant narratives at times either filtered through translation, by family support worker Beena or other research participants, or through gaps in the narratives as women paused, appearing perhaps to consider their use of words. Yet even so, within the focus groups, a rapport appeared to develop between the women. At times, I felt pulled into that space, as women asked me questions about my own experiences, family and thoughts on free childcare.

However, I am not complacent enough to think that the friendliness and generosity shown to me by mothers in the study overcame inevitable power differences between us. I was left wondering why, when at the end of the focus groups, none of the mothers took any evidence away with them that they were ever there. For example, as well as explaining to mothers about the research I provided written information about the research aims and processes, including my contact details, explaining that they could keep this and contact me if they had any questions. This felt particularly significant given that there had earlier been issues of husbands not wanting their wives to participate in the focus group discussions (I discuss this later in this chapter).

None of the mothers took this information with them when they left the focus groups. Some mothers provided me with their contact details on the consent forms but most did not. I was left with a sense that the focus groups was a space the women were prepared to enter, and once in, were willing to share their experiences with each other and with me. However, this appeared to exist separate to their lives outside. They did not take evidence of their participation in this experience back into their lives in ways that were obvious, such as papers with the details of the study recorded on them. When I contacted women and the family support worker, they were happy to speak to me about the study and were interested in how the research was progressing. However, no one did return to meet with me to discuss how I worked with their narratives in the study. It felt like women were exerting a quiet power as a counter balance to the power I exerted in conducting the study. It felt as if they had responded to the call of the liaison worker and, most particularly, the family support worker and joined the study, participating with interest and a degree of enthusiasm. Yet they did not appear to see that it would achieve anything more for them.

Perhaps the fault lay in the way I had explained the study. I do not know, and this haunts me<sup>18</sup>.

### 5.8 Data analysis process

Massey (2011) suggests that data from focus groups reflects the interaction of individual group members. It is not possible to reduce the data collected this way to the individual experiences of members nor to a homogenised group's opinion. It is arguably something else. Data from the focus groups in this study reflect the complex interactions between the situated context of the research topic, the theoretical research framework, the space, the individuals and the group. There is a uniqueness to each focus group that, as a researcher, I cannot easily replicate or control. However, Myers and Macnaughten (2001) go on to identify that analysing data from focus groups is not straightforward either. They argue that analysis of focus groups requires the researcher to work with data that is less fixed, definite and coherent than data from other methods. The rich narrated accounts are not open to abstraction into definitive analysis. In analysing the data in a way that was meaningful for the research aims, I could not easily break down data constructed from conversations within the focus groups into smaller data fragments removed from the wider discussion.

Myers and Macnaughten (2001) describe the analysis of data from focus groups as loosely conforming to a form of thematic analysis. Arguing that whilst analysis of focus group data reflects themes emerging from the study topic, it also requires the researcher to engage ways of interpreting data that reflects the particular context in which it was gathered. Therefore, analysis in this study should reflect the situated interactions between members within a focus group and data from members of the other focus group. In this study, the discourse context in which the focus groups were conducted included discussions of relationships between culture and (non)engagement in services aimed at supporting young children's school readiness. In the analysis chapters, tracts of text are included in order to place the data within the wider context of these discussions. This reflects how, as Myers

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<sup>18</sup> In the second focus group, towards the end and after we had stopped the focus group, three women talked a lot about a group that used to run but had stopped following funding cuts. Liaison worker Alex had also talked about this group in the interview with her. After the focus group, one woman asked me if I knew how they could restart this group. The family support worker quickly intervened and said it was not for me to do. As I reflect on this, women appeared to enjoy the focus group as much as an opportunity to meet and talk, and seemed to want to do so again in the future but not necessarily with me and not necessarily to return to this topic.

and Macnaughten (2001) suggested it might, data gathered in this study was not a straightforward thematic analysis of the research topic; participants took this topic and, individually and in conversation with each other, shifted it into different directions. The data presented in the analysis had to reflect how ideas shifted in the course of these discussions.

By addressing the research questions that structure the research process, three themes did emerge from the data and fed the analysis. These were themes of ruptures in boundaries, ambiguity in knowing, acting and being and precarity. Through these themes, I seek to answer the research question set at the start of the thesis.

These themes strike to the core of the research aim of working with mothers from BAME communities to explore experiences of (non)engagement. From a starting point of shared engagement in the two-year-old offer, experiences of other forms of (non)engagement quickly emerged. Alasuutari (1995) reminds me, that in analysing these experiences, my interpretation of these narratives is not a search for a 'factual' truth. I seek to unsettle notions of sameness/difference in mothers (non)engagement with a neoliberal equality discourse, not to construct a 'factual' counter narrative. Consequently, the analysis I engage in is not so focused on searching for factual data that corresponds with the research questions, but rather to work within the situations that created these experiences as "... an unrepresentable otherness" (Ahmed, 1998: 58) that might unsettle a more powerful equality discourse lying within that narrated experience.

Therefore, the data analysis process required me to reflect and interpret the situated relationships between the different participants in ways that did not simply abstract data in a linear approach to answering the research questions and the research topic. For example, in the analysis chapters, I analyse and interpret relatively long tracts of data to reflect the interactions between participants and their relationship with one of the three themes. From the perspective of Myers and Macnaughten (2001) and Massey (2011), this was because data analysis of focus groups should aim not to gloss over the complex relationships between the different participants and their narratives.

From a feminist research perspective, understanding the power I exercised in interpreting the data into themes was key to the data analysis process. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) argue for the researcher engaging in feminist research to recognise and articulate their own



'situatedness' when interpreting data during the analysis process. My position as researcher inevitably reflects what is included in the data analysis, what is not included, the themes and conclusions drawn. A linear analysis to answer the research questions would arguably run counter to this approach, representing instead the exercise of power by a researcher who remains distanced from the process. Instead, the data analysis remains open to interpretation in different ways; by deciding to include the transcripts of the focus groups and interview in the thesis, I made a conscious commitment to this end.

The data analysis process began with the narratives that directly responded to the original research topic posed at the start of the focus groups (and the individual interview) and will, in this analysis, reflect the research questions posed at the start of this study. Massey (2011) refers to this as analysis of articulated data, and notes that, whilst participants may rephrase the topic and add ideas they feel are relevant, the capacity of a focus group to explore a topic in depth makes this analysis of data valuable in answering research questions and addressing the research topic. However, Massey (2011) also identifies another form of data analysis that involves emergent data, data that emerges because of the focus group conversations and that challenges normative truths that lie within the research topic. It was this capacity of focus groups to generate such data, able to unsettle normative truths, which made this method so valuable for the study and the analysis.

The analysis process involved repeatedly reading and working with the transcripts in order to interpret gradually the attributed and emergent data into themes that could reflect the research topic, the theoretical framework and the research aim of unsettling normative truths surrounding (non)engagement. Squire (2013: 57) describes this process of interpretation of narratives as a "hermeneutic circle", as the researcher moves constantly between experiences in narratives, theories and context. Indeed she goes on to argue that through this complex process of evolving interpretation, the analysis that emerges and the conclusions that arise cannot be seen as representing a closed single interpretation. The circle remains open to different interpretations. Therefore, the data analysis process involved moving between the narrated experiences of women, the theoretical threads of postcolonial feminist theory and the neoliberal equality discourse of problematic difference in ECEC policies. What this reflects is the power of the researcher within the analysis process and the ethical implications involved in how the data from participants' narrated

experiences is interpreted and analysed. I now go on to discuss the role of ethics in this study.

## 5.9 Section two. Ethics

### 5.10 Institutional ethics and 'becoming' an ethical researcher

Conducting research for this educational doctorate mandated my adherence to the institutional ethical requirements identified in the Manchester Metropolitan University's academic ethical framework (MMU, 2016). The ethical requirements of the institution focussed on my obligation to behave in an ethical and professional manner that ties ethics into issues of limiting the risk of harm to the participants, the institution and myself. Consent, safety and security, legality, sensitivity and anonymity, objectivity and validity (MMU, 2016) were embedded into the research processes as I prepared for and conducted the research study. Obtaining informed consent from the institution, the gatekeepers of the settings and women who participated, ensuring focus groups were organised and managed to protect those within them, storing data securely, anonymising the participants and demonstrating respectful objectivity throughout the process were core to this ethical stance. However, as I will suggest later in this chapter, engaging feminist research ethics and choosing to focus my research within a community that I am not a member of, created additional perspectives to these requirements.

I begin by examining ethics from the institutional level that define my involvement with ethics within, what Ramalingam et al (2014) describe as, three domains. These were my knowledge of the institutional ethical processes, that I establish an ethical attitude when conducting the research study and that I demonstrate competence of the ethical skills required for meeting the first two domains (Ramalingam et al, 2014). However, the institutional ethics did not simply require that, as a postgraduate student, I demonstrate my competence within these domains in order to meet the ethical obligations they required. There was also the underlying expectation that by progressing through these domains and gaining 'competence', I would 'become' an ethical researcher, thus underscoring that I internalise this ethical knowledge and in so doing alter who I was/am. The expected transformation of self, resulting from me entering these domains, relating to their ethical concepts and putting them into practice made ethics, as Meyer and Land (2005:

374) frame it, a “... threshold concept ...”. However, working with knowledge that would transform me and shift my thinking into a new space was never going to be a smooth or simple transition.

The process of crossing an ethical threshold in order to ‘become’ an ethical researcher with its accompanying transformation of thought and perception was not solely dependent on working with institutional research ethics. For me, it also included additional ethical considerations, emanating from feminist research methodology. The combination of feminist research ethics with institutional ethics felt both uncomfortable and exciting. Conroy and Ruyter (2008) explore liminality to describe the complexity of learning to recognise and respond to this newfound space. Occupying this liminal space on the threshold of a new knowing – the ‘betwixt and between’ – held its own value and power. Meyer and Land (2005: 380) encapsulated this power describing it as a “...‘liquid’ space, simultaneously transforming and being transformed by the learner”. Combining institutional ethical requirements with the ethical challenges of feminist research methodology did indeed feel fluid.

#### 5.11 Feminist ethics and troubling

Feminist research methodology challenges what Miller and Boulton (2007) see as a growing emphasis on adherence to procedures and regulation, arguing that these have resulted from increased focus within institutions to engage research ethics as a means to avoid litigation. This reflects how ethics remain imbedded in a discourse of concern regarding the im/balance of power, visible and invisible within research. For feminist researchers, this examination of power includes questions about how these imbalances emerge from the values those active in the research process inevitably hold. If research can never be free of the values individuals and groups involved in the process hold, then the power of those values have a bearing on the actions of the researcher conducting, analysing and drawing conclusions (Bell, 2014). Responding to this power within research has become a key component to feminist ethics. Noddings (1988) proposed a feminist ethics of care that was rooted in awareness and response to the other and the building of caring relational “encounter(s)” (Noddings 1988: 222). This principle when applied to research ethics, moves ethics beyond an emphasis on duty to adhere to a set of principles. Whilst feminist research ethics recognise the necessity to adhere to the ethical codes and legislation that bind and

monitor ethical research, feminist ethics of care suggests a research approach that also “... endorses modes of research that are directed at the needs rather than the shortcomings and peculiarities of subjects.” (Noddings, 1988: 227).

This ethics of care within research related well to the ‘study up’ approach I wanted to build into this research study. It offered the chance to build on an awareness of the needs women in the study expressed (or chose not to express) as a way to analyse (non)engagement, not through an analysis of their community but rather an analysis of the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) and hidden narratives emanating from (non)engagement in policies. From this approach, an ethics of care suggested that engagement in feminist research ethics did not confine ethics to the research methodology but rather expanded ethics out into the research analysis. Whilst this demonstrated to me, the value of feminist research ethics, it also raised an ethical dilemma. A fundamental consideration within ethics lay in the act of caring and the relationship between the one caring and the one receiving the care. However, this act and this relationship was based on a fundamental power imbalance. As I raised in my discussion of narrative inquiry, I was already struggling with ideas of ‘empowerment’ in the research process. As the ‘carer/researcher’, I imagined I held more power than the care ‘recipients/participants’ did.

Tronto and Fisher (1990, cited in Phillip et al, 2013: 5) identify care as “... caring about, taking care of, care-giving and care-receiving” with their attached ethical values including ‘responsibility’ and ‘responsiveness’. This resonated within the feminist ethics for this study and drew me to see the positive of ‘caring about’ within both the methodology and the analysis of the research study. However, power relations remained within this process of ethical caring. If I was to take on the ethical role of ‘caring about’ the experiences of women as an ethical researcher conducting research and analysing data, then a power imbalance was evident in the act of caring and in the priority I placed on values of ‘responsibility’ and ‘responsiveness’. As I have discussed, I remained in a liminal space of seeking to balance feminist research ethics with the issues that doing so raised for my involvement in this study. Feminist research ethics might seek to ground research ethics in an act of caring and the values related to this act yet, as Bell (2014: 83) points out, this too remained connected to “... the abstract idea of goodness, whether in relation to the self or other people”. What might be considered the ‘goodness’ required to transform my identity into an ‘ethical

researcher' was steeped in a combination of my personal ethical values, institutional research ethics and my understanding of feminist research ethics.

Any power I placed upon ethics of care and caring about women involved in the study, however well intentioned, could not separate a process of ethical transformation the institute expected of me from the questions this raised. How I understood and responded to the power differences feminist research ethics had made visible, raised dilemmas regarding the power relations that existed between women in the study and myself, it also suggested the significance of the morality of social difference within the act of seeking to care that resonated with the research topic.

#### 5.12 Responding to ethical dilemmas raised by feminist ethics

Responding to feminist research ethics focused my attention on the power relationship between the participants and me as researcher. As a white, middle-class woman an ethics of care introduced caring into the research study that troubled my identity as an 'ethical' researcher. It had begun to create a discourse that I 'protect' women in the study from the research process itself and from the potential re-colonising tendencies of my 'whiteness'. Postcolonial feminist research methodology drew attention to the privilege and researcher power I possessed even within a context of caring. However, postcolonial feminist research also required a response to this privilege. I did not seek to 'give' a voice to participants, and transversal politics with its possibilities for relational, mutual encounters of interdependence might suggest that 'care' could offer a commonality shared by all women in the study (Noddings, 1988). However, as the researcher, I retained an authority and control over the study, and the underlying power my whiteness brought to both the study topic and the research process interacted with this authority.

Reflecting on this from the perspective of women participating in the research, meant considering how whiteness might not only affect my presence even as I instigated a postcolonial ethics of care. This was not limited to a concern that this study should not focus 'problems' within the community in the research, but on an analysis of policymaking. It also stretched to what whiteness might signify and represent to participants as part of the research process. However, from a feminist research perspective, the perceptions and the

meaning others attached to my whiteness might not ultimately be something I could control. However, that did not mean I could or should easily dismiss this.

### 5.13 Impossible ethics: struggles with the ideals of feminist research ethics and taking responsibility for the study

Smith (2016) argues that an English-speaking dominance of literature on research ethics makes this a western dominated space. However, Cousin (2011) challenges the dualism of any western versus non-western /the rest approach to knowledge, including knowledge of ethics. She argues that seeing ideas and values such as those of research ethics (including feminist research ethics) as belonging to a sealed western form of knowledge fails to acknowledge the diverse origins much western thought is based on. Many of the values when considering power and sameness/difference draw from cross cultural sources that a label of 'western', renders invisible. Cousin argues against unquestioned "... contrasting and coherent imagined communities called 'west and 'non-west'" (Cousin, 2011: 592). This argument suggested ways to make sense of the relationship between feminist research ethics of care, my 'becoming' an 'ethical' researcher and postcolonial ethics specifically relevant to this study.

From a postcolonial feminist perspective, the fluidity of hegemonic differences Cousin (2011) argues renders any hidden or dualistic ideas of western and non-western ethical values relevant to this study. If postcolonial feminism sought to resist acts of subordination from outside and within feminism, it could not do so without also recognising that commonalities also lay hidden within those differences that formed part of those subordinations. A postcolonial perspective on ethics in both the subject and approach I took within this study could not ignore shared ethical values that threaded between the differences that undoubtedly existed. However, a postcolonial feminist perspective did specifically enable me to reflect upon what Ahmed (1998) refers to as "... an unrepresentable otherness" (Ahmed, 1998: 58) that lies within those threads of difference.

This ethical stance appeared best able to meet the methodological demands of this study. Ahmed's (1998) response to otherness was to situate me within the study, placing me with the participants. Being 'present' within the study and making my presence part of the study, created a space that rendered me part of an encounter. My presence within the study

required an ethical stance that resisted me simply taking responsibility for women participating in the study, which the feminist ethics of care had proposed. This, Ahmed (1998) argues, would risk me reducing women to an Other who does not speak. Becoming part of a shared encounter suggested the possibility that I might unlearn to 'speak for' women and rather find an ethics that expresses relationships with the ideas created<sup>19</sup> and those who created them.

Ahmed (1998: 63) speaks of the "impossibility of ethics" within this encounter. This perfectly embodied the layering of ideas as I sought to reconcile a meaning for ethics within this study. Acknowledging that I had addressed demands of codified ethics from my institution could not fully address the ethical stance a postcolonial feminist research methodology demanded, and yet it was an important aspect of meeting those demands. Similarly, feminist ethics of care enabled me to better recognise power differences within the study, but it could not sufficiently address how I responded to these differences. Transversal politics from black feminism raised possibilities for allegiances and mutuality within my reflections on ethics, these spoke of finding ways to navigate differences. Whilst postcolonial feminist ethics embodied the ultimate 'impossibility' of hoping to fully reconcile these ethical domains. I realised that as a doctoral student, I occupy a liminal space, in my 'becoming' an ethical researcher. This helped me contextualise the struggle I had (and to date continue to have) with what that meant in the irreconcilable yet real encounter with embodied subjects.

Ahmed (drawing on Spivak, 1998: 67) describes this ethical impossibility as a "loving caress". I sought to become an ethical researcher who could translate and 'do justice' to women I met, yet this was inevitably unstable and not fully possible. However, I learnt that the research ethics I could involve in this small study existed in the care that embodied how I responded to the narratives women offered to me by our combined presence within those encounters. The concept of a 'loving caress' epitomised an ethics of care as one that could not overcome or easily respond to differences. Yet it described how, in sharing a small and in many ways secret, encounter between women, differences might fracture, and in

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<sup>19</sup> Derrida's concepts of *différance* resonates in this process. Any sense of control I have in how I frame and construct this thesis is, in part, illusory. This thesis also emerges from the actions of participants and supervisors in the data and advice they have given to me. This document can only partly capture a continuous merging and layering of ideas.

fracturing, might create narratives that reflected how I took responsibility and translated what had taken place. In doing so, research ethics moved beyond the methodology of data collection and into the way, I analysed how those narratives reimagined and challenged the wider discourses of equality that subsumed women into a universal moral discourse of (non)engagement. Ahmed (1998: 192) reminded me to keep asking, “Which differences matter here?”

This moved the ethical approach I took, away from discussing generalised differences of class, race and gender to recognise that in the encounters that occurred during data collection, differences were present that I could not easily name under these titles. It is in the “collisions” (Ahmed, 1998: 195) of differences nameable and unnameable within those encounters that I needed to place myself. The ethical care lay in recognising that my presence shifted things, but that being within the encounter was not as one with the knowledge to speak for women or to dominate. However, carefully and closely analysing the narratives women shared might disrupt more powerful narratives of judgements about (non)engagement and question what differences mattered in the readings of policies, and how women from BAME communities might be refigured within policy narratives in ways that do not present them purely as figures of difference.

In section three, I examine what difference mattered within this study. In order to do this, I take three main ethical challenges I faced in conducting this study, insider/outsider positionality, whiteness and voice. The first issue that arose was access to women from a community I am not part of.

#### 5.14 Section three. Unsettling privilege: engaging with shadows and silences in research

One initial challenge was how to establish connections when differences in identity were so evident (Gilbert, 2008). My identity was arguably an influential factor on the research process, particularly if participants saw me as representing a dominant social group within early years education. I looked like so many other white women who populate positions of authority within early years and primary education.



### 5.15 Insider/Outsider Positionality: strangers on the margins

Although feminist ethics recognises how a position of privilege casts me as an apparent outsider in this study, this did not automatically exclude me from studying power systems within policies that position women from BAME communities as outsiders (Harding, 2004). However, it did require me to examine my position within encounters that occurred in conducting this study. My initial concern was that a position of relative privilege made aspects of differences outside my experiences invisible to me. However, a more complex and dynamic relationship between insider/outsider positionality emerged.

Smith (1990) proposes that holding a less privileged, 'outsider' position within wider society, affords women from BAME communities perspectives able to recognise hegemonic equality discourses in policies that do not reflect their lived experiences. My 'outsider' position and response to these narratives, was a point of reflection. Leading from the earlier ethical discussion, any simple comparison between my 'outsiderness' conducting the study and the 'outsiderness' women from the BAME communities experienced in wider society was inappropriate. The focus group discussions might have temporarily rendered me an 'outsider' within the encounter, however I was conducting the study and reflected the power inherent to that position of control. This was in no measure commensurate to women's experiences of 'outsiderness' in national discourses and how this impacts their power and position within society.

Broader social narratives and their representation of women from BAME communities, discussed in chapter 2, frequently portray an image of "problematic boundary-markers" (Gedalof, 2007: 91) positioned on the insider/outsider margins of a society where I arguably occupy a position of insider. Yet Kelly (2014) argues that insider/outsider positionality, from a cultural perspective within research requires a nuanced examination. Presenting cultures and cultural boundaries as static would limit the capacity for this study to recognise the fluid nature of belonging in any discussion of (non)engagement. Grand policy narratives might generate insider/outsider positions that create homogenous categorisations of women from BAME communities and their (non)engagement with policies. However, through postcolonial feminist research, the narratives from women in the study might reflect a more nuanced understanding of their position with these wider social systems.

Examining positionality within this study might help unravel this. When I began the data collection and reflected on my position within the encounters, I considered how differences as discussed above placed me on the margins as an outsider within the focus groups. Yet as women in a women only space, there were elements to the encounters that drew me closer inside. Through asking questions about my experiences and, perhaps recognising my 'outsiderness', pausing to explain ideas to me, women in the study reached out to me. Differences entered as a positive into the shared experiences and points of discussion in the narratives that emerged, while I remained simultaneously on the margins and inside the discussions. By entering those spaces, none of us could leave differences and their associated meaning at the threshold<sup>20</sup>. The topic of (non)engagement and ECEC policy are familiar to me, and in this respects the focus of the study and the analysis of the narratives from these encounters confirmed my 'insider' position. Yet the 'insider' experiences women raised through their narratives and in the focus groups, combined layers of sameness and differences that offered perspectives on policies' meanings that foregrounded my 'outsider' position.

Hellawell (2006) reflects this troubling of positionality and insider/outsider in the study, when he challenges a view of positionality as a simple dichotomy between either insider or outsider. Women in the study and I were simultaneously on a series of parallel continuums unsettling the binary of "'insiderism' and 'outsiderism'" (Hellawell, 2006: 489). This helped recognise how elements of both shifted depending on what part of the study I focused on and who was in the various encounters. For example, in one of the focus groups with mothers, I was conscious of a 'sister outsider' position as they talked together at times apparently forgetting my presence, yet we were all women and only one person (the translator) had worked in the space where we held the focus groups. Yet many of the women had 'insiderism' histories of associations with the space that stretched back from their older children attending the settings, connections to each other and the space I did

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<sup>20</sup> Spectres of difference followed us all into the encounters; they affected how we each positioned ourselves and how we felt on a personal level. The spectres became droplets of liquid as we began to speak, dripping from our lips, these spectres made our positions more visible to each other. They positioned us. I watched spectres form in the room. Visible, liquid expressions and feelings of being both insiders and outsiders that were not previously visible before the conversations began now seeped out from their stories. They lingered in the spaces between us, then drifted into mists and were gone. They were surely there and influenced the study and that influence felt positive.

not share. Indeed, during the narratives women often referred to previous people and events that reflected their shared 'insider' experiences within the space and the importance this held for them. When I interviewed liaison worker Alex, I was conscious of elements of 'insiderness' shared as white women with similar experiences of working in the early years. Yet I was an 'outsider' entering her 'insider' space of the work environment, and we discussed aspects of policy Alex was working with and I was not. Consequently, how I positioned myself in relation to women in the study was important, but so too was recognising and reflecting upon what influenced how the women positioned me. My whiteness, and what this represented in terms of insider/outsider positions, suggests how we were all actively engaged in constructing identity and relationships within the research study.

#### 5.16 Whiteness

Best (2003) describes the role whiteness plays in this co-authoring of social relations in feminist research both in the field and later in the analysis, building on Edwards's (1990) earlier examination of the role colour plays in research conducted by white women with black women. Her starting premise was to analyse what happens in the research process and data collection method if the researcher is white and the participants are black. Edwards (1990) noted how early feminist researchers observed a willingness by women participants to share with them personal information. Yet the role race played in building relationships and trust in feminist research was positioned as secondary to gender. Crozier (2003) takes this further and suggests that research involving white women interviewing black women cannot escape the political and social context in which the research happens. She argues how this frames both concepts of race and the role of research in facilitating change.

As discussed earlier, Ahmed (1998) recognises the complex nature of care and the ethical implications that arise from this. Considering whiteness meant that when enacting a postcolonial ethics of care I did not want to position women in the study as the objects of care, as policies have come to do. Although this was how I saw my role in the study, I could not assume that this was how women in the study saw me. Yet how women responded to me and to what extent my whiteness influenced that response was integral to achieving the research aims. Best (2003: 897) refers to this as recognising whiteness "... as an ongoing

interactional achievement and not an attribute or essential property of any individual.” Race in its day-to-day meaning was an integral part of the complex research interactions.

This became evident early in the study as I started to prepare for the fieldwork. Edwards (1990) reports facing reluctance by black women to engage in her research. Indeed, she reports how being a white researcher wanting to involve black women met with suspicion and a degree of hostility. I also faced difficulty with access to women willing to engage in the study and with a degree of suspicion. However, the suspicion in this study emanated most vociferously from husbands of women initially contacted. This presented an interesting dilemma. I was already not able to access women who did not engage in the two-year-old offer and so I, like Edwards, contacted women who already engaged with the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) through an intermediary in the settings the women’s children attended. I was not initially able to engage in face to face conversations with women and in doing so perhaps mitigate the concerns of husbands in particular. The white British liaison worker who talked to mothers and passed out the information letters to women reported that whilst several women expressed interest in participating in the study, when asked again women reported that, after discussing this with their husbands, they would not participate.

The liaison worker spoke to a number of husbands and in emails and phone conversations to me explained how they had confirmed their stance of not wanting their wives to participate in the study. However, when Beena, the British Pakistani family support worker contacted women there was a significantly greater uptake in the study. Beena told me that when she spoke to husbands, she was able to address their concerns. However, as Crozier (2003) suggests, to what degree whiteness played a part in this is unclear, raising the issue of trust as an important factor. Indeed, for a community that might already feel itself under scrutiny, compounded by a social and political climate of suspicion and fear over topics such as radicalisation, trust may well have been an important element. It was also an early introduction to how whiteness and racial contexts threaded through the study. Best (2003) describes how considering these experiences through whiteness allows me to map the ways I, participants and those who did not participate might actively construct racial social orders and trust in ways that were ongoing from the beginning but also shifted and were never static.

The second point Edwards (1990) describes is an unwillingness by black women to share information with white women during interviews. Edwards (1990) concluded that by making her motives clear and acknowledging her position of difference at the start of the interviews, she was able to establish a sense of trust that led to a degree of openness. Best (2003) adds to this, examining how women adjusted their speech in her own research encounters. She concludes that, because of her whiteness, women did not expect her to understand aspects of their narratives and anticipated the need to adjust and explain their experiences in order to overcome this and help her understand. Yet she also suggests a desire by women, that she understand the subtleties of their narratives, arguing that she represented an opportunity for their experiences to reach beyond their community. Yet whilst Crozier (2003) raises the importance of trust in these research experiences, she also warns how disclosing elements of yourself can risk forcing 'whiteness' into the study. In this study, it appeared that women were open to sharing their experiences, yet husbands were reluctant and indeed suspicious. A gap of difference opened that the white liaison worker tried to overcome but could not; it took the family support worker who shared a cultural heritage and trust to bridge this<sup>21</sup>. Perhaps this was an element in why mothers, later in the research, did not want to meet and discuss how I worked with their narratives, and left evidence of their participation in the focus groups in the room.

I talked at the start of both focus groups about the research aims, the reasoning behind the study and an interest in listening to the stories and experiences women wanted to share with each other and me. However, during the focus group discussions, I became conscious of the shifting ways whiteness filtered through the exchanges. For example, the open and frank way women shared their experiences with each other surprised me. Indeed as I reflected upon the postcolonial feminist ethics, I felt uneasy. Were the women so open with their experiences because they had not shared them with others before? Yet, like Best (2003), I too became aware of the whiteness of my presence in the room and how this might

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<sup>21</sup>Although the white liaison worker had known the families for a number of years, she did not act surprised or bothered by the reluctance of the husbands, quickly turning to the British Pakistani family support worker for help. A few days later, the liaison worker rang me to say the family support worker had contacted her. She had spoken to a group of women and their husbands and the husbands had agreed to let the women come. When I spoke to the family support worker about this and thanked her for speaking to the husbands, she waved her hand at me and dismissed it saying 'They were not quite understanding' cutting the conversation short. I was never able to find out what she said that meant women participated.

have shaped the narratives of the focus groups. The discussions occasionally paused as women turned to explain something to me or drifted in to silence, as women did not complete their explanations but nodded in a shared agreement I was not part of. At other times, I felt the discussions continued as if I was not present, as women found shared experiences or points of reference I could not enter. This was particularly so in the larger second focus group as discussions were in part through a translator or when mothers cross translated for each other. I discuss this in the next section under intersectionality: silences and translations.

The third point Edwards (1990) makes is that of similarities and shared experiences, she reports how shared experiences of marriage and motherhood created connections that built a rapport and established intersecting experiences of care and caring that momentarily cut through her whiteness. During the focus group, particularly towards the end, women drew me closer in, talking about the experience of sharing their narratives, asking me questions about my experiences with my studies and (after the recorder had been switched off) more probing questions about who I was as a wife and mother<sup>22</sup>.

However, interestingly Best (2003) also observed how a shared whiteness entered an encounter when interviewing a white woman, where the participant whilst acknowledging race as an aspect in her experience would not engage with that in the interview for fear of racial stereotyping. Best (2003) reflects how a construction of whiteness had entered this encounter and created a silence. Within this study, the interview with the liaison worker similarly created an encounter of shared whiteness. Although I did not observe a silence as Best (2003) described, shared whiteness entered the encounter as the liaison worker reflected upon her experiences and then shared them with me. I was able to observe how whiteness threaded not only through the narratives she constructed about her day-to-day encounters with families and the subject of (non)engagement. It was also present in her hesitations and concerns as her whiteness entered the way she saw meaning in those experiences and then shared them with me, another white woman.

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<sup>22</sup>From my notes: 'After the focus group finished and I was packing up, some women and I began talking. The women asked me where I lived and how old my children were. I talked about my daughters for a bit. As we drank tea, I was asked a lot of questions about my job, why I was studying and my family. I was asked a lot more when I told them that I am divorced. One woman told me she thought I was a good mother.'

### 5.17 Voices: silences and silencing in/and (mis)translations

In many ways, a discussion of voice emphasises the intersection between positionality and whiteness both within the research topic and process. In this crossing and layering of differences the voices of women in the study were powerful features as they navigated silences, (mis)translations and interpretations within the narratives they built together. Understanding and responding to women's voices in the study became the third specific ethical challenge. I held in mind Pérez's (2003: 120) counsel to "allow for possibilities and interpretations of what exists in the gaps and silences but is often not seen or heard". This seemed particularly pertinent to examining voices within the study.

It was helpful, therefore, to begin by considering silence (not speaking) and silencing (not being heard) within this study. Wagner's (2012: 100) approach was helpful here as it focused the discussion of silences on "what silences do", and the position from which they are performed rather than what they are. For Wagner (2012) silences can become acts of resistance within the local political field. Considering silences and silencing as local level acts of resistance within the study, therefore, related well to my desire to engage in an ethics of care approach and to recognise how differences operated. Silences and silencing from and by women in this study materialised as pauses, sentences that trailed off and were never completed, interruptions and translations of one woman's narrative by another woman, different translations by different women and views and opinions that were not narrated to me and which were left unspoken within the encounters.

Drawing on Spivak, Wagner (2012) examines not only the unknown position from which women in the study performed silences and silencing but also the challenge in how, as researcher, I responded to these acts and then sought to reflect and engage with them during the analysis. Reflecting upon Wagner's (2012) questioning of silence and silencing as acts of resistance might allow this study to consider how to challenge not only the removal of voices of women from BAME communities on the topic of (non)engagement, but also how, even when their voices are heard, they are frequently marginalised by louder and more powerful socio-political narratives.

If voice and silences were not to be removed or marginalised in the study, it left an alternative that recognised them as complex and multidimensional. There were possibilities

that silences were themselves a power able to become part of the methodology and analysis of the study. Wagner's (2012) discussion regarding what silences do and the social position, in which they are conducted, enabled me to recognise the influence of the broader socio-political context in which women told their narratives. Thus, silences offered a way to analyse the social positioning of women in the study and me as researcher. Nagar-Ron and Motzafi-Haller (2011) suggest that women's agency might be articulated within the spaces between social and political contexts, in the multidimensional acts of silence, translation and silencing that mean women in the study might become "creative agents who shape not only their own social positioning but centrist narratives of gender, class and nationality" (Nagar-Ron and Motzafi-Haller, 2011: 654).

The marginalisation Mizrahi women experienced in the socio-political narratives of modern Israeli society, that Nagar-Ron and Motzafi-Haller (2011) examined, spoke to the depiction of women from BAME communities in the United Kingdom. In ways reminiscent of the narratives from women in this study, narratives of women from Mizrahi communities in the Nagar-Ron and Motzafi-Haller (2011) study were also fragmented and populated with silences. The entrenched sociocultural frameworks of Israeli society that marginalised the voices of women in that study also confounded any attempt by them to construct their experiences into a single coherent narrative able to challenge the legitimacy of stronger socio-political narratives.

These experiences confirm what Collins (2000) identifies. Namely, that the narratives of women, particularly women from ethnic minority communities, seldom conform to the dominant sociocultural narratives of the society they inhabit. In echoes of the narratives women in Nagar-Ron's and Motzafi-Haller's (2011) study, women in this study who immigrated into the country did not at first draw on their experiences of (non)engagement prior to their arrival in the U.K. However, as the narratives proceeded, these experiences began to enter discussions, as women made connections between earlier experiences and their current lives. Drawing on Bhabha (1994), it was in spaces such as these, in the gaps between the narratives of women in the study and the grand socio-political narratives, that women exhibited their agency. As they reflected and connected their experiences from their original home countries with their experiences in the United Kingdom narratives emerged, that could challenge dominant discourses of (non)engagement. I saw how the



narratives of small, quiet and local experiences of women in the study might speak to strong dominant narratives. This leads to considering the relationship that silence has with the suspicion the study initially aroused.

#### 5.18 Negotiating access: Suspicion and whiteness

As discussed, Alex, a white liaison worker was the initial contact with mothers about participating in the study. Alex did this in settings where she had worked for a number of years and built relationships with women and families in the local community. Alex distributed the research information and letter I provided, however she reported that a number of women who expressed an initial interest in the research returned to her saying that their husbands did not want them to participate. One husband contacted Alex directly asking about the study and said his wife could only participate if he was present in the room throughout the discussion. This was something I declined and so the woman did not participate.

The initial suspicion by husbands when the white female liaison worker approached women about participating in the study, apparently echoed Takeda's (2012) findings that husbands can treat research seeking the views of women with suspicion. Whilst for Takeda (2012) this suspicion appeared to be based on his gender as a male researcher; for this study it is possible that race and culture had a similar outcome. The involvement of Beena, the family support worker and a member of the local community, appeared able to address the husbands' initial concerns and gathered substantially more women willing to participate in the research. Whilst not being a member of a community apparently brought draw backs to me conducting this study in terms of initial trust that went beyond shared language and cultural experiences, this was not necessarily inevitable or negative.

Hall (2004) reports how her position as a white female researcher and outsider created more trust in the husbands of women she wanted to interview. Hall (2004) argues that husbands saw her as neutral and lacking the social connections with other members of the community. This meant that they were willing for their wives to participate in the research study because of the researcher's distance and separation from the community. Whilst I was not able to build that trust, Beena, as a respected member of the community, could

address the concerns of husbands and acted as the conduit with Alex enabling the study to proceed.

Two women told me they had not informed their husbands about participating in the research. Certainly one woman mentioned that she had chosen to participate in the study because she was interested in sharing her experiences and views with someone from outside the community. However, she had decided not to speak to her husband about it in case he did not want her to participate. As discussed above, women did not take the information sheets I provided and many did not leave me their contact numbers. I was left to draw on my own interpretations about the reasons for this whilst trying not to jump to any stereotypical conclusions. In her study of sexual segregation in Islamic societies, Abu-Lughod (1985) explores Bedouin society to reflect on how cultural segregation of sexes creates particular and complex relationships amongst women, that at times actively avoids the involvement of men. From a postcolonial feminist perspective, the relationships Abu-Lughod (1985) discusses are not subordinate to male society but rather seemingly exist in parallel, creating spaces where information flowing from women's social interactions into the male sphere are complex and often filtered and managed. In many ways, this appeared to echo the experiences of women in the study, who were open within the space of the focus group, sharing their experiences, yet appeared reluctant to take evidence of the research back into the wider community.

### 5.19 Conclusions

This chapter explored how, from an initial generic feminist research frame, postcolonial feminist and black feminist theories supported a more nuanced approach to this study. Developing a methodological and ethical approach afforded possibilities for articulating this study as an encounter with '...unrepresentable otherness' (Ahmed, 1998: 58). By doing so, my position as a white female researcher researching the experiences of women from BAME communities became an ongoing point of struggle that haunted my engagement in this study.

Drawing on Harding's (2004) argument I unwrapped how privilege associated with membership of dominant social and cultural groups might fail to equip researchers (including myself) with the resources (political and intellectual) to identify and therefore

challenge values that their (and my) position renders invisible. This suggests that meaningful ways need to be found to challenge the risks from assumptive practice that defines and manages 'problems' such as (non)engagement by members of less dominant social groups. Questioning how power associated with 'me', as a white, middle-class researcher related to the power/powerlessness of 'other', of women from BAME communities participating in the research process led to an exploration of ethics in this study.

I found myself in a liminal space, seeking to balance feminist research ethics with the issues that doing so raised for my involvement in this study. What appeared important to transforming my identity into an 'ethical researcher' was steeped in my personal ethical values, institutional research ethics and feminist research ethics. Transversal politics from black feminism raised possibilities for allegiances and mutuality that spoke of finding ways to navigate differences. Whilst postcolonial feminist ethics embodied the ultimate 'impossibility' of hoping to fully reconcile these ethical domains.

Engaging with Ahmed's (1998) response to this otherness, situated me within the study, positioned with the participants. Being 'present' within the study challenged me to consider how I might create a space that rendered me part of an encounter, but that did not lead to me dominating the encounter. Considering insider/outsider positionality helped, in some way, to resist me simply 'taking' responsibility for women participating in the study and reducing women to an 'other' who does not speak. Instead, I became part of a shared encounter, with the possibility that I might unlearn to 'speak for' women and rather find an ethics that enabled 'mutual' responsibility to translate the ideas created.

Part three moves on to analyse the narrated experiences shared by women in the study. Troubling concepts of (non)engagement and discourses of equality threading through contemporary early years policy, speaks of instability in understandings of sameness and difference embedded within their construction.

## Part Three. Analysis

In this third section, I examine how narratives of (non)engagement in the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) become a means by which to put a postcolonial feminist lens to work in order to unsettle the discourse of equality running through contemporary early years policy. To this end, I return to the overarching research question and the research questions leading from this.

The overarching question asked:

In what ways might the experiences of a small group of mothers from BAME communities who are engaging with the two-year-old offer, help unsettle expectations of engagement and non-engagement with ECEC policies and beyond?

In order to respond to this, I draw upon the following questions to structure the analysis.

1. How might the language of 'school readiness' in the two-year-old offer, free childcare and wider ECEC policy shape encounters mothers from BAME communities have with early years education and care?
2. What might the experiences of mothers from BAME communities offer to professional expectations about sameness and difference in enacting ECEC policies?
3. What might mothers' encounters of (non)engagement with professionals outside ECEC practice do to unsettle notions of sameness and difference beyond ECEC policies?
4. In what ways might mothers' experiences of (non)engagement contribute to ideas of (non)engaged citizens?
5. Methodologically, what are the challenges, affordances and contributions made by engaging postcolonial theory and feminist research in a study working with women from BAME communities in a small area of South Manchester?

I use themes of ruptures, ambiguity and precarity to explore the experiences of mothers in relation to these questions.

### Ruptured boundaries

This analysis grapples with how the construction of boundaries between sameness and difference, figure throughout this study. Whilst I try to deconstruct boundaries created by discourses of (non)engagement and equality in policy, I simultaneously construct boundaries of sections and chapters throughout this document, in a struggle to clarify and structure the research. Yet the research topic and research experiences themselves leak through ruptures in the boundaries of this document, unsettling endeavours at order and synchronicity. Ruptures disrupt this study's topic and my documenting of the research process.

### Ambiguity: knowing, acting, being

Ambiguity haunts this analysis. Processes of knowing, acting and being appear ambiguous in terms of both the research focus on (non) engagement and equality discourses, as well as the research process of working with postcolonial feminism. What emerges is the value of ambiguity and a willingness to engage with it; attempts to maintain authority and control by rendering uncertainty less visible, arguably denies possibilities that arise from working with ambiguity.

### Precarity

Drawing on Butler (2009), precarity suggests unpredictability within societies and the fragility and vulnerabilities of all individuals and communities. What is interesting in the narratives are the ways political actions might create precarity for some whilst others experience stability. As with ambiguity, recognising the precarious nature of society and the impact precarity can have upon individuals and communities, offers a means to analyse concepts of sameness and difference in equality discourses within this study as well as within government policy.

## Chapter 6.

### 6.1 Introduction

Within this chapter, I explore extracts of data to analyse how narratives of women in this study might respond to the first two research questions.

Section one, draws on data to open up how the language of a neoliberal equality discourse in the two-year-old offer and wider ECEC policy might shape the way early childhood education and care professionals encounter mothers from BAME communities. Working mainly with the data from an interview with LW Alex, this section analyses how the neoliberal equality discourse threaded in the language of ECEC policies, could be understood to shape the actions of an early years professional delivering the two year-old offer.

In the second section, data from mothers troubles an apparent reliance on ECEC policies to maintain an equality discourse of sameness. The experiences of mothers could be seen as unsettling professional expectations in response to research question two. I explore what the experiences of mothers from BAME communities might offer to professional expectations about sameness and difference in enacting ECEC policies.

### 6.2 Section one. Ambiguity and mimicry: the demands the language of neoliberal equality discourse places on policy makers and mothers.

Drawing primarily upon the experiences of the liaison worker, this section interrogates how the language of the neoliberal equality discourse filters out of ECEC policy to make demands of those tasked with implementing its aims. Robertson and Hill (2014) suggest that neoliberal marketization has created early childhood education and care as a site for ensuring 'school readiness'. Reinforced by normalising truths within the curriculum, it maps out linear and universal development of young children in ways that render sameness as ideal and difference as problematic. I want to stay with the language of 'school readiness' and also 'choice' and 'disadvantage' discussed in chapter two, to explore how the language of policy could be seen to shape the ways an ECEC professional engages with neoliberal discourses in her practice.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the language of policy, such as *'school readiness'*, *'prime areas'* and *'developing skills of independence'* appeared in Liaison Worker Alex's discussion (Appendix II: xliii) about her work with mothers from BAME communities. The creators of policies that champion neoliberal equality arguably require professionals to become its protectors. The two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) manages 'problems' of difference in parents' (non)engagement with this discourse by essentially beginning the process at an earlier point. Arguably, successive governments perform acts of guardianship of neoliberal equality, through policies that strengthen sameness and reduce difference in ways that demand ever-increasing levels of engagement by parents already identified as problematically different (Gewirtz, 2001). For example, Liaison worker Alex (LW Alex) (Appendix II: xxxvi) offered an insight into the challenges and expectations a neoliberal discourse created in her daily practice:

*'LW Alex: .... I do supervise, plan with and monitor the 'stay and play' groups for local parents who bring their children into the centre. ... when I go in I kind of 'model' without saying to them 'why are you standing watching?' and 'this is what I want you to do'. It's more I kind of go in and sit on the floor, always sit on the floor, and whatever the child is doing I sort of, as in early years, good early years practice of supporting children in self-chosen play; I support the child and extend, hoping that the parents are picking up on what I'm doing.*

...

*L W Alex: ... we are starting a group, a targeted group, for eligible two's. Now those parents, in time, we haven't got it set up yet because we've just got the data from city council. These will be children ... who are eligible for the two year funded place but for whatever reason they're not taking it up.*

...

*L W Alex: ... for the outreach workers to go into the homes to work with parents to show them what they can do in the home. So it's not all about bringing them into here to do great and wonderful things, it's about what can you do at home. Which if I had the time I could do very quickly. But, you know, it's another of those*

*... I can set things up but then I don't have time to monitor, to check outcomes, to you know ... it's another of those things ...*

...

*L W Alex: ... it's a huge job.'*

Some of Alex's language in this extract gestures to colonising practices, '*I support the child ... hoping that the parents are picking up on what I'm doing*'. This could suggest how the language of 'school readiness', written into ECEC policy, shapes the encounters LW Alex has with mothers, as the Other who might achieve equality by acting like the same '*as in ... good early years practice of supporting children in self-chosen play*'. Through '*picking things up*' and '*show[ing] them what they can do in the home*' the Other might better perform the observable criteria of 'school readiness' embedded in the language of the two-year-old offer. However, the language of neoliberal discourse that links parental 'choice' with 'disadvantage' may simultaneously create tensions in practice. For example, LW Alex is required to monitor continuously her own practice and that of her staff.

*'L W Alex: So the planning is done with me, and it's very much based on the prime areas. I can give you a planning sheet if you want before you go. Just so you can see the kind of thing we do. There's quite a long evaluation on that because obviously we need to know that what they're doing is making a difference. Opportunities to talk about 'next steps, and to follow each child, or some children. So it is all kind of changing in terms of ... groups have always been open to everybody, but now because of the lack of people resource we're having to target our groups a lot more narrowly. Which is a shame but ...'*

The language of policy places expectations on professionals to meet neoliberal equality requirements of monitoring and assessment, not only of children and families, but also self-monitoring and self-assessment as they collect evidence to 'prove' how their practices are equipping 'disadvantaged' children to be 'school ready'. Yet no similar critique appears to be made of the neoliberal discourse that creates the language of school readiness '*... because obviously we need to know that what they're doing is making a difference.*' Such language that heavily dominates and dictates practitioners' planning and assessment seems to remain secure, invisible.



This language of school readiness, choice and disadvantage threads through the narratives of LW Alex as she coordinates her staff to target families identified in policy as being 'at risk' of not "...meet[ing] their responsibilities to their children ..." (DFES, 2005: 1). In these encounters, the risk identified by the equality discourse in the two-year-old offer, is also subtly interpreted by LW Alex (Appendix II: xxxix) as possibly 'being risky'.

*L W Alex: ... I tried to do some tracking with the parents, which is interesting as well. Because, as you will know, when you track children, even with an interpreter to interpret some of the aspects, the early years aspects, everybody can do everything because they think you are asking them because you ... parents are anxious that they sound as if the children ... they're not honest in short. So that didn't really work. So the whole kind of format needs to be thought very clearly about.*

*R: What you are going to do?*

*L W Alex: Yes, because it can't be like that. And it won't be just coming in for one session. It'll be 'this is what you've come in for. This is what you can do at home following on.' And the outreach workers will visit them at home, and I've been trained in REAL. Do you know REAL? Raising early attainment in literacy?*

...

*L W Alex: Absolutely wonderful. Probably the best training I've been on for a long time. That was wonderful training. So I'm hoping we can use their materials, even though they're geared at three year olds I can easily knock them down a bit for twos. And they can use their materials when they go into peoples' homes. So that's kind of going to be going on.*

...

*L W Alex: ... So it was, it's getting the timing right. Their idea of school readiness which isn't just for threes, back to twos. I want to start it with the parents in the two year room now. I don't want to do it just as this quick fix thing in July so they're ready for September. But that's going to be a challenge because 'Why do you want to talk to me about getting ready for school when they're not going for*

*two years?’ so I think ... there’s barriers to get across, some of it’s cultural, some of it isn’t and I think some of it is to do with restrictions placed on them from other family members, let’s say. Mother in laws as well, in my experience follow them around ‘where are you going? What are you doing? Who are you doing it with?’ often live with them, so they’re very, very controlled. So, you know, it’s quite hard to get people on their own to talk, to tell you what they’re doing and what they’d like to do.’*

Here, LW Alex’s narrative hints at how the neoliberal equality discourse requires state observation, assessment and measurement of parents’ ability to perform choice ‘correctly’, and early years professionals’ ability to ensure the rights of the disadvantaged child to “... fulfil their potential ...” and “... make the most of their abilities and talents as they grow up” (DfE, 2014:5). Children and their families are simultaneously positioned as both ‘at risk’ of failure and ‘risky’, whereby (non)engagement by mothers hampers professionals’ efforts to help their children be school ready.

The role this ECEC policy language plays in forming professional expectations that filter into encounters and relationships with mothers from BAME communities, might be understood to reflect a process described by Bhabha (1994) during which subjects of colonial rule are required to adopt behaviours of camouflage. The purpose of camouflage is not to disappear into the background, but rather to adopt the appearance of the background in order to exist within it. In encounters with mothers, the language of ‘school readiness’ shapes professionals’ expectations that mothers adopt the behaviour of helping their two-year-old children get ready for school ‘... I want to start it with the parents in the two year room now. I don’t want to do it just as this quick fix thing in July so they’re ready for September’.

Failure to camouflage hints at the distrust of difference that hampers the drive for sameness sought in the neoliberal discourse ‘... there’s barriers to get across, some of it’s cultural, some of it isn’t and I think some of it is to do with restrictions placed on them from other family members, let’s say. Mother in laws as well, in my experience follow them around ‘where are you going? What are you doing? Who are you doing it with?’ ... so they’re very, very controlled.’ Working with Bhabha’s ideas of mimicry, ECEC policy language that premises “... what parents do with their children at home is a powerful predictor of attainment at ages three, five and seven” (DfES, 2005: 7) might suggest a certain

appearance of sameness that those ‘targeted’ to engage with the two-year-old offer must demonstrate. For a neoliberal equality discourse, asking mothers ‘Where *are you going? What are you doing? Who are you doing it with?*’ is simultaneously seen as controlling when emanating from within the family, but arguably reframed as ‘... *good early years practice of supporting children*’ when emanating from policy-makers and early years professionals.

### 6.3 Ambiguity and Precarity.

Bhabha’s ‘mimicry’ articulates the ambiguous, slippery nature of sameness and difference that emanates from the language of ECEC policies and complicates efforts by neoliberal discourse to constrain difference. The equality discourse in ECEC policy seeks to smooth difference into ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ categories of difference. As LW Alex (Appendix II: xxxvii) expresses:

*‘Now there are quite a lot of parents who voluntarily do not want their child to come, because they feel they’re too young. That’s good from my point of view, that’s good but it’s also bad. If it’s that they were doing something nice with them at home, that would be good; but my outreach team tell me that actually isn’t the case. They are in front of the TV or being ignored, not ignored, but left to get on’.*

The neoliberal equality discourse shaping LW Alex’s ambiguous defining of what is acceptable and unacceptable difference, struggles to recognise difference beyond the risk it presents. The language of ECEC policy for “school readiness” and “... no child gets left behind” (DfE, 2017: 5) appears to constrain what LW Alex and the outreach team can accept as ‘... *doing something nice with them at home*’ and not accept and dismiss as ‘... *being ignored, not ignored, but left to get on*’. Yet the language of school readiness also echoes in the narratives of mothers in the study, providing brief glimpses perhaps, of the subtle adopting of equality discourses. ‘Qualities’ that suggest the successful attainment of equality emerge in the words mothers use in the narratives. For example, Astur (Appendix I: vii) states ‘*They’ve got fruit, singing time, phonics time*’, and ‘... *from ‘birth to three years old and they go to school*’, and Dalal (Appendix III: lxi) speaking through the translator ‘... *she know like reading time, she has got lots of rules and boundaries.*’

The narratives of mothers and LW Alex might indicate something more than simply absorbing the language of ECEC policy and acting in accordance with it. Analysing the

language of ECEC policy in the narratives, suggests the neoliberal equality discourse generates precarity through its demand for action. By this, I mean analysing how the language demands actions, exposes the limitations and disparity of these actions. For example, the EYFS (DfE, 2017: 10) refers to the prime area of listening and attention that sets out an expectation that “children listen attentively in a range of situations”. For LW Alex (Appendix II: xxxviii) it appears this policy expectation resulted in a demand for action that results in certain expectations of children, and through the children their parents, particularly mothers:

‘So they’re babied, particularly, and I will say this because you know this is my experience, particularly boys. And I went to observe a letters and sounds session the other day at \_\_\_\_\_ [name of local centre], which was very good. And the children who, this was for threes, but the children were just three, the children who will not sit down, even for two minutes, and this is terribly, this is awful to say it really, but they kind of pampered, over-dressed, over fed little boys.’

Through LW Alex’s expectations, attempts by mothers to engage with their children creates precarity for them and their children. Taking their children to the early years setting and the expectations of ECEC policy, exposes both children and mothers to boundaries of being othered as different and failing. Through not sufficiently meeting a policy expectation of sameness, to be able to “listen attentively” (DfE, 2017: 10), a damning charge of being different ‘... kind of pampered, over-dressed, over-fed little boys’ is laid against child and mother. An early years professional driven to seek sameness in her encounters creates boundaries of prejudicial difference that renders precarious her work to support families in meaningful ways. Through demands of sameness mother, child, early years professional and the ECEC policy are made precarious. Badr (Appendix I: xxiii) appears to recognise how this demand to act in accordance with sameness, will render her approach to motherhood as different and therefore precarious

‘Badr: Now I, know my son’s still sleeping in the same room as me although he’s nearly seven, and he should be in his own bedroom and now I’m saying to my husband, we’ve got a bunkbed for both of them. It’s time that we need to put them both in their own rooms. I mean sometimes even now he says

‘Oh mummy I want to sleep with you’. Because my husband works nights so I say ‘No. You’ve got your own bed and I’m going to give you your own room’. But it doesn’t mean that I’m not his mum or I don’t love him, or I love him less. It’s just this thing, whereas in Pakistan, or ... there’s like this bond where the children sleep with the mum and dad sometimes and you know this culture’s different.’

Bhabha might refer to this precarity as an emptiness lurking behind the mask of mimicry. He argues the identity of the Other is not hiding in encounters such as those in the example above, rather it is empty, the identity of the Other has gone, consumed by the sameness of the actions demanded by the discourse of equality. This suggests precarity not only silences the history behind the creation of such a discourse, but also limits alternate approaches to equality.

For Derrida, *différance* offers a means to articulate the complex processes of understanding how ideas, such as equality become precarious. His premise suggests that the language of ECEC policy is itself ambiguous, untraceable to any particular starting point that does not relate to ideas that preceded it, influenced it or will in the future continue to do so. Returning to the example above, threaded within the goal that young children should be able to listen attentively in different situations lies a history of untraceable ideas and expectations that have led to this. There is ambiguity in what the act of ‘listening attentively’ should look like, and what ‘situations’ this might happen in. Emerging from language such as this, come expectations of how young children should be made ready for school and the choices mothers of children seen to be at a disadvantage can make if their difference is seen as problematic. It leads to actions by early years professionals such as LW Alex (appendix II: xl)

*‘And the outreach workers will visit them at home, and I’ve been trained in REAL ... So I’m hoping we can use their materials, even though they’re geared at three year olds I can easily knock them down a bit for twos. And they can use their materials when they go into peoples’ homes.’*

For Derrida, these will inevitably be just one small part of a wider set of ideas of equality and the structures relating to it. The narratives of women in the study, suggest nuanced

perspectives to (non)engagement with the equality discourse in ECEC policies, and intimate at an endless complex network of ideas, structures and actions rather than a linear path to an 'ultimate truth' of equality through (non)engagement.

#### 6.4 ECEC policy language and interpellation

The demand for action to 'listen attentively', leaks from policy into practice in ways reminiscent of the concept 'interpellation'. The demand for action in the language of ECEC policy suggests a hail to engage with a universal ideology, making the individual a social subject. There is guilt and compulsion in the individual's response to interpellation's hail. Applying this idea, ECEC policies hail mothers from BAME communities to 'choose' to engage with the equality discourse, a western neoliberal version of a universal ideology, their children should be able to "... sit down even for two minutes" and not be "babied". Yet for Butler (2009), doing so opens a space as an encounter with the Other. If the government policy makers, local authority officials and early years professionals are subjects who enact this hail to mothers from BAME communities, then Butler questions why mothers do/not respond and (not)engage.

Applying Butler's thinking here, might suggest traces of guilt in language that creates deficit narratives about women from BAME communities, a pre-existing relationship complicating the way mothers respond to the equality discourse. In LW Alex's narrative, '*... when you track children, even with an interpreter ... everybody can do everything ... parents are anxious that they sound as if the children ... they're not honest in short*' choosing to respond or not, arguably, comes with a cost, but also offers a gap for resistance to an authorising call to become the same. The act of resisting, not responding, apparently risks further scrutiny and calls to comply. This call to engage with ECEC policy could create precarity; the decision to engage or not, may render mothers who are called (*'targeted'*) precarious.

ECEC policy's call for school readiness and ensuring "... no child gets left behind" (DfE, 2017: 5) could be understood to render both mothers and professionals precarious as they enact the policy. As discussed earlier, the demand for action placed on professionals means LW Alex must assess levels of engagement by mothers. There are hints of precarity she much complete '*... quite a long evaluation*' because '*... we need to know.*' There appear to be implications, a risk from not knowing, engagement is rendered precarious. For mothers

there are hints of precarity in the risk of becoming members of 'a *targeted group, for eligible two's ... who are eligible for the two year funded place but for whatever reason they're not taking it up*' (Appendix II: xxxvii). Mothers who do not respond to the hail could be understood to represent a stranger incompatible with Ahmed's (2008) desirable and committed citizen this hail seeks.

In responding to the hail this language creates, mothers may be accepting the liberal bargain, becoming the ideal engaged mother. Meeting expectations '*... to do great and wonderful things*' (Liaison worker Alex, Appendix II: xiv) and accepting a '*western culture[s] ... more emphasis on routine and like ... the child should ... you know, go out to nursery and play and have friends and things*' (Badr, Appendix I: xxiii). Accepting the hail might mean mothers not only agree to a deficit, a disadvantage, that needs addressing, but open up their homes to scrutiny in order to be part of the 'shared values' of '*an interested group of people*' the discourse of equality seeks.

*L W Alex: ... And I think the going into homes ... if they have a very clear 'this is what we're doing today'. Like we'll do this lovely scrap book idea of environmental print which is a lovely thing to do with children ... I think it's just getting the ... if I say the right group of people I don't mean the 'right' group, but in terms of measuring impact you do need an interested group of people. You don't want to go round when you've arranged a visit and them not be in. Because that's what's happened before. I'll say 'have you been to see ...' 'Yes well, I'm sure they were in but they wouldn't open the door'. That happens a lot, we want them to say 'Great \_\_\_\_\_ [colleague's name]' that's one of our workers, '... is coming today with a lovely bag of things to do'. It's going to take twenty minutes and we can leave you with it and you can do things on your own. So yes it's all being worked on.*

(LW Alex, Appendix II: xlvi)

Drawing on postcolonial theory, the history about mothers constructed in the language of ECEC policy, not only shapes how mothers from BAME communities might be called to act in encounters, but also opens a space for resistance. For example, on governmental, local and individual levels, recognising precarity and ambiguity in the language of ECEC policy,

might loosen the constraints of historical “myths and prejudices” (Fanon, 2008: 167) that haunt western perspectives about difference in ECEC practice.

*L W Alex: Still in nappies, mothers have no interest in getting them out of nappies because they don't want to. The child doesn't want to. So there's a big job on our hands to really developing skills of independence, which starts before they're three and, ... getting ready for school starts when you're a baby actually. So in terms of my experience, that has been ... and that isn't just South Asian. ... Again not making any great generalisations, but there isn't a strong play culture with the children I worked with there in the families. ... Because parents can't see, if they don't understand the value of play, they can't see that they can learn through it ... Predominant lack of interest in play, and I am told by mainly Pakistani workers, that that's because it is not in their culture. They're busy, traditionally they're busy, their words not mine, 'cooking, cleaning, looking after men' so they haven't got time to play with the children. The children in turn learn very early that they have to just get on, on their own ... If they're creative children or they've had opportunities to be outside, or whatever. They can do quite a lot, and that's a skill, isn't it, that a lot of other children who are directed all the time actually can't do. So it isn't all bad, being left, you know ... it's not just a kind of South Asian thing, but it's not all bad if it is. Because children can learn to get on, and that's a good skill ...'*

(LW Alex, Appendix II: xxxviii)

Precarity recognises the history placed on mothers. Mothers represent a signified Other who ‘...have no interest in getting [their children] out of nappies because they don't want to,’ and who are subject to the interpellation hail ‘... a big job on our hands’. Yet precarity might also rupture the boundaries these histories construct. The following section in this chapter is devoted to the spaces that open where mothers have opportunities to respond to, and reflect on, why this equality discourse places problematic difference on them. The data I draw on could be understood to unsettle the equality discourse shaping government, local authorities and individual professionals such as LW Alex, and gives rise to possibilities through the mothers’ questioning. Their unsettling questions seem to loosen the grip on striving for images of sameness, instead finding value in patterns of difference. I use the



idea of 'ambiguity' to evoke a willingness to be open to the unsettling experience of questioning the language of ECEC policy and the limitations to an equality discourse built on predefined 'shared' values. Although responding to an interpellation hail emanating from a neoliberal equality discourse, narratives by mothers in the study indicate a quiet resistance. Engaging with the two-year-old offer opens up a space for a counter interpellation, a hail emanating from mothers to local authority officials, health and early years professional and the narratives and discourses of 'shared values' they voice. This is something I explore through research question two.

#### 6.5 Section two. What the experiences of mothers might offer to professional expectations about sameness and difference in enacting ECEC policies

In the focus groups, mothers' narratives seem to offer a response to the hail of problematic difference in the language of ECEC policy and reflected in LW Alex's narrative. ECEC policies create discourses of engagement as promoting "... teaching and learning to ensure children's 'school readiness'" (DfE, 2017: 5) that focuses on educational knowledge and skills; yet narratives shared by mothers hint at ambiguity through subtle experiences that problematise any 'choice' to conform to a linear and universalised 'school readiness'. The narratives of mothers unsettle concerns about skills of independence and the value of play that LW Alex spoke of. Instead mothers talked about their young children being upset or frightened.

*'Astur: So she's really, really settled as well. Once she gets to know, she's that sort of a person. Once she gets to know you and she thinks 'Okay, mummy's just gone, but she came back' at first she kind of thought I was leaving her for good or something and that's why she had kind of a melt down and cried and things like that. Wow, it's a major step for her! ... So when it was her time she felt like 'I don't want to stay!' she kind of changed her mind. But now she's really, really settled.*

...

*Badr: ... But since then the SureStart keyworker was really helpful because I explained my situation and then like I insisted if I could get a two year old place for \_\_\_\_ (child's name) quite urgently and they helped me get the place. And the nursery, I think she must have made a special referral or added something in and*

*supported me on the application. And I was really glad to get her a place, and now she's so much settled. ... I'm starting to feel a bit more that, you know I've got some time to myself and I can feel a bit more alive. Because it's been really rough all through that time.*

...

*Badr: We used to live in \_\_\_\_\_ (names another area in the city, the same area A mentioned earlier)*

*Astur: Oh I came from there.*

...

*Badr: Yeah? Okay. But it's a nice community. And like there's things going on at the Sure Start centre.'*

(Appendix I: vi)

Experiences such as illness and movement within and between communities in the city, hint at complex experiences unrecognized in the hail to respond to the expectations of a neoliberal discourse. Davis (2012) suggests that if we entangle multiple possibilities of interpellation, then there is space for all subjects to hail and respond. There is space for mothers from BAME communities to hail those in authority to respond. This might appear a naïve reading, yet within this analysis government policy makers, LW Alex (and me as researcher) exist in a direct relationship, a real point in time and space with mothers as the signified other. A place that might be open to and willing to respond to a counter hail emanating from mothers that unsettles professional expectations of sameness and difference. For example, mothers spoke of concerns about the pressures that expectations to engage with the two-year-old offer put on their children:

Dalal (speaking through an interpreter) spoke of her own fears (Appendix III: lxii):

*FSW Beena: 'Before when I was giving her to this two years nursery. It was unknown fear. What is going to happen to her? Is she going to settle down? Or will she come back with lots of fear and crying. Now I'm okay''*

Mothers also valued the benefits they felt their children gained from accepting the two-year-old offer, (Bahja, Appendix III: lxvii):

*'No nothing negative. It is all positive and we should encourage parents as well,'*

In addition, Cala (through FSW Beena) (Appendix III: lxiv)

*'... What is she going to do without mum and dad? New area, new field. And now she's very happy when she comes with her smiling face. ....'*

The data above from the narratives of mothers and LW Alex offer professionals two interesting points for discussion about sameness and difference. Firstly, the freedom local government officials and early years professionals have in building relationships with families that they cannot force to engage; and secondly resulting from this, is a perceived view of parental engagement as somewhat passive.

#### 6.6 The freedom early years professionals have to build relationships with families they cannot force to engage.

LW Alex's narrative expresses how the actions of early years professionals, as much as parents, are organised by adherence to policies, from national governmental level, through government initiatives and into individual encounters with mothers. Policies require local government officials and early years professionals to act and identify children eligible for the two-year-old offer, encourage and monitor engagement by mothers *'...a targeted group, for eligible two's. ... who are eligible for the two year funded place but for whatever reason they're not taking it up'*. For example, the disturbance of *'for whatever reason they're not taking it up'*, suggests limits to the actions of local governments and early years professionals.

By this I mean, national governments may espouse qualities and values representative of social equality, such as fundamental British values (DfE, 2014c), yet governments cannot force them on individuals without negating what they represent. Local government policies and institutional processes may monitor and encourage engagement by those identified as 'disadvantaged' and different to act in accordance with this equality discourse. However, this same equality discourse also limits how far it can go in 'monitoring' and 'encouraging' the choices families make. The idea of mimicry allows for discussion about how enforcing

sameness through equality of opportunity too rigorously is to deny that same equality. Therefore, LW Alex (Appendix II: xxxvi) is not insisting but rather '**hoping that the parents are picking up on what I'm doing**' and will '**... work with parents to show them what they can do**'. LW Alex must balance enacting values and attributes of sameness in the equality discourse in such a way as not to negate them by forcing mothers to engage. However, the narratives also mention occasions when this has failed. For example, when the demands of national government (in the form of OFSTED) dislocate the values it extols in the individual lives of people it claims to support. Under the gaze of an early years professional charged with extolling the values of this equality discourse, it becomes mockery (Bhabha, 1994). Referring to how she felt the influence of OFSTED had led to the ending of a popular community group, LW Alex recalls:

*'Their way of working was very personable, but sadly doesn't fit in now with all the criteria that we have to satisfy OFSTED with. So it was based on relationships, which to me is more important than anything else, however, doesn't seem to be now. So those groups have been changed.'*

(Appendix II: xliii)

The experience above suggests that reaching out to those who are different, at times requires local authority government officials and early years professionals to act to enforce one set of values whilst alienating themselves from other equality values. Policies might not only control but also reduce the scope early years professionals have in their relationships with children and families. The requirement to '*satisfy OFSTED*' apparently not only limits actions to those focused on individual children to meet observable and measurable criteria, they also steer early years professionals away from actions that resonate with group rights '*based on relationships*'. Building on this, I turn to the second point I want to raise from the data extracts above.

### 6.7 Parental engagement as passive.

The second point the experiences of mothers open up is how ECEC policies might be seen to promote a somewhat passive approach to engagement. In chapter two, I highlighted how a neoliberal equality discourse of 'choice' appears throughout ECEC policies, linking choice with children's improved prospects of succeeding at school (DfEE, 1998) and increasing

'quality' in ECEC provision (DfE, 2013). Yet how a neoliberal equality discourse tasks parents with the responsibility to support their child's educational success, arguably renders engagement relatively passive. Engagement appears premised upon conforming to the expectations of professionals. For example, LW Alex only required parents to be '*picking up on what I'm doing*' and not offering their own ideas or contributions.

Policy expectations to conform to narrow and prescribed notions of equality might limit the capacity early years professionals have to look beyond the individual child and the policy criteria, to recognise and respond to behaviours of difference. In addition, mothers' use of ECEC language intimates processes of mimicry as camouflage and may also suggest they act to meet these expectations. Indeed, this also extends into the language of ECEC policies. For example, in the EYFS (2017) 'engagement' appears twice, referring once to early years practitioners engaging parents to continue "... guiding their child's development at home" (DfE, 2017:10) and once to assist families in engaging specialised support; non-engagement does not appear.

From a postcolonial feminist perspective, mothers engaging with the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) are best placed to critique (non)engagement with policy. In the narratives above, mothers speak of engagement in complex terms that dispute concepts of passive engagement. Mothers speak of (non)engagement in terms of well-being, having a say and engaging with something unknown. For example, mothers articulate active engagement, referring to concerns about '[not being] *quite ready*', '*unknown fear*' and '*What is she going to do without mum and dad?*' Mothers also speak of having control of engagement and seeing benefits '*I think September will be a good time; and you know it was*', '*Now I'm okay*', '*It is all positive and we should encourage parents as well*,' and '*now she's very happy when she comes with her smiling face*'. In their narratives, mothers speak as voices of difference living within the boundaries (or territories) of sameness, that reflects Bhabha's (1994) notion of mimicry as camouflage.

The experiences of mothers, who are engaging with this discourse of equality, offer language of engagement not generally found in ECEC policies, such as '*lots of fear and crying*' and '*very happy ... with her smiling face*'. 'Happy' appears once in the EYFS (DfE, 2017), 'happiness' does not appear; neither do they appear in the EYFSP (2016). 'Happiness' does not appear in Gibb et al's (2011) study, but 'happy' does appear three times, twice

with reference to settings signing up for the two-year-old offer and accepting children with disability, and once with reference to parents and the hours settings offered. 'Crying' does not appear in any of these documents. 'Pressure' does not appear in the EYFS or the EYFSP; whilst Gibb et al (2011) refer to pressure four times, three in connection to local authorities and settings concerning costs and standards of free childcare and once about settings running open days for families to view their premises without pressure.

Policies might imagine mothers from BAME communities as consumers of an equality discourse, willing to recognise and expect that professionals offer advice they will accept and act on. However, this cannot escape the subtle element of menace in a performance of not being quite the same nor the missed opportunities to respond to the language mothers might offer to policy makers.

LW Alex's experiences resonates with Crozier's (2009) findings that teachers risk placing homogenising stereotypes on parents regarding aspirations for their children. Mothers' experiences of performing the neoliberal ideal of choice and quality providers with "high-calibre staff and more choice for parents" (DfE, 2013: 5) also limited Bahja's ability to engage with the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014). Bahja's (Appendix III: lii) high aspirations for her child led her to raise concerns about the settings providing the two-year-old offer.

*'Yes, when she was two, I was looking forward to send her somewhere. ... But finally she got a place and it was a private nursery. I send her over there, and I wasn't happy. ... Honestly, I really want to say, all they are doing, they are just money making. ... I'm not saying they were doing any harm to children but the atmosphere, and the place was so dirty, and my daughter, she was not learning anything. I thought this is just a waste of time. ... It was really bad experience for me ... I was trying really hard, pushing for her to get a place in these nurseries ... and thankfully she got a place here. .. She's more confident and I can see her difference ...'*

This might reflect an emphasis on relationships and trust with the settings mothers sent their children to, as Abir (Appendix III: lvii) also spoke of building trust when she recalled

*'Yes with SureStart. When I had my daughter first I was here alone because my husband was renewing his visa back there in Bangladesh. I was alone. I was*

*pregnant and then I had my child and I didn't have anything. So the SureStart helped me. ... I am really happy with this place and it is really helpful and nice ...'*

Demonstrating the attributes of a neoliberal "... fully responsible subject" (Stranger, 2018), Bahja seemed prepared to engage with the two-year-old offer, but not at any cost. Gibb et al (2011) recognise the need for sufficient places to meet demand, but for mothers in the study other concerns did not mean accepting a place anywhere. For Abir, building trust in people and a setting that offered her support seemed important. Mothers in the study were not seeking childcare in order to work, and their approach to the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) reflected this. Giving their young child to a stranger in a setting did not seem to be an easy task, *'It was unknown fear. What is going to happen to her? Is she going to settle down?'* (Dalal, through a translator, Appendix III: lxii). Whilst these narratives represent only the experiences of a small group of mothers from BAME communities, they intimate at how policies that represent mothers as strangers and boundary markers cannot benefit from the complex decisions and consequences that accompany mothers' (non)engagement.

#### 6.8 Entangled childhood memories

In their narratives, mothers recall memories of their own childhoods. Recollections, stories of conflict and pressure reflect hybridity, as history in the process of happening, and offer ways to explore sameness and difference in ECEC policies.

*'Astur: Well my mum, actually we moved out from there when we were young and the war happened. As you grow up, as a teenager, when you ask questions of where you come from. It is like you hear all about the countries and fights and this and that. But you don't really hear before the fights. Of how your childhood is.*

*R: Yeah*

*Astur: pause. Because you feel like people just struggled and you kind of ... your memories just go away sometimes. So obviously, memory is not just go from my mum but from us. Because you grow up and you become a teenager and life just was quite difficult. And so you look back and you think 'oh, did I do that?' 'How was it like?' So we had to ask our mum 'what was I like?' and not us remember it.*

*Laughs. So yeah, it's quite funny because we only remember like the grown up bit. But I forgot the memory of what it was like, what it felt like when I was much younger.*

*R: Yeah? So do you remember leaving Mogadishu and coming here? Or do you only remember being here?*

*Astur: No actually I remember. Cos my mum left first. So my dad was looking after us.*

*R: Oh right?*

*Astur: so she left and she used to stay in Italy and work there. And she was studying. And then the fight happened, so my dad was looking after us. And obviously we had all family members, my grandma was there. My mum's side, my dad's side. My aunties, my cousins. Some of them are here now. They tell us like 'oh I used to look after you when you were a child. I can't believe you've grown up. You have kids!' laughs'.*

(Appendix I: iii)

When Bahja, in the second focus group (Appendix III: lxvii), recalled her childhood in Pakistan she referred several times to the pressure her parents placed on her.

*'Bahja: You know when I was three, I used to go nursery. I was two and a half. My mum was a teacher and my parents were really into ... very ... very determined. They were not highly educated, but they always encouraged me, and I think I'm not, I'm also doing the same thing. But they've done really well with me. Laughs. And when I was two and a half my mum used to always bring some basic books, the books in Pakistan were dual language books then or English books. And when I was three I used to go to Nursery and when I was three and a half I used to read stories. And when I went from nursery to proper school, because I was so small, teacher used to say 'why, she's too small. Can she read?' My mum, in Pakistan they take a test before they ... enter, before admission, yes before admission. And because I used to go to nursery, my mum was a teacher and she worked so hard*



*with me. And when they took my test they were so surprised, 'We didn't know a three years-old child can read!' ...*

*R: Right.*

*Bahja: ... and they took me in their school because I passed their test. Yeah, and so because I was brought up that way, I don't know if it is the same experience, but yeah, because they put pressure on me when I was tiny though. Laughs.'*

From a postcolonial feminist perspective, these narratives speak of *différance* that unsettle how ECEC policies understand sameness and difference. They allude to precarity, suggesting how fragile individuals and groups can be within societies. For Astur and Bahja, their engagement with the two-year-old offer led to conversations about their own childhood memories. British rule in Somalia and Pakistan, and histories of the struggles both nations faced after colonialism, left these nations divided and needing to forge a sense of identity. These world histories impact the adult lives and haunt the childhood memories of Astur and Bahja offering powerful perspectives of sameness and difference.

For Astur (Appendix I: iii), a postcolonial history of war appeared to disrupt her childhood memories,

*'It is like you hear all about the countries and fights and this and that. But you don't really hear before the fights. Of how your childhood is...'*

For Bahja (Appendix III: lxvii), postcolonial Pakistan's education system echoed with spectres of British rule

*'[a]nd when I was two and a half my mum used to always bring some basic books, the books in Pakistan were dual language books then or English books'*

*Spectres of Postcolonialism* suggests how past British policies and the unrest that resulted from them, follow both mothers into their present engagement with current British ECEC policy.

Said (1993) speaks of a continuing tautology of European superiority and dominance shaping the views governments have of minority ethnic communities in contemporary Britain. In many ways, these echo how government policies past and present, arguably,

continue to view mothers from BAME communities less as engaged citizens and more as stranger mothers (Ahmed, 2000), without any regard for a shared history or historical acknowledgement that might influence their being viewed this way. Even in Astur and Bahja's small memories of childhood, historical spectres appear as experiences of precarity, as instability in their childhoods and in their present motherhoods '*... because I was brought up that way, I don't know if it is the same experience.*' Across chapters in the thesis, the two-year-old offer sits in a continuum of policies where educational achievement form part of a discourse of social equality that ties the individual to performing as the engaged citizen. In ECEC policies, these processes include the use of assessment of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) (DfE, 2016) and narratives of school readiness that lead to the two-year-old offer as a way of engaging 'disadvantaged' families.

What appears absent in the context of (non)engagement with these policies is a sense that histories from women such as Astur and Bahja matter. ECEC policies seek to engage mothers from BAME communities with an equality discourse that has little regard or acknowledgement of the complex play of histories, beyond a view of cultural lack, such as that articulated by Gibb et al (2011). Yet Bahja's narrative answers this apparent lack ... '*when I was three I used to go to Nursery and when I was three and a half I used to read stories.*' Différance hints at the play of multiple threads in the apparent presence and absence of these histories. Mothers appear to speak themselves into a presence and absence numerous times in their narratives as 'they' that is 'not me' or 'us'. Yet différence evokes how ECEC policies also appear to speak mothers into presence and absence. If mothers, such as those participating in this study, engage then surely they become present, engaged mothers and citizens. To some degree, they do. Yet policies such as the two-year-old offer do not speak to these childhoods and experiences.

What narratives such as these from Astur and Bahja of their early childhoods, entwined with postcolonial histories binding Somalia, Pakistan and Britain offer, is a means to complicate a simplistic understanding of (non)engagement for national and local government officials, researchers and professionals. These narratives unsettle a discourse that attempts to smooth out and reduce difference and is unwilling, or perhaps unable, to suppose that it might make absent those it seeks to engage. It is arguably, ill-equipped to recognise and respond to precarity within society.

I do not suggest that the experiences and childhoods recalled in these narrations offer some innate 'wisdom' to be applied or included in understanding how to better engage mothers from BAME communities in the two-year-old offer. What I do suggest is that engaging *différance* recognises that current equality discourses in ECEC policies are part of a hybrid and changing history of equality within the United Kingdom. Consequently, equality discourses built solely on western ideals of sameness appear unable to recognise, address or benefit from complex experiences of difference, such as the women's own experiences of childhoods.

### 6.9 Conclusion

The narratives of mothers offer multiple and complex responses to the ways a neoliberal discourse of 'school readiness', 'choice' and 'disadvantage' in ECEC policies intersect with changes within their own communities. Sa'ar (2005) argues that the liberal bargain mothers might engage in carries a risk that their personal histories can be lost, ignored or marginalised by wider western society and left to exist only in the small and local. This marginalisation, Bhabha (1994) argues, is the historical strategy liberal societies, such as the United Kingdom, use to represent cultural difference, through traditions that translate the past and create difference within the present, for example, the representation of Muslim women as victims of oppression or as part of a community that do not value or understand early childhood education. Such normalised 'truths' could be understood as echoed in the narratives of both LW Alex and mothers. *Différance* acts as both a starting point to disturb this discourse of (in)equality, and as a departure point from which to open up these discourses in new ways.

Reflecting on the precarity of engaging and not engaging with ECEC policies, suggests rupture points where spectres from the past mingle with spectres in the present. Narratives such as these offer a starting point for re-examining the ways a neoliberal equality discourse threads through the two-year-old offer and wider ECEC policies. For Wolfreys (2007), *différance* represents the differences and changes that occur but remain silent in these policies. These differences are not easy to hear, but they leave traces in the words of mothers. *'Yeah, and so because I was brought up that way, I don't know if it is the same experience'*. Concepts, thoughts and ideas that do not exist just in the present but are part of the movement of connecting and shifting histories binding the lives of LW Alex, mothers

and the two-year-old offer, suggest how narratives and histories might join to create new meaning. In chapter 7, I explore this in terms of mothers' encounters with contemporary social equality discourses beyond ECEC policies, as I consider the remaining three questions.

## Chapter 7

### 7.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 considered the ways participants' narratives speak to the first two research questions. In this chapter, I move on to analyse the remaining three questions that move beyond ECEC policies. Through the narratives of women in the study, I explore how mothers' (non)engagement with services and policies beyond ECEC and the two-year-old offer, unsettle notions of sameness and difference. I then go on to explore how mothers' experiences could be understood as speaking to ideas about (non)engaged citizens. The chapter finishes with an analysis of the role postcolonial feminist research theory played in conducting this research.

In this chapter, the themes of ruptured boundaries, ambiguity and precarity continue to thread through the analysis of sameness and difference inherent to a neoliberal equality discourse. However, in this chapter layered entanglements of difference are reflected on as I analyse mothers' experiences of (non)engagement with health professionals and their own families. I explore possibilities arising from alternate interpretations of (non)engagement as mothers share experiences of complications and inexactness. I use the term 'hybridity' to trouble a simple view of engagement and its relationship with equality.

Section one takes mothers' encounters that reach beyond early years professionals to include encounters with health professionals that initiate discussions of sameness and difference expanding beyond ECEC policy.

In section two, I progress these unsettling experiences with the notion of what it means to be a (non)engaged citizen, to analyse the complex spaces equality operates in. I explore the repeated reference to 'they' in the narratives of mothers in the study, to examine further the ways ambiguity disrupts difference. The chapter concludes by considering how narratives of mothers speak to the role postcolonial feminist methodology played in the study.

### 7.2 Section one. Broader encounters of (non)engagement

In addressing question three I explore how, for mothers in the study, (non)engagement was not restricted to ECEC policies. The criteria and terms of the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014)

identified mothers in the study as eligible for early intervention for their young children within the education system. However, ECEC policies do not exist in isolation. Astur and Badr foreground how multiple policies, relating to health and education, create webs of (non)engagement and diffractive boundaries within equality discourses. Together Astur and Badr discuss their experiences of engaging with health professionals following concerns they raised about their children. Badr (Appendix I: viii) describes taking her young daughter, who was not sleeping and crying in pain, to the GP:

*Badr: So I mean she would wake up and she wouldn't sleep at night. And then was crying out in pain and then when I took her to the GP they referred me to take her to hospital. And as you can appreciate it takes some time for them to diagnose what it is. So they said if it was an injury it would have healed for six weeks so during them six weeks she wasn't getting any better. Which means that day to day I was just at home with her. And because the pain was more severe in the morning, it would only settle in the afternoon. To the extent when I've given her ibuprofen and she's gradually used to move. But it was really, really difficult.*

*R: How old was she when all that started?*

*Badr: She was about, she was about one and a half; and pauses it was just, like they've not given any reason. Nobodies got it in the family, anyone. But for me it was really stressful because I was really worried because I just didn't know what it was. And then I used to just stay home with her and not really do much. I couldn't get out. It kind of made me really down as well, because of what was happening. Pause. And I didn't really ... sometimes we felt, like I felt, a bit isolated with it as well because it was like just me and my daughter and we'd have to be indoors but then ... she had an MR scan and in that they diagnosed, they thought it would be um juvenile arthritis. At first they sent us to the orthopaedics and they said there's nothing wrong with the bones and then they'd seen this inflammation in the leg and then yeah, it's been diagnosed so ...*

She went on,

*'... the NHS, and sometimes it's a matter of persevering most of the time ... they said Oh well you will get a referral in a few months' time .... And I said How can*

*you just tell me that ... so luckily I had this deep conversation with them and told them how I felt as a parent, and the fact she is so young. You can't just, I feel that's neglecting. .... But I insisted for her to be seen quickly. .... I felt really alone. I felt as though I fought my way through because I didn't really have anyone on my side'*

Astur (Appendix I: x) shared a similar experience:

*'Astur: Yeah, with the speech delay and because my son and my daughter there's only a one year age gap. And being a mum, it's really, really hard, especially with having two children with a close age gap because my other two children have a big age gap, two years, three years. When she was born, he was one and I hadn't realised, being busy, that he was having, that he's not .. on time, with his talking. So I just thought 'oh?'. I knew he was a lot quieter than other babies, but I hadn't realised it was actually a problem. Until like one year and a half. I realised that his speech is a little bit slower than my other kids were, and that really, really worried me so I took him to the GP and they said, you know, 'he's really, really young you shouldn't be worried about his talking at this stage'. So I said 'you know my children were quite active and talking at this age' so they said 'you shouldn't really be comparing your kids. Some are slow, some are fast, some are you know medium' So I said 'But there is definitely something wrong because as a mum, I can feel .... like he needs a bit of help. So they said 'let's just see, a couple of months, then see how he is' So around one year nine months, one year ten months I went back and said 'you know he's not even saying 'baba' or 'mama' or anything. There is definitely something not right' so I asked them to transfer me to speech and language therapy. Because I said 'as a mum, I'm really, really worried'. So I said 'instead of being late and delaying everything. I would really like to know at this stage if we can do to help him'. So they didn't really want to refer me but because I insisted, they had to refer me.'*

The two-year old offer uses 'school readiness' to target "... the 40% most disadvantaged children" (UK. Gov, 2016) within the population in an effort to reduce the attainment gap, evidenced in the EYFSP (DfE, 2016a). Targeting low-income families in receipt of certain benefits or who have a statement of special educational needs or disability living allowance

(HM Government, 2017) meant Astur's and Badr's children were eligible not only on account of their low income status. Astur's son had a speech and language delay that warranted special educational needs and Badr's daughter had juvenile arthritis that met disability living allowance status. Yet, prior to these diagnoses, when both women attempted to engage proactively with their own concerns for their children's development, they appeared to meet boundaries that were difficult to cross. When Astur presented her concerns to a health professional about her child's reluctance to speak and use language, the response felt ambiguous. Health professionals appeared reluctant or slow to respond, *'you shouldn't be worried about his talking at this stage'*, *'Some are slow, some are fast'* and *'Oh well you will get a referral in a few months' time'*.

Ahmed (2000) suggests relationships, encounters, along boundaries between those already recognised as being different and those holding access to sameness reinforces boundaries. Yet these encounters seemed to rupture boundaries between health professionals, Astur and Badr. This rupturing troubles the discourse of difference reflected in policies, as both mothers pushed to assail boundaries not of their construction. These boundaries created by a discourse of equality, perhaps led health professionals to dismiss the concerns mothers had of their children's differentiated development *'at this stage'*. Whilst the same discourse of equality simultaneously constructed boundaries, they also led education professionals to have concerns about their children's differentiated development in terms of the EYFSP and their need to engage with the two-year-old offer.

In these encounters ruptures occur as mothers put relationships to work to assail boundaries *'so luckily I had this deep conversation with them and told them how I felt as a parent, and the fact she is so young. .... But I insisted for her to be seen quickly.'* (Badr, Appendix I: xii) and *'well I went back and .... 'There is definitely something not right' so I asked them to transfer me to speech and language therapy.'* (Astur, Appendix I: xi). Yet to see this as a simple example of mothers engaging with equality discourses to establish their rights when they have concerns, would miss the chance for a more subtle reading that points to ambiguity in boundaries.

Mothers identified their concerns, yet both mothers faced professionals perhaps willing to engage difference as a way to placate their concerns about their children. For Badr it was



the possibility of an injury that would heal in six weeks, for Astur (Appendix I: xvi), difference lay in language.

*'... when I went to the GP they said maybe the two language that you speak at home it makes it difficult for him to pick up maybe one. So maybe just go with one language. Like you said, I go with English with my kids, they don't speak my home language. They don't understand.'*

Gedalof (2007) speaks of mothers from BAME occupying a space between public spheres of sameness and private spheres of difference. In Astur's narrative, the GP appeared willing to see Astur as a 'boundary marker'. He deflected a problem her child was having with his language development away from a public sphere of support and back into the private sphere of Astur's family and the problematic difference, this space seemed to represent for the GP. The suggestion is that Astur's ability to speak two languages '*makes it difficult for him*'. That Astur raised it in her telling of this experience hints at its significance for her. Yet Astur was not speaking two languages at home '*I go with English with my kids, they don't speak my home language. They don't understand.*' Badr quickly picked up Astur's idea of speaking one language at home, the conversation did not linger on the assumption the GP made. Instead, it immediately moved on to a discussion about language.

*Astur: ... Because when I went to the GP they said maybe the two language that you speak at home it makes it difficult for him to pick up maybe one. So maybe just go with one language. Like you said I go with English with my kids, they don't speak my home language. They don't understand, my eldest, she's trying to, she speaks now but she's not perfect.*

*Badr: I think it's much clearer for the child.*

*Astur: It makes it clearer because we kind of confuse them ..*

*Badr: Yeah. It's confusing ..*

*Astur: Because they come home it's Somali, they come to school they've got English. They kind of mix but because my husband speaks good English, he's from here. I'm from here, I grew up here, even though I was not born here. I went to school. I know the system. I speak good English. Where my mother-in-law and my*

*grandma, she's here as well, they kind of struggle to communicate with the kids because the kids, their first language is English. Which is quite ... when they want to have a deep conversation ... I have to get involved [laughs] and explain. Because I felt like the kids, as they grow up, they will pick up my language because this is something that I can teach. But I felt like they needed to learn English as their first language because when they go to school I didn't want them struggling. Because I've seen some in parts of my community where they teach the kids ... home language at first, from birth to three years old and they go to school; and then they started to learn English, and they quite struggle. They feel like their kid doesn't settle well because they can't obviously understand other kids, they can understand, but they can't really have a conversation or play with them, or understand teachers, or understand what's going on around the class or what is really happening. So I think it makes it ...difficult for the child to speak.*

Language hangs from a thread, a rupture point in my reading of the data and in the boundary constructed in the encounter between Astur and the GP, and between Astur, Badr and I. It appears to be what Ahmed (2000: 129) might refer to as “a disturbance that lacks a sign”. A postcolonial feminist reading might trouble the boundary the GP appears to create by questioning the significance of Astur's ability to speak more than one language, making it problematic. From an equality discourse valuing sameness, the possibility of her passing this on to her children placed Astur outside a monolingual western sameness. Yet LW Alex's narrative (Appendix II: xiix) further disrupts a view of language development that Astur and Badr hold.

*L W Alex: ... one mum said, 'When are you going to teach her to speak English?' So there's a lot of misunderstanding on that as well. Because the speech and language team tell us very clearly 'You speak in your own language at home, unless you are absolutely fluent in English.' ... six years ago I didn't know that if they come into school as fluent Urdu speakers they will learn to speak English much quicker than if they come in with a broken down, stilted version of English. So it makes perfect sense when it's explained but that's the kind of thing that parents, I've seen parents physically kind of sigh when you tell them that 'you're doing the right thing. Well done.' You know, sing them rhymes in Urdu, read them*

*books in Gujarati; whatever language, that's great because we're after fluency and confidence'.*

These narratives speak to how liberal societies frequently focus on universal sameness, decided through national policy approaches, and that filter down into the actions of individuals and organisations. Astur's and Badr's narratives about one young child's language development and another's distressed behaviour, could potentially question and challenge how boundaries define those who are different. Their experiences unsettle a neoliberal discourse of equality that require equality be done *to* them, in order for 'them' to attempt to belong to a more powerful sameness. These narratives might see equality, as Ahmed (2000) suggests, as layers of ongoing multiple attempts to assail boundaries created by those holding social power. Yet, as these narratives suggest, complex relationships occur along these multiple boundaries, and they disturb attempts at defining a universal sameness or othered difference. It suggests that relationships in small, lived encounters define and enact apparently distant equality discourses.

A discourse of equality perceiving difference as problematic meant Astur and Badr needed to assail boundaries that appeared to exist prior to these small encounters with the NHS. It seemed to lead a professional to perceive Astur's bilingualism as sufficiently different to suggest that her son's problem lay with *her* difference. Both mothers offer more nuanced perspectives apparently missing in the discourses of professionals who appeared more focused on difference as problematic, and by doing so created and maintained boundaries. Astur and Badr raise these encounters as part of a more complex construction about equality and language, sameness and difference. Learning two languages as simultaneously problematic and helpful became a discussion point. Not learning two languages as problematic in conversing with other older family members whilst it might be helpful when children start school. These mingle with LW Alex's narrative that problematise a decision by Astur and Badr. They should only teach their children English if they are 'sufficiently' fluent. Bhabha (1994) alludes to how symbols and icons not only define difference but also produce meaning of what is different. This suggests that the encounters both mothers had with health professionals contained boundaries of difference already constructed prior to the encounters occurring. These icons of difference seeped into and shaped the path the encounters took. Yet the conversations in these encounters also leaked into the focus group

discussions, becoming something more. Boundaries ruptured through the narrated encounters Astur and Badr shared with each other and into the encounter of the focus group. Yet they did not stop there. The complexity of boundaries continued, as both mothers recounted how these experiences also hinted at boundaries within their families. Ambiguous, complex webs of boundaries spun as Astur and Badr talked about how their families also dismissed their initial concerns for their children. Badr (Appendix I: xii) recalled

*'... my husband was like 'you know she's probably hurt herself, she fell' and I said 'No, because you know she's always in front of me. She's not had any injuries' and then he like was saying like 'you don't know''*

Astur (Appendix I: xiii) empathised, sharing a similar experience

*'Yeah they just tell you like 'you are being too much' ... '... it's not as bad as you think' I've had a similar thing'*

Boundaries tangled in conversations as both mothers talked about experiences when raising their concerns. Undercurrents of resistance and accusations of over-engagement, rubbed up against boundaries placed before them as mothers actively seeking support from professionals and family for their children.

A postmodern reading offers these as ruptures demarcating sameness from difference and shaking concepts of boundaries. Doing so not only troubles how equality discourses, as instruments of state engagement, might lead to the construction of complex boundaries that place mothers outside in spaces of difference before any encounters of (non)engagement occur. It also sheds a light on how focussing on these relationships of (non)engagement along multiple boundaries might disturb assumptions of what the term 'equality' means.

The views mothers had of sameness and difference appeared open to challenge, although ultimately vindicated and proved correct (Astur's son *did* require speech and language therapy and Badr's daughter *was* diagnosed with juvenile arthritis). Yet these experiences left both mothers with feelings of being *'...really alone. ... because I didn't really have anyone on my side'* (Badr, Appendix I: xii) and *'... a really, really hard time to be honest because ... when you haven't got the experience and you are going through a difficult time you research*

*stuff, you talk to people, you hear things.'* (Astur, Appendix I: xi). Ambiguity drifted through the multiple ways Astur and Badr, their families and health professionals they turned to, understood and engaged with boundaries. These experiences offer alternate perspectives of governments' approaches to equality based on specific criteria; they rupture the boundaries a focus on sameness creates. They trouble 'truths' that suggest problems with equality lie with 'difference', with those children and families failing to perform in the way required.

### 7.3 Unsettling experiences

Mothers shared other narratives of unsettling experiences of difference living in the United Kingdom today. An experience narrated by Badr (Appendix I: xxii) suggests how a western cultural discourse of sameness led a health professional to view motherhood in a way that rendered Badr's cultural understanding of motherhood precarious. Precarity haunts an encounter with (non)engagement that occurred before Badr had even taken her new-born baby home:

*'... and in the culture as well they feel there's a lot of things that are different, because they say, you know ... I was surprised when ... when I was in hospital when I had my children they said you shouldn't put your baby next to you when he's asleep or when you're sleeping because ... it's a health issue, you know, because sometimes if you're asleep and the baby can fall down off the bed and things like that. And they should be in their cot, and I remember like I had dozed off and the baby ... because I was breast feeding, the baby was like next to me and we both went to sleep. And then, the nurse came and she said 'No. You need to make sure that he's in the cot'. And, whereas in the Asian culture they feel that in these early years that the child should be more with the mum and should be more bonding. I think with the western culture I think there's more emphasis on routine and like ... the child should ... you know, go out to nursery and play and have friends and things.'*

Living and adjusting to expectations of sameness and the consequences arising from this were new to me, but perhaps not to mothers in the study. I return to spaces of sameness when I move away from the study. Yet encountering Badr's experience is unsettling, a

spectre that clings and follows me. 'Truths' echoing from my background in health and early years are rendered fragile. For women in the study, I propose that unsettling experiences such as Badr's, conjure spectres far more powerful.

The words of the health professional, the cultural 'truth' that shaped them and the equality discourse that authorised the confidence to chastise Badr appear to follow her into a space of motherhood. Badr speaks about this encounter, and in doing so shakes the equality discourse that led to it. Yet it remains unheard by the professional. A postcolonial feminist reading might suggest that these unsettling experiences extend ways of 'learning about' the equality discourse embedded in policy. Equality discourse such as that influencing health and early years professionals emphasise performing measurable and recognisable forms of sameness and render performances of difference unacceptable. This links ideas of precarity to this study of (non) engagement. Experiences of precarity might further disrupt this equality discourse. This precarity is not founded in some 'wisdom' the subaltern might offer to the western discourse (Spivak, 1998). Rather it reflects the precarious nature of equality these narratives hint at.

From a postcolonial feminist perspective, this is not simply 'learning from' the experiences of women in the study, and applying this into practice to look for ways of increasing engagement with policy, as Callanan et al (2017) and Anderson and Minke (2007) suggest. Such approaches do not question the equality discourse, but continue to question those who do not engage with it; this approach maintains sameness as the solution and difference as the problem. Badr appears to recognise this:

*'the western culture ... [where] there's more emphasis on routine and like ... the child should ... you know, go out to nursery and play and have friends and things.'*

If seeking images of sameness means differences become invisible, or if visible, limited to what they are not, then Badr's apparent interpretation of the nurse's 'No' (Appendix I: xxii) is interesting. Badr was not transgressing the boundary of the same, she and her baby had merely fallen asleep, but in the 'No', she apparently reads herself as representing the Other. Yet Badr also moves beyond simply recognising an identity of difference placed on her by the nurse. In recounting this experience to me, at that time and in the context of this study on (non)engagement, Badr tangles this 'No' with her own reading of the difference the

nurse represented to Badr. In Badr's response to the nurse's 'No' she opens a space and revisits the unsettling experience with her own unsettling of the dilemma the 'No' represented to her, to me and to ideas about (non)engagement.

Badr appears to recognise the nurse not only wanted her to engage with a sameness of an 'ideal' mother, but specifically of a western 'ideal' mother. Badr's response to the 'liberal bargain' the nurse presented to her is a small resisting willingness to unsettle the equality discourse that represents her as different. Badr appears to see that the equality the nurse was offering was closed to her 'difference'. Indeed, this discourse sees her difference as problematic: *'... when I was in hospital when I had my children they said you shouldn't put your baby next to you when he's asleep or when you're sleeping.'* Badr does not appear to reject what, to her, represents a western emphasis on tangible and observable routine, *'it's a health issue, you know'*. Instead she tangles it with her own cultural emphasis on something less palpable and definable *"...in the Asian culture ... that in these early years that the child should be more with the mum and should be more bonding.'* Badr's 'bonding' could appear to offer more than an explanation to the nurse's 'No'. It intimates a quiet resistance that pushes back at an equality discourse that, to Badr, prefers *'more emphasis on routine'*. 'Bonding' implies Badr's resistant response to 'routine'.

Sa'ar (2005) suggests engaging with the two-year-old offer presents an opportunity for mothers in the study to mitigate some of this raw marginalisation, and benefit from liberal society's equality discourse as a way of managing multiple layers of gender and racial oppression. Yet more than this, perhaps difference and change also relates to the hegemony inherent in language, place, family, community, and the hybrid sense of belonging and identity associated with these. The narratives in this chapter gesture at how engagement with the two-year-old offer is only a small part of a wider, more complex entanglement of changes in sameness and difference that mothers recognise and experience within their own families and community. I expand this further in section two, where I analyse the fourth research question, the ways mothers' experiences of (non)engagement might contribute to ideas of (non)engaged citizens.

#### 7.4 Section two. (Non)engaged citizens: Encounters of not/belonging

In this section I turn to question four, as narratives by mothers continue unsettling difference as a way to meet or not meet criteria of sameness. As this analysis questions, “which differences matter here?” (Ahmed, 1998: 192), I return to the narratives of Astur and Badr (Appendix I: xxxii) as they try to explain to me their views on difference and identity as citizens.

*‘Astur: Yes ... and for example, somebody, a Muslim person does something. Like in the media, for example ... Muslim gets dragged ... which is nothing to do with Islam. Because Islam is peace. I mean the word of Islam means ‘peace’. But in the media, you see like bombing happens (claps hands) like terrorism, you feel like ... for example, somebody who does not know anything and who reads from the media, will see me covered up like this will say, she is a terrorist, but it’s nothing to do ... because the media does that and people only see from the media side, and don’t get involved in the community, so we get dragged ... Islam and the religion gets dragged in the middle. But when there is nothing to do with it. Because I as a Muslim am against them, but they are just using the name of Islam. But because you might not know anything about that. You might see and think ‘Oh they are all the same!’ because you read from the media: ‘This is what they do and this is the community who does it’. So for example, I get told like, ‘She’s English, she does this, English people do this (gestures to me) blah blah blah’. Now you see like (clicks fingers) straight away I use that in my head. And because of what I have read and what I have seen I don’t get to know you as a person. So I come with what I had in my mind and I attack you. That’s like not fair as well. Because I think it’s good to get to know the person rather than just ...*

*Badr: ... it is just using stereotypes ... like people say, like people think, like people in Pakistan, they think that Asian girls who are born and bred here are probably like western, completely western ...*

*Astur: ... western, yeah.*

*Badr: oh they are western, they are not religious. Or they are not accepting us and I always think that is not fair. I mean I was born here and I fit into their*



*conversations ... but I don't know if they accept me as one of them though. That's thing...*

*Astur: yeah*

*Badr: But they say like 'You're from here' but ... its only until I speak English that they don't realise that I'm actually, I was born here. They actually think, a lot of my husband's friends think I was from Pakistan. But I think they have this image, because we've been born and bred and educated here which makes, not a bad person but you hear these stories don't you ...*

*Astur: ... like you are not one of ...'*

These narratives open up ideas about (non)engaged citizens to ambiguity and uncertainty. The experiences brought Astur (a Somali born British Muslim woman), Badr (a British born Pakistani woman) and myself (a Yemeni born British woman) into a face-to-face encounter of unknowable differences. In other words and, drawing on Spivak (1998), it is not a simple exchange of knowledge where I translate 'truths' Astur and Badr speak. Rather I strive for a "loving caress" (Ahmed, 1998 : 67) occurring within an encounter, that recognises there are secrets, some shared, some remaining hidden. In this encounter, difference cannot be "spoken for" or represented by an image of sameness. I may accept that I cannot fully understand what lies hidden in the experiences mothers tell me about, but I must also recognise that ideas about 'knowableness' should not render Astur and Badr voiceless.

Postcolonial feminism contextualises how a legacy of imperial authority continues to create a (non)engaged citizen through the approaches policies and policy makers take to (non)engagement. There is an interplay between clarity and ambiguity. Trust is placed in equality discourses that resist forming a relationship with ambiguity but rather seek to control uncertainty through order and clarity, defining the engaged citizen through observable and measurable values and actions. Barnacle and Dall'Alba (2014: 1143) observe this as an "expectation of achieving mastery" arguing that control requires conviction of one's own right and authority in dictating the terms and conditions by which this equality is defined. The drive for mastery provides little room for ambiguity and uncertainty and sits as an anathema to feminist research principles I attempt to engage in this study. Postcolonial feminism troubles an ontology that government approaches to engagement in

free childcare is one of 'mastery' and 'control', and an epistemology that a function of government is to control.

However, Ahmed (1998) warns that any attempts to reconceptualise encounters such as that narrated above into procedures and policies would only return difference to a position that subsumes it into a universal sameness. Attempting to write such encounters into policy connotes a violence that returns to a discourse of equality through sameness. Ahmed (1998: 66) refers to a feminist ethics that "... is not the forging of 'new' relations to the Other as an impossible figure, but the re-dressing of the constitutive violence which binds her to a given place [and] ... cannot hold her in this place". Ambiguity emerges from a willingness to engage with an unsettling deconstruction of sameness/difference. As Badr articulates, '*... but I don't know if they accept me as one of them though. That's thing...*'. Ambiguity does not suggest writing a counter discourse of equality through difference. Rather, it offers a space for challenging the consequences that come from an understanding of equality built upon a belief not only that its values are reducible to observable and measurable principles, but also that it is possible to observe, assess and judge an individual's successful attainment of these principles.

Cala (Appendix III) also hints at precarity that link her experience with the two-year-old offer to being a (non)engaged citizen, as she negotiates and balances her role as a mother within her home, with her role as an engaged mother in the public sphere. Cala (through a translator):

*'Okay. She's saying 'you know my in-laws are very progressive. They said, leave it to her, school', but what happened she said 'I can't go very far away, I have to do housework as well. And that's why, and I couldn't drive. The two factors ...' but they are progressive and they say okay. For good reason.'*

(Appendix III: lxiii).

This was part of a wider discussion about Cala's wait for a place with the two-year-old offer to become available nearer her home. The narrative glimpses at the unsettling experiences of balancing expectations of a (non)engaged citizen placed on Cala by both the public and private sphere. This suggests how encounters in the small scale that might appear fragile can be powerful.

To government, local authority and early years professionals Cala could represent a non-engaged citizen, a “problematic boundary marker” (Gedalof, 2007: 91) enabling or blocking the progress of her child’s equality. The narrative suggests her family see her actions as ‘*progressive*’. Yet for Cala there is perhaps ambiguity in her ‘being’ different in both spaces. As Cala speaks of a decision ‘left’ to her but shaped by forces of home and public expectations, she may appear quietly rendered fragile. Yet I am not sure that is how Cala saw her position. As she spoke there was a sense that Cala could not only recognise what precarity felt like, but in living with it and adjusting to it she had in some sense found a way to push back. Cala engaged with the two-year-old offer but in her narrative, it is uncertain whether she was prepared to engage with its discourse of equality. In this small, unsettling experience, Cala appears to trouble any demand by both the equality discourses of ECEC policy and her family to be an engaged citizen. This action feels loud, though in all senses its delivery and appearance seem quiet.

#### 7.5 ‘They’: disturbing difference, sameness and Othered others.

Returning to Derrida’s (1973) *différance* suggests ways that mothers experiences might contribute to ideas of (non)engaged citizens. I wonder if the word ‘they’ that echoes through mothers’ narratives, might open a space to recognise complexity and unsettle the equality discourse of the (non)engaged citizen.

*‘... it’s just that **they** have the old mentality ...’*

*‘But in our culture **they** don’t move like from the times ...’*

*‘**They** don’t, **they** don’t move back, **they** don’t move forward.’*

*‘People don’t know the benefits of sending their two years old child. Like when **they** will know it properly then **they** will encourage other people. Then one day **they** will realise and **they** will send their children. I think on Asian people it is mostly their family pressure as well from what I have seen.’*

*‘People have from what I have seen, people, especially ethnic minority people **they** don’t know their rights as well. Because I’ve seen not only in this field but other fields as well people don’t know their rights, especially women. ... Because **they** are new in this country, **they** are living with families, **they** are like ... Women*

*don't know much, **they** are just staying home and cooking and I think we need to ... aware them and need to tell them. If we tell them, especially new generation, cos I'm not new, I'm now old. Laughs. But when you encourage them, **they** will send their children to the two years old, not only this but other rights as well, other things as well. So ... if **they** know their rights ... **they** know what **they** need to do, **they** will do it.'*

*'I've seen people changing. But if **they** know, Asian people or all ethnic minority people know their rights, especially now. Because the children now are more bold and **they** are more confident. **They** are not like us, **they** are not scared or anything. **They** are ready to take a stand for themselves.'*

*'That is our concept, **they** think that is normal.'*

From a policy perspective, mothers who choose not to take up the two-year-old offer become not only strangers (Ahmed, 2000) but also othered Others, potentially non-engaged citizens. Because mothers in the study have engaged with the two-year-old offer, they arguably occupy a position of 'engaged citizens'. Yet the word 'they' litters narratives mothers share about themselves and their own community. 'They' affords possibilities to interrogate the complexity in difference, in what is seen, and what is not seen in the notion of the (non)engaged citizen.

By using 'they', mothers in the study not only suggest a recognition of the way mothers from BAME communities become embodied representations of difference, of the Other, these mothers apparently also speak themselves into this representation. Mothers appear to both recognise and not recognise themselves as 'they'. Drawing on Bhabha (1994), in this third space, difference displaces further differences. I cannot assume mothers from BAME communities engaging in the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) epitomise the "liberal bargain" (Sa'ar, 2005: 681) and are willing to give up something of their own culture in order to gain the benefits of adopting liberal values as engaged citizens. However, mothers in this study chose to engage in this policy.

In their narratives, Astur and Badr (Appendix I) and Bahja (Appendix III) draw generational differences into the third space of difference.

*'Badr: ... you know, obviously, it's a generation gap but my mum was like nineteen when she had me and my brother, and I think now my mum's ... about fifty-three, fifty-four, and I think she's learnt through us because she came into the country at a young age and then she was married ...and I think she ... she ... I mean, she did have some education behind her but she wasn't educated here and I think it's natural to feel ... I mean if I went to live in a different country, it's natural to feel hesitant. Because you don't know, you don't know the place, she wasn't ...*

*Astur: I think it's related to ... like you mentioned, a lot of the minority communities who are not bringing their kids to the nurseries, it's because of ... **they** come here, **they** don't speak the language, **they** don't know what does it feel like to live and to be around where **they** are and the people ...*

*Badr: I think its survival ...*

*Astur: ... so **they** keep themselves to themselves ...'*

(Appendix I: xxii)

*'Bahja: ... People don't know the benefits of sending their two years old child. Like when **they** will know it properly then **they** will encourage other people. Then one day **they** will realise and **they** will send their children. I think on Asian people it is mostly their family pressure as well from what I have seen. With my experience. Like nannies and grandmothers are saying 'No, no. You are sending him or her when he or she is three is too early.' That's why. Maybe mothers want to send them, especially who are living with joint family. It's more pressure on you, daughter in laws as well. **They** have to make happy their father in law and mother in law.*

*R: Right ...*

*Bahja: So it's very hard to go against their decision.'*

(Appendix III: lv)

These narratives convey shifting boundaries of Otherness as Astur and Badr articulate themselves as part of a changing history, and appear prepared to see themselves as part of

a community that includes an openness to a 'they' that is not 'us'. Both Other and othered Other. This suggests a subtle response that sees difference not as a problem, but as part of a continuing process of change. These narratives do not speak of an inevitability that sameness will subsume difference through engaging with the equality discourse. Nor does it suggest that not engaging with the discourse is limited to not understanding the inherent value this discourse offers.

Reading *différance* suggests that the 'they' in narratives of government policy and the hail of local government officials, health and early years professionals to engage, is both the same and not the same 'they' mothers speak in these narratives. To explain, mothers in the study engage with ECEC policy and represent the "partnership working" (DfE, 2017: 5) policy seeks. Because of engaging, they are a possible part and not part of the different 'they', the two-year-old offer, government and professionals hail. Mothers in the study are entitled to the two-year-old offer, so to policy makers, they potentially lack the ability to prepare their children for school. But, it is also possible mothers from this group already meet the requirements of an 'engaged' mother, perhaps mothers from this study are already doing '*great and wonderful things*' (Appendix II: xiv) or perhaps not. Therefore, mothers in the study are possibly both part and not part of the 'they' the two-year-old offer hails. Mothers in the study and their narratives are arguably narratives of (non)engaged citizens. Due to their eligibility for the two-year-old offer, mothers in the study remain part of a group seen as disadvantaged and doing less well in the EYFSP assessment (DfE, 2016a). Once more, it is possible mothers are simultaneously present and absent, engaged and non-engaged citizens, possibly able to meet the assessment criteria, but possibly not. By engaging, mothers are both present and absent from the discourse of equality in ECEC policies.

Yet mothers in this study arguably hail back to the equality discourse, their response lies in both conforming and not conforming to the sameness, and representing and not representing the difference it expects from them. If mothers had articulated themselves as part of the too different othered other and referred to 'we', then grasping the universal other suddenly feels raw, uncomfortable and it resists being spoken, as Ahmed (1998) suggests it might.

To illustrate how this might look and feel, I take the snippet of data below. Inserting 'we' against 'they' the context changes, it unsettles. The narrative becomes more active, less

passive, perhaps more threatening to the universal sameness of the equality discourse. It no longer gives me the sense of how mothers in the study wanted to present themselves to me:

*'So ... if **they [we]** know their [our] rights ... **they [we]** know what **they [we]** need to do, **they [we]** will do it.'*

and

*'Astur: I think it's related to ... like you mentioned, a lot of the minority communities who are not bringing their [our] kids to the nurseries, it's because of ... **they [we]** come here, **they [we]** don't speak the language, **they [we]** don't know what does it feel like to live and to be around where **they [we]** are and the people ...*

*Badr: I think its survival ...*

*Astur: ... so **they [we]** keep themselves [ourselves] to themselves [ourselves] ...'*

Différance is there as a small group of women turn experiences of subtle challenges into words and silences, offering ideas of (non)engaged citizens. It is also present in the fact that these narratives of change and challenge to equality through sameness are in English and Urdu words that cross and mix between these languages. I type ideas into written text and attempt in my analysis to reflect the play of différance stretching back in time, into shared and different histories of colonialism that brought us all into those rooms in Manchester to meet. Mothers in the study already recognised and raised this as they moved their discussion into recounting their family histories:

*'...my mum's ... and I think she's learnt through us because she came into the country at a young age and then she was married ... she did have some education behind her but she wasn't educated here and I think it's natural to feel ... I mean if I went to live in a different country, it's natural to feel hesitant... '.*

(Badr, Appendix I: xxii)

Mothers could also see différance stretching forward in their family's future

*'Because the children now are more bold and **they** are more confident. **They** are not like us, **they** are not scared or anything. **They** are ready to take a stand for themselves.'*

(Bahja, Appendix III: lx)

These narratives also hint at Wagner's (2012) notion of non-violent silence. Silence that recognises, at times, this may be the only option available to the (non)engaged citizen when all other options are denied. Wagner argues for recognising the power that lies in the "subaltern aporetic discursive position" (Wagner, 2012: 101) women in the study occupy. Bahja's narrative might reflect this in two ways. Bahja appears to speak herself into a non-violent silence as a response to the discourse of equality she meets in encounters. Yet simultaneously she does speak of a future generation, a 'not me' generation, that is less quiet, perhaps that will not be silent. In doing so she hints at a future, alternate response to this discourse that she appears unable/unwilling to make '***They are not like us, they are not scared or anything***'. What this does is open up the role silence plays, not only in the study, that the positions women already occupy offer a powerful channel to analyse (non)engagement. Silence also offers a lens by which to trouble the discourse of equality acted in encounters. By this I mean that if silence is not a neutral act but a possible defiant statement, then it perhaps offers a response to the assumptive 'truths' of policy makers, researchers, and early years and health professionals. Even within the research process, there were moments when silence entered the focus groups, particularly when women recounted their experiences with equality discourses and those who spoke them. For example, Bahja (Appendix III: liv) recalls how a friend had to persuade her family to bring her son to the two-year-old offer. The story was broken with numerous pauses and silences

*Bahja: ... yeah and they were not encouraging her because he used to cry and her grandmother and nanny were 'Oh no no don't, he's only small don't send him. He's like going to go school all of his life. Just, just ... don't ... when he'll be three then you send him'. Even they are born and ... and brought up here, his grandmother still they were like saying stuff like this. Maybe she was like, with her grandson, maybe she loved so much she doesn't want to see him crying ... But she still made her effort and she sent her son to nursery. And after three months when he was settled, I've seen him improving so much. He was learning lots of*



*words. Before he was not able to speak properly ... and I've seen a massive difference ...*

Silence is conceivably a counter, apparently fragile, but quietly powerful response to the roar of this discourse of equality in women's lives.

#### 7.6 Precarity and (non)engaged citizens

Bhabha (1994) argues a complex understanding of cultural difference, beyond a unitary or dualistic view of either engaged or non-engaged citizens. A view that is willing to recognise an unconscious third space of meaning. This appears to reflect in the narratives of Bahja and Family Support Worker Beena as they offer a view of multiculturalism as part of a complex and ongoing history (Appendix III: lxxiv)

*'Bahja: Yeah, multicultural. So they show respect to their religion as well. And they should also be themselves, proud of who we are and also respect their other ... with other children's religions, with other people's religion as well. So it's all about respecting ourselves and others as well.*

*R: Yes and I suppose to start very young with that ...*

*Bahja: Well we were ... Speaks in Urdu. We used to listen, well there is Christmas. Continues in Urdu. Yeah, we didn't know. But now it's good that our children know and are with different children.*

*R: That's an interesting idea about what children need know and to do to prepare themselves as adults.*

*Bahja: Yeah.*

*R: Is that something you think is important?*

*Bahja: It is to respect to respect other people as well to see. My children got friends some are related to like different religions. My daughter has got friends she's Hindu, my son has got friends who are like different cultures and religion. And so we don't mind we respect ... they don't see, maybe, the way we used to be brought up in Pakistan. 'He is this, he is this' It was a bit like that.*

*FSW Beena: Yes*

*Bahja: Racism or whatever. We would hardly see any different, different ...*

*R: ... different cultures?*

*Bahja: Different cultures, yes, yeah. And when we used to see it was 'Oh look, he's ...' in a hundred people there used to be ...*

*FSW Beena: ... one...*

*Bahja: only one. So the same, ... Laughs. But our children are totally different. They respect them, they mingle with them. They don't think that he's Hindu, or he's Christian or he's Sikh. They just living together ...*

*FSW Beena: ... everybody is just Manchester.*

*Bahja: Yeah. I get that they don't see it. Maybe we see it this way. I see his friend is this, but they, our children ... they don't see it. So this is a good thing.'*

In many ways, this narrative reflects a hybrid possibility of equality. Bahja and Family Support Worker Beena speak about equality that both includes and does not include mothers who are, in this present moment, discussing it not for themselves but for their children,

*'But our children are totally different. They respect them, they mingle with them. They don't think that he's Hindu, or he's Christian or he's Sikh. They just living together ...'.*

In this present/future third space, Bahja appears to see her children and her children's friends but she does not appear to include herself: '**They** respect them, **they** mingle with them'. As in previous narratives, mothers in the study appear to speak themselves into invisibility. '**They** just living together'. Bahja is present and not present in this equality, arguing perhaps that as, engaged citizens, '*... everybody is just Manchester.*' It felt like Bahja both included herself, in the room in Manchester, and did not. There is ambiguity and uncertainty in this process of being and acting as an engaged citizen, and how Bahja sees herself and her children as '*... just living together*'.

Yet exploring ideas of difference might reposition equality from a 'different' perspective, in ways Bahja (Appendix III: lxxiv) reflects when, from a position made different by policies, she says

*'So they show respect to their religion as well. And they should also be themselves, proud of who **we** are and also respect their other.'*

Bahja's narrative echoes in policy such as the EYFS (DfE, 2017: 8) that speaks of

*"... helping children to develop a positive sense of themselves, and others; to form positive relationships and develop respect for others ...".*

Yet Bahja is placed under a gaze, to become an engaged citizen who sends her child to the two-year-old offer, in order to overcome her difference and avoid being part of *"... a targeted group, for eligible twos"* identified in *"... the data from city council. ... who are eligible for the two year funded place but for whatever reason they're not taking it up."* (LW Alex, Appendix II: xxxvii). This concept of fetishizing the stranger suggests precarity in this multicultural future Bahja imagines her children and their friends into, both in the present and the future. The narratives of mothers suggest that, as engaged citizens, accepting a neoliberal equality discourse now will help their children be part of broader changes to their community and wider society, a hopeful *'everybody is just Manchester'*.

### 7.7 Transversal politics

ECEC policies position children's early education and care as *"... equip[ing] them to thrive in school and later life."* (DfE, 2013: 34) and promoting *"... the right foundation for good future progress through school and life"* (DfE, 2017: 5). Yet the narratives of mothers suggest how equality discourses might benefit from being better able to recognise, listen and respond to voices of difference in ways that FSW Beena hints at in *"... everybody is just Manchester"*, or Bahja appears prepared to recognise in her own community *'But our children are totally different. They respect them, they mingle with them. They don't think that he's Hindu, or he's Christian or he's Sikh. They just living together'*.

The narratives appear to suggest that whilst engaging in a liberal bargain in sending their children to the two-year-old offer, mothers are also prepared to challenge authoritarian views. The engagement policy-makers seek is that families, who meet the criteria for free

childcare, simply send their two-year-old children to nurseries. Yet in their narratives, mothers in this study speak of engagement as being active in their children's education and future. In chapter 3, I examined how Guattari (2015) discusses the way public intervention by policy makers into social spheres such as health and education, has led to a deterioration in the value placed on customs, beliefs and self-regulation; replaced instead by faith in professional knowledge and research that generates it. However, Guattari's (2015) argument is that better outcomes require a shift away from models of intervention reliant on domination by power hierarchies and towards transversal politics. Transversal politics that could form alliances negotiating across different social groups to form "collective assemblages" (Guattari, 2015: 133) to decide actions within a local social sphere.

Transversal politics raise an important insight for considering (non)engagement and equality, a way that might value difference and loosen some of the grip on maintaining sameness. A postmodern perspective, suggests equality as comprising hybridity willing to engage with the previous encounters and future discourses of different social groups, as part of a process of change. It certainly feels precarious. Yet the narratives of mothers from the study suggest they are in the process of living with complexity and precarity. In the conversations below there are glimpses of ways transversal politics might trouble current equality discourse as Bahja, Cala and Family Support Worker Beena continue their discussion about their children's futures:

*'FSW Beena: Another thing is, because we have got that idea in our minds. It already works, and we wanted to give our children our confident ...*

*Bahja: ... freedom, yeah, ...*

*FSW Beena: ... we don't want to break their confident, 'New world, new things, new faces, strangers, all that. We don't want to send them to strangers unless they have grown up to five ... they have got confidence, now go school.'*

*Bahja: Yeah*

*FSW Beena: This is another concept ...*

*R: Yeah*

*...*

*Bahja: Yeah, I just keep comparing 'Should I do this? My parents did this, should I? ...'*

*FSW Beena: Yes, that is an important thing.*

*Bahja: Yes, so ... it's all an experiment ...'*

(Appendix III: lxxi)

Astur and Badr also hint at precarity as they recount how they feel Asian women are portrayed:

*'Badr: A lot of Asian women have got this, you know, issue going on where the husband wants to be more domineering or where they don't want to see the woman as independent, you know, or bold, or outspoken and I think some women are a bit hesitant involving this.*

*Astur: Yes I think that plays a big role, where we don't get to see. Or like you said they do this sort of a study and we feel like we are at the bottom of it, like we don't like take our kids to school or like when they do this research we get into trouble for not being part of the community.*

*R: I think that's an interesting point that idea of well it's almost like a dismissal.*

*Astur: We live here but we don't get ...*

*Badr: ... it's a stereotype. We've got like these stereotype images and sometimes it's not just ... there's a lot of other things ... people like to view it like a typical scenario ... but there are a lot of interesting things underlying ...'*

(Appendix I: xxx)

Whilst transversal politics might offer a means to unsettle the current equality discourse and power hierarchies on a local level, it is not without its own complexity. It is possible that a more direct influence on the enactment of ECEC policies in the local level could offer ways for experiences of mothers from BAME communities to speak of feeling that

*'Astur: We live here but we don't get ...'*

However, as the narratives above suggest this might be more complex than it appears. The narratives allude to the ambiguity in any equality discourse relating to raising children

*'Bahja: Yes, so ... it's all an experiment ...'*

However, that does not mean mothers imagine that professionals even on a local or individual level will, easily recognise their contribution. In response to LW Alex's assertion that

*'LW Alex: They're busy, traditionally they're busy, their words not mine, 'cooking, cleaning, looking after men' so they haven't got time to play with the children. The children in turn learn very early that they have to just get on, on their own.'*

Badr hints at the intersectionality threading through her precarity as an Asian woman,

*'Badr: We've got like these stereotype images and sometimes it's not just ... there's a lot of other things ...'*

The narratives hint at overlaying experiences of relationships, be that within a family

*'Badr: ... where they don't want to see the woman as independent, you know, or bold, or outspoken ...'*

Or reflected in LW Alex's recollection about women's restricted engagement with the research study

*'LW Alex: So one of the people I asked to come to your group, well actually two said yes and then I had a husband phone me up and say 'What is this about? She can come but I will be there too.'*

Or in wider society

*'Astur: ... like we are at the bottom of it ... we get into trouble for not being part of the community.'*

A discussion of transversal politics in chapter 3 suggested a possibility to move on from seeing power as a simplistic linear hierarchy running through equality discourses to a more nuanced and layered framing of equality that appears to echo in these narratives, but also strains with its multiple layers and complexity. Perhaps Bahja sums it up best when she says

*'it's all an experiment ...'*

For Collins (2000), the value in transversal politics lies in building upon these different forms and expressions of power and resistance across and within groups and recognising that social groups, like power, do not remain within clearly defined boundaries. Troubling boundaries to unearth ways they are porous and subject to change both from within and externally offers a way to reflect on the hybridity of change and create third spaces for more fluid interdependence across groups. However, the processes of intersectionality speak of power within any transversal politics, and interdependence that is not equivalent between all groups.

According to Crenshaw (2010), intersectionality exposes how racial discrimination by gender, and gender discrimination by race, acts as a tool by which marginalisation of mothers from BAME communities might be exposed and dismantled. This is important in any engagement with transversal politics. Intersectionality also opens up how experiences of women from BAME communities might challenge standard measure of maleness and whiteness, in ways similar to narratives of women in this study. However, intersectionality in transversal politics does more than recognise value in the 'subaltern' experience (Spivak, 1998); it also recognises socio-economic, class and sexuality (Carbado et al, 2013) within and between groups. That coalition across groups might be dynamic, suggest ways that postcolonial feminist ideas might not only recognise the possibility of working across social and cultural groups, but also the value in doing so, particularly to disrupt women from BAME communities being written into invisibility. It might help Bahja answer her question

*'I just keep comparing 'Should I do this? My parents did this, should I? ...'*

Baja's reflection in this question exposes that ultimately control, like sameness is unachievable. This reflects closely my own experience of this study and I finish the chapter by addressing the final research question to explore what the narratives of mothers in the study taught me about my engagement with postcolonial feminism in the course of conducting this study.

### 7.8 Section three. The challenges, affordances and contributions made by engaging postcolonial theory feminist research

The narratives of mothers in the study unsettle boundaries and bring a sense of ambiguity and uncertainty to the research process. By engaging with postcolonial feminist research theory, the experiences of mothers and I were constantly framed into a face-to-face encounter of unknowable differences. Postcolonial feminist research theory afforded me the methodological space to explore the otherness of each other as part of the power differences between and amongst us. In chapter 4, I discuss the challenges and affordances postcolonial feminist research theory offered to this study and how I approached both the topic and the research process. Hauntings as footnotes became the way I attempted to articulate this. In this section, however, postcolonial feminist theory, as a methodology, offers a lens through which to analyse the discussion below between Astur and Badr from the perspective of the research process.

*Badr: it's more to do with culture ... its more culture.*

*Astur: Yes ... and for example, somebody, a Muslim person does something. Like in the media, for example ... Muslim gets dragged ... which is nothing to do with Islam. Because Islam is peace. I mean the word of Islam means 'peace'. But in the media, you see like bombing happens (claps hands) like terrorism, you feel like ... for example, somebody who does not know anything and who reads from the media, will see me covered up like this will say, she is a terrorist, but it's nothing to do ... because the media does that and people only see from the media side, and don't get involved in the community, so we get dragged ... Islam and the religion gets dragged in the middle. But when there is nothing to do with it. Because I as a Muslim am against them, but they are just using the name of Islam. But because you might not know anything about that. You might see and think 'Oh they are all the same!' because you read from the media: 'This is what they do and this is the community who does it'. So for example, I get told like, 'She's English, she does this, English people do this (gestures to me) blah blah blah'. Now you see like (clicks fingers) straight away I use that in my head. And because of what I have read and what I have seen I don't get to know you as a person. So I*



*come with what I had in my mind and I attack you. That's like not fair as well. Because I think its good to get to know the person rather than just ...*

*Badr: ... it is just using stereotypes ... like people say like people think like people in Pakistan, they think that Asian girls who are born and bred here are probably like Western, completely Western ...*

*Astur: ... Western, yeah.*

In the narrative above, boundaries between what is the same and different are made fluid. For Astur, there is reciprocated un-knowable otherness in my difference, *'She's English, she does this, English people do this (gestures to me)'*. Astur juxtaposes this alongside further powerful unknowable otherness from her experiences as a Muslim woman in Britain, *'Oh they are all the same!' because you read from the media: 'This is what they do and this is the community who does it'*. Badr adds a further layer of difference in her experiences as a British born Pakistani woman, *'oh they are western, they are not religious. Or they are not accepting us and I always think that is not fair.* Neither Astur, Badr nor I are the same but neither are we wholly different, yet the power differences that ebb and flow between us shape how we each might conceive this possibility.

Methodologically, postcolonial feminist research offered a means to articulate these power differences, as an encounter that recognised these shifting boundaries where some secrets may be shared, whilst others remain hidden. In this encounter, difference cannot be 'spoken for' or represented by my seeking an image of sameness to recount through the thesis. I may accept that I cannot fully understand what lies hidden in the experiences mothers tell me about, but I must also recognise that ideas about 'knowableness' should not render mothers voiceless.

Engaging with postcolonial feminist theory also speaks to the challenges of boundaries created by my difference, as a white female researcher. My difference meant a number of husbands met my presence with suspicion. This restricted my access to mothers and limited the size of the study I was able to conduct. However, meeting with the mothers I found myself drawn into possibilities of my (non)engagement with their community. The act of participating in the focus group reminded women of a much-loved group that had run in

the past. As mothers spoke about the group, boundaries appeared, limiting their capacity to meet and restart these groups.

*'Bahja: But with that group we used to meet each other and used to learn about new groups and what's going on. It's new things going on for children. Is there any group going on, is something ... but now it's finished.*

*FSW Beena: Finished. All funding cut, cut.*

*Bahja: So, yeah ...*

*FSW Beena: And another thing. That time, the other facilities they can keep their children in the crèche when we are going to group. From six months and they have got the idea to new area, new things. And this is also working when they do like for child's two years funding.*

...

*Bahja: Yeah, but now they have finished those groups. I think that if there is time for those groups. That maybe, new coming mums can mingle with other ladies and have ... make friends and have good chat. Because in our culture we don't go clubs and we don't have night life and we just have ...*

*Cala: ... Inaudible time ... Laughs*

*Bahja: Laughs.*

*FSW Beena: This is I feel the lesson and they are saying they have taken their theme from this ...*

*R: To be able to talk about your experiences ...*

*Cala: Yes.*

*FSW Beena: And every group, we talk about different, different things ...*

*Bahja: Yes.*

*FSW Beena: ... and if that group was here, we could talk about two years funding. Yes. This is like a workshop. But no funding ...*

*R: Yes.*

*Bahja: It's finished. I'm really gutted that those groups are finished now. [Beena], do you remember there was another group called, no a course called 'stress relief course' ...*

*FSW Beena: Yes 'stress relief' yes we did that upstairs ...*

*Bahja: ... lots of courses as well. Yeah.*

*Cala: Speaks in Urdu.*

*FSW Beena: They are missing these things so much. No funds ....'*

Drawing on postcolonial feminist research methodology challenged me not to position this research as a simple exchange of knowledge where I translate 'truths' narrated by mothers. Rather my experience of postcolonial feminism was closer to striving for a "loving caress" that Ahmed (1998: 67) refers to and that drew me into the lives of the women in the study. Methodologically, postcolonial feminist theory contributes to this research as it embodies an experience of ambiguity. Ambiguity in the limits to the research topic exploring (non)engagement in ECEC policy and my ability to (not)engage in this process and the community and lives of mothers who participated.

Postcolonial feminist methodology opens up possibilities for alternate readings of (non)engagement with equality discourses encapsulated in an ontology of 'ambiguity'. Barnacle and Dall'Alba (2014) propose ambiguity affords ways of moving beyond concerns with control, epitomised in the attractive appeal of boundaries. Ambiguity expresses the slippery and shifting relationship between knowledge, action and being. For example, 'knowing' about boundaries, such as those narrated above, between and within communities and thread through this study is itself ambiguous.

This study aimed to unsettle boundaries in ideas about equality, yet I could not escape them, I created boundaries in writing this thesis and by my presence in the research process, with mothers. However, postcolonial feminism disrupted any notion of stable knowledge these boundaries might suggest. Postcolonial feminism enabled me to work with theory in order to see how boundaries, like knowledge are porous, uncertain and ambiguous. The web I refer to at the start of the study contorts, distorts and re-assembles in a different

formation. Voices of women in the study recast what it means to (not)engage and disrupt attempts to apply stable meaning to the actions of policy-makers, mothers and myself. The spectres haunting experiences of being and not being different unsettle encounters between mothers from BAME communities and me.

### 7.9 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed how the narratives of mothers from BAME communities might provide perspectives to unsettle ideas of (non)engagement beyond ECEC policies and frameworks. The narratives and experiences of mothers offer ways to consider how contemporary equality discourses, reliant on sameness, form part of multiple encounters for mothers in the study.

The possibility of women from marginalised communities gaining benefits from the liberal agenda appears to echo in the narratives. Yet this is not necessarily as straightforward as it might appear. In chapter 2, Ahmed (2000) argues that admitting the stranger within a community might combine the demonstration of compassion with opportunities to connect and learn, yet the stranger also embodies that which is outside and risky. The analysis appears to support this premise, as the narratives demonstrate, engagement by mothers from BAME communities risk bringing change. The naturalised aspects of British society such as understanding ideas about (non)engaged citizens deploying their rights and ambitions for their children to become part of a bolder future, intimates that mothers in the study are prepared to quietly challenge social rhetoric and structures. Encounters by mothers speak of assailing boundaries that present barriers to a more comprehensive equality discourse that includes *'everybody is just Manchester'*.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusions

#### 8.1 Introduction

The conclusion to this study considers how, through this research, the experiences of a small group of mothers from BAME communities who are engaging with the two-year-old offer, help unsettle expectations of engagement and non-engagement with ECEC policies and beyond.

In doing so I explore how voices from communities might trouble systems of reason, embedded in ECEC policies and the equality discourse upon which they are built. This chapter sets out why it was important to do a study such as this. The willingness to raise serious questions about the impact ECEC policies have in the lives of families and individuals is not new. However, this study strives to unsettle the normative discourses of equality that can easily slip into invisibility in the written narratives of ECEC policies and research, and in the spoken narratives and practices of national and local policy-makers and early years professionals. This study started with the overarching research question:

In what ways might the experiences of a small group of mothers from BAME communities who are engaging with the two-year-old offer, help unsettle expectations of engagement and non-engagement with ECEC policies and beyond?

In order to answer this overarching question, I asked the following questions:

1. How might the language of a neoliberal equality discourse in the two-year-old offer and wider ECEC policy, shape the way early childhood education and care professionals encounters mothers from BAME communities?
2. What might the experiences of mothers from BAME communities offer to professional expectations about sameness and difference in enacting ECEC policies?
3. What might mothers' encounters of (non)engagement with professionals outside ECEC practice do to unsettle notions of sameness and difference beyond ECEC policies?
4. In what ways might mothers' experiences of (non)engagement contribute to ideas of (non)engaged citizens?

5. Methodologically, what are the challenges, affordances and contributions made by engaging postcolonial theory and feminist research in a study working with women from BAME communities in a small area of South Manchester?

Through narratives emanating from this study, professionals might question how discourses of equality construct 'truths' in policy that are enacted in practice. The study offers spaces where uncertainty might challenge the consequences of building an understanding of equality reliant on reducible, observable and measurable principles to assess and judge. Arguably, a neoliberal equality discourse might frame mothers in this study as both engaged and not engaged, dependent on their behaviour and the assessed results of their children's performance in the EYFSP (DfE, 2016a).

In research, ambiguity disturbs ideas, preventing them from settling into sedated 'truths', whilst precarity renders 'truths' fragile. This unsettled the research experience and whilst hauntings helped negotiate and articulate this unsettling they could not solve or manage it. Engaging postcolonial and feminist research meant encountering uncertainty throughout the research process in ways I had not anticipated. Yet postcolonial feminist theory also helped me glimpse what precarity offers. Whilst research ideas continue to feel ambiguous, possibilities also arise from this.

In this chapter, I begin by returning to the research questions, before moving on to consider what this study might add to scholarly knowledge. I present a discussion regarding the limitations of the study as well as commenting on the impact this study has on my practice and future postdoctoral work moving forward.

### 8.2 How might the language of a neoliberal equality discourse in the two-year-old offer and wider ECEC policy, shape the way early childhood education and care professionals encounters mothers from BAME communities?

In responding to question one I examined how a powerful equality discourse, embedded within the two-year-old offer, uses language to generate taken for granted 'truths' about sameness, difference and belonging. The reason for asking this question was that assumed neoliberal 'truths' are perceived to shape policies and research and seep into the practices of professionals working with families and young children.

The language of ECEC policy appeared not only in the narratives of LW Alex, but also in the narratives of mothers. In the study, the subtle adoption of the equality discourse through language suggested more than simply absorbing language and acting in accordance with it. Rather it suggested the language of ECEC policy is not benign, but demands and shapes actions. The narrative of LW Alex hinted at how language in policy shaped her encounters and perceptions of mothers from BAME communities, whilst the narratives of mothers offered the response to these demands.

Bhabha (1994) refers to mockery as the action of mimicry that exposes limitations and disparity in the demands the equality discourse makes of mothers and ECEC professionals. Yet the narratives of mothers hinted at ambiguity in responding to the language of the neoliberal equality discourse in ECEC policy. For instance, mothers' concerns about the pressure engaging with the two-year-old offer might put on their children, expectations of family and fears about what would happen at the nursery, mixed with the value mothers placed on the opportunities the two-year-old offer brought. Forging relationships between difference and sameness threaded through these narratives of (non)engagement with the two-year-old offer. The narratives hinted at ambiguity, that unsettled the endeavours language in ECEC policy might make at order and synchronicity. These thwarted attempts by the neoliberal equality discourse to demarcate un/acceptable strangeness in (non)engagement with the two-year-old offer and striving for social harmony through order and sameness. This led to the discussions framed by the second research question.

### 8.3 What might the experiences of mothers from BAME communities offer to professional expectations about sameness and difference in enacting ECEC policies?

The experiences of mothers in the study troubled normative 'truths' found in ECEC policies. In a complex world of uncertainty, that brings fragility into the small daily lives of individuals, such 'truths' support apparently strong and stable systems, shaping encounters between professionals and families. An over reliance on unquestioned and invisible powerful neoliberal discourses, such as that of equality, are not necessarily helpful within these encounters.

Narratives spoke of the trust placed in a neoliberal equality discourse that resists and restricts opportunities to form relationships with ambiguity. Mothers and the liaison worker

shared encounters, shaped by those with authority, using order and certainty as a means to control uncertainty. Through considering behaviours of camouflage, I was able to unpick the uneasy relationship between masterful control and responses I found in the data.

ECEC policies might frame decisions about (non)engagement as the choice of mothers, yet wider forces of home and public expectations render this less clear and more ambiguous. Narratives from living with ambiguity unsettled (non)engagement. Mothers' narratives suggest how professionals and policy-makers offered ways to focus less on finding ways to 'manage' and 'control' uncertainty and rather seek value from acknowledging and responding to ambiguity in practice. This study suggests that being open to ambiguity that arises from the uncertainty of encounters with difference, might help to make structures supporting equality more flexible. Seeing how encounters that render mother precarious also render professionals and policies precarious, could offer professionals and policy-makers spaces where relationships with uncertainty are more open and responsive. This leads me to consider mothers' encounters with professionals outside ECEC practice.

#### 8.4 What might mothers' encounters of (non)engagement with professionals outside ECEC practice do to unsettle notions of sameness and difference beyond ECEC policies?

The narrations of mothers about encounters with health professionals became a lens to trouble a tendency of equality discourses to reduce and smooth over uncertain complexity with powerful and comforting 'truths' about sameness, normality and stability. Difference appeared to become a site to place perceived problems. However, doing so constructed in encounters boundaries that placed mothers into a problematic space of difference before these encounters occurred. Through *différance*, I was able to unsettle seemingly stable truths professionals relied upon. Truths appeared more complex, ambiguous and any stability they appeared to create generated precarity in encounters that limited enactments of equality.

Ahmed (2000) suggests encounters reinforce boundaries, as those already recognised as different meet those holding access to sameness. Yet in the analysis, I suggest seeking alternate perspectives on these encounters, might create ruptures in boundaries that offer sites to question the equality discourse. For example, Astur and Badr's reflections about experiences along multiple boundaries with health professionals, created ruptures that



trouble a discourse of difference. Astur and Badr's reading of actions by health professionals and their own families, created for them, boundaries they chose to assail. Therefore, what might simply appear as mothers successfully engaging with equality discourses to establish their rights, also speaks of ruptures. From the perspective of mothers, in their encounters with professionals, 'truths' about difference, used to placate their concerns about their children created a boundary but also a rupture point. A health professional's assumption about the use of language became a rupture, disturbing boundaries of duality, shifting their conversation onto learning two languages as simultaneously problematic and helpful. The idea of correcting the health professional appeared transient and ephemeral. Astur and Badr passed through it moving instead to ideas holding more significance to them both – the benefits and challenges of bilingualism. Yet for me, it became a disturbance, a rupture point in the research process.

Within the data, mothers' experiences exposed what I have called precarity in the equality discourse haunting their stories. A reprimand by a nurse when in hospital with her newborn baby became, for Badr, an early encounter with a western discourse of equality. Yet this encounter also renders precarious an equality discourse that led a health professional's cultural view of motherhood to problematize Badr's cultural understanding of motherhood. Badr, the nurse and the 'truths' within the equality discourse haunting this encounter, appear precarious. Without an openness to ambiguity in a discourse and the 'truths' it generates are made invisible and the precarity of the discourse is not seen. The only precarity visible is Badr's, created as a cultural 'lack'. The precarity of the equality discourse framing this cultural lack remains hidden. This leads to question 4 and the wider implications of 'being' a (non)engaged citizen.

#### 8.5 In what ways might mothers' experiences of (non)engagement contribute to ideas of (non)engaged citizens?

Negotiating and balancing expectations of being a (non)engaged citizen arose as Cala narrated how expectations to engage with the two-year-old offer and so meet what the discourse of equality in ECEC policies saw as 'being' an engaged mother, intersected with expectations of family. To government, local authority and early years professionals, Cala might represent both an engaged mother but also a mother of a child who requires the support of the two-year-old offer, a (non)engaged, disadvantaged citizen. Cala's family

appeared to see her and their actions as 'progressive'. Yet for Cala there is perhaps ambiguity in both views. Cala's narrative could be understood as reflecting ambiguity about living with and adjusting to expectations. Cala seemed to have found scope to push back, to unsettle the terms of (non)engagement she faced. Cala engaged with the two-year-old offer, but it is uncertain whether she was prepared to engage with its discourse of equality. Cala's response hints at how ambiguity offers a means to trouble demands for 'sameness' placed on her by the equality discourses of ECEC policy and her family.

This study does not propose some alternative universalising systems upon which to build a new reliance. Rather this study calls upon the relatively short, but deeply thoughtful and affecting narratives individuals offer of their experiences, as a lens that might deconstruct some of these values and open up a powerful equality discourse to the scrutiny of quiet, but equally powerful, perspectives. This leads to the final research question.

#### 8.6 Methodologically, what are the challenges, affordances and contributions made by engaging postcolonial theory and feminist research in a study working with women from BAME communities in a small area of South Manchester?

Postcolonial feminist theory offered a postmodern perspective that resonated with the study's ambition and provided me with the possibility of engaging the insightful thoughts of Homi Bhabha (1994) and Sara Ahmed (1998) in this study.

Engaging postcolonial feminist theory as a frame for both the study focus and the research process arose from a decision to take as my point of reference the narrated experiences of a small group of mothers from BAME communities in an inner-city area of Manchester. Methodologically, postcolonial feminist research theory became a prevailing element in my experience of conducting this research. It both challenged and supported the research process and I attempted to articulate this throughout the thesis.

Postcolonial feminism in the research process brought mothers and myself into immediate encounters of unknowable differences. The focus groups opened up spaces where the otherness of each other, appeared as momentary relationships. The power between and amongst us suggested spaces, where uncertainty might work. I strive in this study to avoid simple knowledge exchange, where I translate mothers' 'truths'. Instead, I attempt to acknowledge that unspoken secrets, un-representable by sameness might remain hidden

in the narratives constructed in the focus groups, but these do not render mothers voiceless. Ahmed (1998) warns against attempting to write such encounters into policy, implying it a violence that returns to a discourse of equality through sameness.

#### 8.7 An outline of the contribution this study makes to practice and scholarly knowledge

In this study, I attempt to merge subject and experience, to mingle and complicate 'knowing'. Doing so points to the possibilities that arise from being open to and working with ruptures in boundaries, ambiguity and precarity. If discourses and policies focus on maintaining authority and control by rendering uncertainty invisible, then these possibilities are lost.

The narratives of women in the study helped deconstruct boundaries that sought to hold mothers in their place. Women's experiences illustrated complex webs of boundaries riddling contemporary equality discourses and unsettling encounters of equality that might help question policy and its enactment in practice. Symbolic icons of difference in the neoliberal equality discourse apparently produced meaning for professionals about difference that created boundaries between them and mothers. Yet mothers' narratives offered a lens through which boundaries emerge as fluid and leaky, defying 'truths' constructed prior to encounters occurring, but that also leaked into the focus group discussions, becoming part of shared conversations, as mothers appeared to see something that I could not. The rupture in the focus group saw further spectres of uncertainty stream into the data, yet had I halted the conversations and asked for clarity I fear I would have steered the narrative into a direction I sought.

Ruptures do not suggest creating a counter discourse of equality through difference, to write into policy. Rather, they offer spaces where uncertainty might challenge consequences from building an understanding of equality reliant on reducible, observable and measurable principles to assess and judge. Applying Derrida's (1994) *différance* to boundaries helps glimpse ruptures that question the futility of attempting to dissect sameness from difference, as spectres from past ideas and experiences bring uncertainty. Boundaries are places of struggle, and because of this struggle and uncertainty, ambiguity became a second theme in the analysis.

This thesis argues that a less-fearful willingness to engage with ambiguity in encounters with uncertainty. Whilst challenging, ambiguity also suggest possibilities. In this study, ambiguity as a theme arising from women's narratives, offers possibilities that shifting the gaze away from communities and towards a powerful discourse, might loosen its reliance on western neoliberal 'truths'. For professionals and policy-makers, ambiguity disturbs ideas, preventing them from settling into sedated 'truths'.

Ambiguity also reflects the limits I faced examining both the study topic of (non)engagement and my ability to (not)engage in the research process. Barnacle and Dall'Alba (2014) propose that ambiguity offers ways to move beyond concerns about control. Control that boundaries epitomise. Ambiguity considers shifting knowledge, for example, 'knowing' about ruptures in boundaries is itself ambiguous. This reflected much that I encountered through engaging postcolonial feminism in the study, as what I know became both certain and uncertain, ambiguous. Spectres of being and not being different drifted through encounters between mothers and me. Our (non)engagement with each other caused ambiguity to haunt the experience of this research and the chapters of this thesis. This leads me to the theme of precarity to help expand this.

Troubling a neoliberal equality discourse such as that found in ECEC policy, challenges an understanding of difference as that which is outside the boundaries of acceptability. In this study, precarity becomes a link to how narratives of (non)engagement might challenge this understanding. Experiences of precarity offer disruptions to this equality discourse in unexpected ways, building upon ambiguity. The study does not seek to present some subaltern 'wisdom' derived from experiences of precarity, to challenge a western discourse. Rather these experiences reflect the precarious nature of a neoliberal equality discourse. The narratives speak of relationships between equality and precarity acting on multiple levels, merging the small private sphere of family with the public sphere of education and health institutions. Recognising the precarious nature of society and the impact precarity can have upon individuals and communities became a means to analyse the equality discourse in this study as well as within government policy.

This thesis suggests that without an openness to the challenges of ambiguity arising from uncertainty, then the structures supporting equality discourses risk becoming fragile and brittle. Seeing precarity in discourses suggests ways ambiguity might help professionals and

policy-makers find spaces for relationships with uncertainty that are more flexible. In conducting the research, precarity rendering my 'truths' fragile, unsettled the research experience. Hauntings helped me negotiate this unsettling but could not solve or manage it. Ambiguity arising from encountering uncertainty throughout the research, speaks of precarity in conducting the study and articulating the ideas. Yet it also suggests possibilities I had not anticipated before starting the research.

### 8.8 Limitations to the study

As well as offering possibilities in this study, *différance* also presents dilemmas. Of course, there is no guarantee that experiences narrated or the thesis written are understood in ways the mothers or I intended. Therefore, uncertainty drifts into the fabric of the study, creating ambiguity not only in the subject I explore, but also in the ways I create and present meaning from it. Yet exploring these ideas of (non)engagement, sameness and difference in the discourse of equality might help reposition equality from a 'different' perspective. Seeking this different perspective is not without its challenges, not least from Ahmed's warning of "fetishizing" difference (Antwi et al, 2013: 116). Whilst I maintain the narratives of mothers offer valuable experiences of how a discourse creates experiences of being made different by others. The ways they differ are not the focus of the study; rather the experience of this becomes a lens to focus on the equality discourse creating these encounters.

There is a risk that in writing this study, I might inadvertently feed a 'fetishizing' of difference. This echoes my ongoing concern about the role my whiteness played in this study, and limitations arising from that. Yet I maintain that ambiguity like research is not without risk. It is challenging to engage experiences from a less powerful group as a lens to redirect a gaze towards a more powerful discourse. It is particularly challenging when the researcher doing so represents a more powerful group. Attempting a feminist ethics of care with participants from groups positioned as less powerful within wider society might help but does not resolve these issues. Yet shifting experiences of ambiguity echo the shifting experiences of my role in this study. A researcher from the same community as the mothers might have done this research differently. No two webs are ever the same. However, the perspective I bring to the study and the challenges postcolonial feminist research ideas

presented to me, suggest there is also value in the perspective I bring to this and the web I weave.

This study is small; perhaps my whiteness raised a reluctance, particularly on the part of husbands for participants to engage. Future studies might engage with more women or with women from other communities. Alternatively, taking a longitudinal approach to this research might make it possible to build narratives that stretch over a period of time. However, keeping to small spaces to examine experiences in detail, is perhaps also useful for a study such as this. As this study does not intend to present a counter discourse to that of the equality discourse it is troubling, the small numbers of women involved do not seek to construct a single counter narrative. Rather by enabling space to draw out the small, lived experiences of a group of women from BAME community perspectives emerge that contain a smaller, concentrated power.

No single cohesive narrative arose from the focus groups, rather a collection of individual and shared experiences worked together to create multiple narratives that overlapped and diverged from each other. I do not consider this reduces the validity of what the women said. Rather, in agreement with Ahmed (1998), I see these multiple narratives as ways to question a concept of universal values and 'truths'. Ahmed (1998: 54) asks "Is this term fixed or given, or is it open to being defined in different ways? Who, within a given community, authorises the definition of 'values'?" The narratives women in the study created, reflected how the emancipatory values buried within concepts of (non)engagement in the two-year-old offer, combined with the emancipatory values embedded in the lived everyday experiences of women. I have attempted in the thesis to document how narratives of women in the study were able to stand alongside other narratives from policies, researchers, theories and my own. This has provided me with ideas as I now begin to consider the implications this study has in my own practice.

### 8.9 Implications for my practice

Being open to ambiguity in the narratives women shared in the focus groups and precarity in my attempts at analysing these, have helped me consider the role third space (Bhabha, 1994) plays in my practice. This has implications for my role in Higher Education working with undergraduate students and early years professionals. The idea of third spaces in

which to explore and engage with ambiguity has become something I have started to build upon. In a project working with early years practitioners, I used third space as a means to explore ideas of professional identity and presented a paper to the British Education Research Association in September 2016. Third spaces and openness to ambiguity have also started to become a teaching tool for working with undergraduate students. I am finding ways for students from diverse cultural communities to collaboratively explore ambiguity in 'truths' about sociocultural perspectives of children's learning and development and the implications this has for early years practice.

Similarly, Derrida's (1994) *différance* has become a means for me to reflect upon complexity, in choices and decisions not only in the research process but also in constructing ideas about knowledge and learning. As a personal tutor and head of year, I am interested in how students reflect upon their experiences of an undergraduate degree. This has implications both for how we as an institution approach learning but more immediately it has implications for how I approach and 'understand' students' experiences and expectations of learning whilst at university. The presence/non-presence academic staff play in the lives of undergraduate students is interesting. This has implications for how students connect learning whilst at university with their previous experiences prior to commencing their studies and as future graduates of an early years and childhood studies degree.

#### 8.10 Future postdoctoral work

This study's examination of how professionals, researchers and policy-makers approach (non)engagement by mothers from BAME communities in the two-year-old offer, might be shaped by an equality discourse and easy 'truths' about mothers' taken-for-granted 'strangeness'. Yet narratives by mothers combine with postcolonial feminist theories to unsettle this discourse and open up boundaries of (non)engagement with ECEC policies to a much wider hybridity of change and equality. Ambiguity and precarity suggest it is less easy to manage and control uncertainty than, perhaps, government, local authority, and professionals imagine.

Going forward, this study offers a starting point to explore ideas of ambiguity and precarity that arise when professionals and researchers work with participants' experiences to reach

beyond 'lack' within participants' communities. Ambiguity arising from uncertainty, offers the possibility to investigate how precarity in discourses within policies echo the precarity these policies can create in the lives of individuals. These are areas for future exploration. In addition, engaging with the ideas of postcolonial feminism and the role of hauntings in conducting research with challenging postmodern ideas is an area I would like to pursue.

Perhaps the most significant implication this thesis has for my postdoctoral work has come from my experience of hauntings. As I have repeated throughout the study, hauntings and spectres have come to represent the experience of engaging with postmodern theories such as postcolonial and feminist theories. From a methodological perspective hauntings was my response to the demands for researcher reflexivity these theories made of me. There is capacity now for me to explore this in greater depth. To begin with, questioning my relationship with hauntings within this study might help me explore the viability of working with haunting spectres within research methodology in future research.



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PLEASE NOTE: THE NAMES OF ALL PARTICIPANTS HAVE BEEN CHANGED

Appendix I

Interview with mums 1/10/15

Mother 1 Astur

Mother 2 Badr

Researcher R

Researcher (R) and Mother 1 (Astur) in the room.

R: So, what I thought we might do if that's okay. Is just to start with, because you said that originally you came from Somalia.

Astur: Yes

R: I've brought a book. An atlas.

Astur: oh yes a book. *laughter*. Okay

R: the reason I brought it is. I think when a lot of people, erm like the government, talk about communities and they use words like 'black' and 'Asian', 'minority ethnic community'. I think it puts everybody into one group, and people are really much more different than this.

Astur: Yes

R: We all have such different backgrounds.

Astur: Definitely

R: So what I would like to do to start with is to spend some time if that's okay talking about your journey that you talked about. You talked about briefly before about coming here and your experience of childhood and how that might be different and also the same for your children.

Astur: Yes.

R: And then we can talk about your thoughts on the two year old offer. Is that okay?

Astur: Yes. That's fine.

R: I'm not sure how useful this is but .. *opens atlas* .. if we look at where originally in the world you came from. Somalia.

Astur: It's in Africa.

R: *Searches through the atlas with A.* Here we are, we've got North East Africa.

Astur: I'm not really sure where I am in the map. *Laugh.*

R: It's alright we'll find it. Here we go. Somalia

Astur: *A & R look at map.* I'm from Mogadishu. Oh look it has all the names. Ahh yes here. *A looks more closely at the map.*

R: it's quite interesting really.

Astur: Yes. Oh I heard all these names from my mum. *Points at names on the map across Somalia.*

R: Did your mum come from there?

Astur: no, no. But us have never really looked on a map to see where they all are.

R: Where was your mum from?

Astur: We were all from Mogadishu. My mum my dad were born in Mogadishu we were all from Mogadishu. Probably my grandma from my mum's side were from here. My dad's side were from outside of there.

R: Yeah.

Astur: I'm not really sure. But me and my mum and dad were from there.

R: Oh thank you. So did you grow up, when you were very young in Mogadishu?

Astur: yeah. I don't really remember life in Mogadishu. Umm. We left when I was like eighth, nine.

R: Yeah.

Astur: *pause.* So I don't really know that much until mum tells us a few stories.

R: Oh yes? What kind of stories does your mum tell you?

Astur: Oh. Of how we were like. Of what the weather was like there. Of what we used to do. Yeah.

R: Are there any stories that you remember from that?

Astur: Well my mum, actually we moved out from there when we were young and the war happened. As you grow up, as a teenager, when you ask questions of where you come from. It is like you hear all about the countries and fights and this and that. But you don't really hear before the fights. Of how your childhood is.

R: Yeah

Astur: *pause*. Because you feel like people just struggled and you kind of .. your memories just go away sometimes. So obviously, memory is not just go from my mum but from us. Because you grow up and you become a teenager and life just was quite difficult. And so you look back and you think 'oh, did I do that?' 'How was it like?' So we had to ask our mum 'what was I like?' and not us remember it. *Laughs*. So yeah, it's quite funny because we only remember like the grown up bit. But I forgot the memory of what it was like, what it felt like when I was much younger.

R: Yeah? So do you remember leaving Mogadishu and coming here? Or do you only remember being here?

Astur: No actually I remember. Cos my mum left first. So my dad was looking after us.

R: Oh right?

Astur: so she left and she used to stay in Italy and work there. And she was studying. And then the fight happened, so my dad was looking after us. And obviously we had all family members, my grandma was there. My mum's side, my dad's side. My aunties, my cousins. Some of them are here now. They tell us like 'oh I used to look after you when you were a child. I can't believe you've grown up. You have kids!' *laughs*

R: *laughs*.

Astur: *laughs* And I'm like 'really?' They're 'like you're still a baby'. And I'm like 'no I feel like I'm old now' 'I'm a mother for four!' so she tells me like, she knows me,

obviously she was looking after me. So she kind of tells me 'you're a baby!' and I felt like I'm a big woman. I'm twenty-eight and she tells me 'no!' *laughing*. So you kind of have an idea of what your childhood is like. It's nice to meet someone who know you to that point. You know what I'm talking about?

R: Yes. Definitely

Astur: so they can tell you a bit more of what you were like.

R: what do they say you were like?

Astur: oh lovely!

R: Oh!

Astur: fussy eater. Didn't want to eat anything! *Laughing*

R: *laughing*. Really?

Astur: I have that with my daughter. She doesn't want to eat anything. My mum says 'she's so like you' I'm like 'okay' so I do have a good memory. I do have lots of family members around to tell us as well. My mum was telling me a neighbour of hers who lives in London. She was asking about me. She's like 'where's that girl who used to cry a lot?' I'm like 'really? Was I a crying child?' *Laughs*.

R: Oh really?

Astur: *laughs*. So yeah it's nice to have ... that sort of people around as well. So I do have a rough idea of what it was like. Because I get like reminded all the time!

R: oh from all these people.

Astur: yeah. So we have quite a lot. So all my family members are all, most, here. So I'm quite lucky. I have a few friends who people are still not with them. And that. *Pauses*.

R: so that's lucky.

Astur: yeah. So it's good, yeah.



R: it's interesting to remember and to hear stories about when we were children. Especially when you've got your own children.

Astur: Yes. Definitely. I've got loads of pictures.

R: Have you got pictures of when you were a child?

Astur: Yeah. So my mum actually went back a couple of years ago. And the family members kept some of the stuff. And so photos of when we were babies. So yeah we've got like quite good pictures. So I'm like 'oh my god that's us!' *laughing*

R: Oh that's lovely. Maybe if we meet again next time if you've got any to bring? I'd love to see them.

Astur: Yeah. We've got one of me crying! *Laughs.*

R: *laughs.* Like your neighbour said!

Astur: oh yeah. *Laughs...* one when I was two, and my mum says 'Oh I had moved away to one side and you wanted me, you wanted to be next to me'. I'm like 'Oh my god was I that fussy?' *Both laugh.* So, yeah it was actually good to know, so my daughter when she was crying in the nursery I said to my mum 'Oh \_\_\_\_\_ started' she said 'Good luck!' Because my mum thinks she's similar to me when I was a child.

R: Ahh Right.

Astur: She's really, really attached to me; as I was to my mum. She said 'You're going to have a gooooood [emphasis] time with her!' She said 'You're going to have a lot of crying trying to leave her!' It was even difficult when my mum was trying to babysit her. If she wanted \_\_\_\_\_ to have a sleep. She was kind of like 'No!' [Emphasis] she wants to come with me. It was quite difficult but as she got to know the nursery. The first time I came back. The second time I was coming back. Third. So she kind of thought 'oh mummy's not going away!'

R: Yeah

Astur: So she's really, really settled as well. Once she gets to know, she's that sort of a person. Once she gets to know you and she thinks 'Okay, mummy's just gone, but she came back' at first she kind of thought I was leaving her for good or something

and that's why she had kind of a melt down and cried and things like that. Wow, it's a major step for her! So when she realised I'm coming back for her. She felt like 'oh yeah, this is a school where I play and do things; and mummy's coming to get me' so obviously, because she's only two, and something. Almost three now! *Laughs*. She's got used to it. *Laughs*. Because she's the baby, she's going to be three soon! So she realised like her sister and her brothers go to school and they come back. She realised with \_\_\_ as well. At first she wanted to stay when she was little, a little bit younger. When I took \_\_\_ in she wanted to sit down with him. So I used to tell her 'It's not for you yet! When it is your time you will be coming here.' So when it was her time she felt like 'I don't want to stay!' she kind of changed her mind. But now she's really, really settled.

R: how long has she been coming?

Astur: Since September.

R: Oh right so that's quite quick then.

Astur: Yeah. We tried with her in April. She wasn't really ready. So I said 'you know let's just try, once September opens the school again.' So I said the summer holidays will give her quite some time to see if she grows up from this. And \_\_\_\_\_ (nursery staff) was saying just yesterday 'you made quite the right move' because it was for her. I felt like, at the time that she wasn't quite ready and she felt like 'why are you doing this?' it just depends how she felt. Some days she wanted to stay after she refused! And I was like 'but you didn't want to stay!' so sometimes she does and some she doesn't. So I said 'you know what I think September will be a good time; and you know it was'.

R: Yeah and so she's settled now?

Astur: Yeah. It only took her like the first week. The first week it was really, really hard. But obviously she's got her brother and they play outside.

R: Ahh, so she sees her brother?

Astur: Yeah. I wanted him to start full-time nursery because our school you know \_\_\_\_\_ (names a local school)? Have you been in the school?

R: I know the school but I haven't been inside.

Astur: Yeah, they don't have a fulltime nursery. Before I moved I used to live in \_\_\_\_\_ (names another area in city) before I moved to \_\_\_\_\_. So, over there, my daughter she had fulltime nursery and my son went fulltime nursery. But because they have a nursery next to it and this one, when they were building they had no permission to build a nursery.

R: Ahh right.

Astur: So they only start from Reception, and I can't take three different schools. So I decided for him to stay here until he's in Reception; because he was having good progress in here as well. With his speech. It's much, much, much better. It's getting a bit clearer. Before his words were like the words not clear at all. But we started with 'non-clear' to 'clear'. So we're like he's improving. The more he grows up the more he's improving.

R: Yes because you said before that you thought that bringing him to the nursery really helped his speech?

Astur: Really, really helped. Because he comes in and he has a routine. He's got things to do in the morning at ten, ten-thirty, eleven. He can go outside. They've got fruit, singing time, phonics times. He does a lot of activities because I'm involved with his education as well.

Session stops as staff member enters the room and says another mum (Badr) has arrived to join the study and will be in after dropping off her child. I speak to A to affirm if it is okay for another mum to join her.

R: Is that okay then with you?

Astur: Yes, yes that's okay. I'll stop talking! *Laughs*.

R: No don't stop talking, please. *Laughs*. Keep talking. So you said that you were really involved in your son's ..

Astur: yes I am really involved. So I've asked them like, the Speech Therapists, I've asked them like how we can help him? So when they give me ideas of how we can

build up his speech, so I do come in and let the staff know. How they can help him build up. Before it was like 'tell him small words' it was starting with small words. Single words. And they did, with repeating. So now its coming out from the repeat into a sentence. If you know what I'm trying to say.

R: Yes.

Astur: But his sentence now is like 'how are you?' 'are you okay?' 'I need toilet' so he's able to say those things. And especially with his sentences I would say he's much better at home with me now. Before it was like he is outside but now it is much better. He is more confident at home. Because here he doesn't say like 'I need toilet'. If the girls ask him he'll say 'yes'. He's getting there but he's still a bit shy. *Laughs.*

R: Yes. He's learning though to be more confident?

Astur: Yes. He's getting far more; he's much more confident now ... than he was before he started at school. So it really, really helps.

R: so did he have the free two year old childcare?

Astur: Yes, yes he did and that helped. If it wasn't for that I think we would have struggled because he would have stayed at home and he would not have gone to this.

Another mum (Badr) enters the room to join the research. Recording is stopped whilst I discuss the research and gain consent from new mother and both agree to continue the discussion together. I switch on the recorder. B says that she wants to join as her daughter has had a diagnosis of adolescent rheumatoid arthritis and she has started on the two year old offer.

Astur: We were just talking about the experience I had with my son about his speech delay. I think it is good experience for her to join us.

Badr: So I mean she would wake up and she wouldn't sleep at night. And then was crying out in pain and then when I took her to the GP they referred me to take her to hospital. And as you can appreciate it takes some time for them to diagnose what it is. So they said if it was an injury it would have healed for six weeks so during them six weeks she wasn't getting any better. Which means that day to day I was just at

home with her. And because the pain was more severe in the morning, it would only settle in the afternoon. To the extent when I've given her ibuprofen and she's gradually used to move. But it was really, really difficult.

R: How old was she when all that started?

Badr: She was about, she was about one and a half; and *pauses* it was just, like they've not given any reason. Nobodies got it in the family, anyone. But for me it was really stressful because I was really worried because I just didn't know what it was. And then I used to just stay home with her and not really do much. I couldn't get out. It kind of made me really down as well, because of what was happening. *Pause*. And I didn't really ... sometimes we felt, like I felt, a bit isolated with it as well because it was like just me and my daughter and we'd have to be indoors but then ... she had an MR scan and in that they diagnosed, they thought it would be um juvenile arthritis. At first they sent us to the orthopaedics and they said there's nothing wrong with the bones and then they'd seen this inflammation in the leg and then yeah, it's been diagnosed so ... But since then the SureStart keyworker was really helpful because I explained my situation and then like I insisted if I could get a two year old place for \_\_\_\_ (child's name) quite urgently and they helped me get the place. And the nursery, I think she must have made a special referral or added something in and supported me on the application. And I was really glad to get her a place, and now she's so much settled. And her condition as well. They've managed to get the right medication and it's only now that I'm starting to feel a bit more that, you know I've got some time to myself and I can feel a bit more alive. Because it's been really rough all through that time.

R: And that must have been going on for about a year?

Badr: Yeah, just over a year. Last summer 2014 when it started. But ... yeah it's been. I mean I've only been in this area since 2013.

R: Oh right.

Badr: We used to live in \_\_\_\_ (names another area in the city, the same area A mentioned earlier)

Astur: Oh I came from there.

Badr: Yeah then we moved and got this house.

Astur: I moved 2012, December.

Badr: Yeah? Okay. But it's a nice community. And like there's things going on at the Sure Start centre. You get information and you can come along with the children and other things going on. You know just being informed about what's going on.

R: Yeah. So do you feel happy with the support that you got?

Badr: Yeah I think I feel well supported. So yeah.

R: *To A.* You were just talking about your son and the support ...

Astur: Yeah, with the speech delay and because my son and my daughter there's only a one year age gap. And being a mum, it's really, really hard, especially with having two children with a close age gap because my other two children have a big age gap, two years, three years. When she was born, he was one and I hadn't realised, being busy, that he was having, that he's not .. on time, with his talking. So I just thought 'oh?'. I knew he was a lot quieter than other babies, but I hadn't realised it was actually a problem. Until like one year and a half. I realised that his speech is a little bit slower than my other kids were, and that really, really worried me so I took him to the GP and they said, you know, 'he's really, really young you shouldn't be worried about his talking at this stage'. So I said 'you know my children were quite active and talking at this age' so they said 'you shouldn't really be comparing your kids. Some are slow, some are fast, some are you know medium' So I said 'But there is definitely something wrong because as a mum, I can feel .... like he needs a bit of help. So they said 'let's just see, a couple of months, then see how he is' So around one year nine months, one year ten months I went back and said 'you know he's not even saying 'baba' or 'mama' or anything. There is definitely something not right' so I asked them to transfer me to speech and language therapy. Because I said 'as a mum, I'm really, really worried'. So I said 'instead of being late and delaying everything. I would really like to know at this stage if we can do to help him'. So they didn't really want to refer me but because I insisted, they had to refer me. But when I went there I met a couple

of mums who delayed their children and they were saying to me 'you know actually you made a good move because when he was two year and two months I'd been offered a speech and language therapist so we went there like over twelve weeks. Ones were for the mums and dads and ones were with the kids. So we had like one hour with the child and every fortnight we were having like two hours, just the parents meeting. No children at that time. So they were giving us information, how to help your child, what to do with him. Loads, and they really helps. But for me going early kind of really helped me; because they helped him when he was quite young. But we've seen other parents there and with their children they were like four ... and they were kind of regretting the mistake they made to bring them, to realise they delayed when they were given that advice to wait and see. They actually listened and they said if they'd brought the child when they were younger, when they started with this programme that might have changed something .... So I think it made a difference for me to go to the speech and language therapist quite young. Because it really, really helps. Somebody recommended a nursery who was going through the same thing as me. So her son was referred when he was three and something. So she was kind of thinking I was in a good place because I got referred when he was quite a young age. It was like just the two other mums out of the twenty people who were there, who their kids were under three and actually two and a half, mostly. So I think with that age it really, really helped and it made a difference as well. Because the child was quite small at that time and ... he was late so when they taught the words and the child was like where they should be at around eighteen months with their speech. You know when they compare the child. My son was like eighteen months old for the things he was saying. Where the four year olds were like still the same child at eighteen months. But because you can't compare a four year and a two year, obviously that made a difference as well. So I think if I had delayed or I had not brought him to the nursery we probably wouldn't be where we are. It would have been quite a struggle. It was a really, really hard time to be honest because I thought he might be autistic because when you haven't got the experience and you are going through a difficult time you research stuff, you talk to people, you hear things.

Badr: Yes that's happened to me. Because I thought because my daughter started off limping and my husband thought that she had hurt herself, like 'she's fell somewhere'. And he was thinking that I 'm being a bit too ... because I'm quite 'on board' with the children. I'm really like. I get really worked up as in make sure. I'm maybe too, I do I don't know what's the word? Obviously as a mother we do ...

Astur: We get really, really worried. I have the same thing with mine.

Badr: ... and then my husband was like 'you know she's probably just hurt herself, she' fell' and I said 'No, because you know she's always been in front of me. She's not had any injuries' and then like he was saying like 'you don't know' and I was talking to my friends and people were saying like 'Do you know? Is she up to date with her immunisations? Do you think its polio?' things like that, you know, which were really scary. Because obviously I didn't know what it was. She started, first of all she was limping and then she'd get up in the morning, or just keep crying at night because of pain. Or in the morning, she was like really stiff. She couldn't bear weight. She was standing on one leg. I just didn't know what it was. At that time, obviously as a mother, you get very worried. Thinking. You think the worst.

Astur: Yeah definitely.

Badr: ... because you've not been in that situation and you've got different people telling you different things. You can only go by ... with the NHS, and sometimes it's a matter of persevering most of the time because they can't give a quick answer. They have to rule out everything and make sure what it is. What's been diagnosed, at the time when the orthopaedics, when we were referred to the orthopaedics, they said 'Oh well you will get a referral in a few months' time.' Before being seen by the rheumatology department, which is the department she's under now. And I said 'How can you just tell me that. It's quite difficult for me.' So luckily I had this deep conversation with them and told them how I felt as a parent, and the fact that she is so young. You can't just, I feel that's neglecting. I know it's sometimes just a matter of waiting. But I insisted for her to be seen quickly. At that time I just felt really alone. I just felt as though I fought my way through because I didn't really have anyone on



my side. My husband was saying 'Oh. You know you're being too ... *(paused)*' he was, like really passive about the situation. Maybe men are, like when it comes to ...

Astur: Yeah they just tell you like 'you are being too much'

Badr: Yeah, when it's kids ..

Astur: '... it's not as bad as you think' I've had a similar thing, people telling me 'Oh he's too young.' 'Why are you worried?' 'It's not bad.' 'Kids get delayed sometimes. I'm like 'My kids were up to date' I said you know, maybe there is something wrong with him. At this stage he shouldn't be this delayed. They said 'he's fine. You're just paranoid' like you mentioned the GP and they tell you to wait, and a lot of the parents they have a struggle because they waited so long to get the speech and language therapists. So a lot of people were like really surprised 'How did you get ... your son is too young. Like ours is four.'

R: You're talking about that need for pushing.

Badr: Yeah. It's a journey as well. Because with being a parent, because my son.. He's fine at school he's doing well. He's at the stage where he should be, and recently I put in an application for him. Because I wanted him to change schools, and I put in an application for him for a grammar school. And I was only realising that ... I took him for some tuition and I only realised that he is behind, his writing is appalling. Like I didn't realise this. That his handwriting was so bad. ...and the teachers have never mentioned it at parents evening ...

Astur: How old is he?

Badr: He's six. The teachers have never said that \_\_\_\_\_ (son's name) has got an issue with handwriting. I thought it was normal, you know, his handwriting. Because should it be like that.

Astur: Because the teachers they didn't mention. So you didn't think that.

Badr: I didn't think it was, and then I went to this tutor and they were like, 'well you know ... *(pause)* His handwriting is a really big issue. Because if it's not sorted out even if he's got the answers and the ideas. They're not going to come across clearly'. So I

thought 'Oh. Okay' and then things like he doesn't know his, he only knows like his two and three times tables. Obviously if it's like a grammar school or a better school, they're looking for much more. Children who are more highly capable. And I thought (*pauses*) now it's time for \_\_\_\_ (daughter's name) to learn her times tables as well. I was quite surprised because one tutor said some kids actually know their times tables at age four and five and I thought that was quite young.

Astur: Yes

Badr: I know it means that sometimes some kids have got more in them than others. I mean everyone's individual. But then I was thinking 'Yeah right' I need to, whatever I'm doing with \_\_\_\_ (son) I need to do with \_\_\_\_ (daughter), anticipating that as well. So instead of like always watching cartoons, learning tables, on the ipad for example. So I think it's just a really good experience, because he was my first child and I don't know I think it's just ... you don't know sometimes. You think it's just ... but then you go and find as a parent. Because I always used to just read with him or just go to the library and get books and I didn't know there were other things what I should be doing. Like for example, handwriting or (*pause*) and now I've become more aware. And sometimes you just don't want to do. I mean for kids it's boring they've been to school and at this stage it's quite hard to put too much pressure on them but I thought 'well I think I should do more with both of them'. And she just does it now by herself 'mummy shall I put the timetables on?' without me saying anything; and I say 'Yeah. Do it.' I mean I don't know if it's a girl boy thing as well but I find her much more active and involved. Whereas my son's a bit lazy ...

Astur: Oh yes definitely. I have two boys and two girls and I definitely agree with you. The girls are a lot cleverer...

Badr: Yeah the girls are brighter ...

Astur: ... the boys are quite lazy. They need telling ...

Badr: ... a lot more pushing ...

Astur: Yeah they need a lot more pushing because my son, he's the same age as your son. He's in year two and his handwriting is quite bad as well.

Badr: Yeah

Astur: When my daughter was really really good at that stage. Her handwriting was excellent.

Badr: and I don't want him ... but then at the same time you feel quite (*pauses*)

Astur: you don't want to push the child.

Badr: you don't want to make them upset because when I think I think my handwriting was quite good when I was that age. When I thought back now and I thought oh I remember my brother's handwriting to be a bit like this. But I don't want him to, you know sometimes you don't know. Sometimes I'm like I don't want to be a bit more harsh. It's a bit difficult.

Astur: I think it will pick up with his handwriting, as they go along they pick up. So you might think this week he is really really bad and then around four weeks or five weeks down the line you might think handwriting improved like that (*clicks fingers*). So with that sort of a thing they can pick up quickly something they can pick it up the long way ...

Badr: yeah

Astur: ... as they go on you feel like from that three months ago to today things change. Because my son when he started, when he was in year one and today I can see a massive difference. Because like September they started school and you feel like 'wow, they've grown up so much.' As they grow. Like in six months it makes a lot of difference. So I said to the teachers as well with his handwriting. I was worried myself. They said 'you know it is nothing to worry about he might be a bit slow now but he could pick up in two months' time.' So they said if he's up to date with everything else, which he is, (*pause*) they said 'you know its okay'. So we can't have everything perfect, obviously we're not *laughs* we're human beings everybody is good at something. For example, I was good at maths, my brother wasn't. so ... and he was good with his writing. So even if you go back in yourself as when you were growing up you can see the differences. Where you were good and your sister was even much better than you and something you were bad at. You were good at

something she was bad at. So *(pause)* it makes a difference. I look at all of my kids and that's one of the things people were saying 'don't compare their speech' but because I felt like I needed to compare because when they were at that stage or anybody at that stage should be doing this. It's not because they were clever and he is a bit not clever as much as them. All I meant was at two he should be saying something, at one and a half at least he should be saying 'mum', 'dad', 'milk'. You know? *(pause)*

Badr: I think it makes it difficult as well because English is not always our first language, like at home we speak Urdu.

Astur: Yeah

R: *To B* So you speak Urdu at home?

Badr: Yes

Astur: I speak Somali.

Badr: I tend to speak English more with the children because I was actually born here as well and I went to school here and so I felt more comfortable in speaking English but not to say that I didn't used to speak Urdu. Now with my husband, he's from Pakistan, we speak more in Urdu or Punjabi \_\_\_\_ (children's names) they both know it as well. But we feel more comfortable in speaking English. I felt when I used to write there was not much clarity, sometimes I used to have a lot of grammatical errors because of the fact that we didn't used to speak English as the first language at home.

R: So when you were a child you spoke Urdu at home.

Badr: Yeah but obviously when we came to school we spoke English and then we went home we spoke English amongst ourselves, between me and my brothers and sisters. So I think that's a factor as well. Sometimes you don't have that clarity.

R: What do you think \_\_\_\_? (A's name)

Astur: Yeah, I definitely agree. Because when I went to the GP they said maybe the two language that you speak at home it makes it difficult for him to pick up maybe one. So maybe just go with one language. Like you said I go with English with my kids,

they don't speak my home language. They don't understand, my eldest, she's trying to, she speaks now but she's not perfect.

Badr: I think it's much clearer for the child.

Astur: It makes it clearer because we kind of confuse them ..

Badr: Yeah. It's confusing ..

Astur: Because they come home it's Somali, they come to school they've got English. They kind of mix but because my husband speaks good English, he's from here. I'm from here, I grew up here, even though I was not born here. I went to school. I know the system. I speak good English. Where my mother-in-law and my grandma, she's here as well, they kind of struggle to communicate with the kids because the kids, their first language is English. Which is quite ... when they want to have a deep conversation ... I have to get involved *laughs* and explain. Because I felt like the kids, as they grow up, they will pick up my language because this is something that I can teach. But I felt like they needed to learn English as their first language because when they go to school I didn't want them struggling. Because I've seen some in parts of my community where they teach the kids ... home language at first, from birth to three years old and they go to school; and then they started to learn English, and they quite struggle. They feel like their kid doesn't settle well because they can't obviously understand other kids, they can understand, but they can't really have a conversation or play with them, or understand teachers, or understand what's going on around the class or what is really happening. So I think it makes it ...difficult for the child to speak.

R: When we think about the two year old offer and children coming into settings at two years old, which both your children have done. The idea about why is it that when the government have done research they find that children from some ethnic communities are less likely to get involved. I wonder why do you think; because obviously you've chosen to get involved and it has been something that you have really worked for. I'm interested in what you think.

Astur: I think it really helps because when your child goes at the age of three to start full time nursery or from the age of four to start reception. When they go to full time

education if you have taken them at that young age to settle at school and to learn, and to have like activities and to have like a learning journey at that young age. I think that when they start at full time education it will be a lot easier. Because it's something that they got used to and something that they grew up to do from that young age. Their memories build up from learning, doing activities, coming to school, having routine so I think it will be much easier for them when they start school from the child who does not go to nursery at two year and straight away at the age of four or three they start school. I think they settle in well, the ones who go to school from the early years.

Badr: I agree with that because obviously you are in a better routine, as like now I have sent \_\_\_\_ (daughter) and she's having these. At first I was bringing her down for afternoons, now her medication is reduced so I've started to send her in the mornings now because my son's already up and we're all up; so they have breakfast and then he gets dropped to school and she comes here. Your question was why you think that people who are from ethnic minorities do not send their kids, the ones who aren't sending their children; there's an assumption to say that they wouldn't be sending their children until their three. Obviously, there's a law and according to that then children do need to ... but it depends I think as \_\_\_\_ (A) and myself because we've had this upbringing we've been here, we've been educated here, I went to school here, college here to uni. Like we've been here, we know. I'm not saying we know but we probably have ... *(pause)*

Astur: ... have a rough idea ...

Badr: How I think it's better obviously because there's a routine and if you start early then the children settle in better and they can get on. Some people, for example if I came from Pakistan, like we know a family friend who's wife's come from Pakistan and they don't have that awareness ..

Astur: ... and even if they do have that awareness ..

Badr: ... or even if they do have the awareness a lot of things are depending upon the other ... partner in the house for example, the husband; and now my husband's not really actively involved, he's left everything to me since the day the children have

been born up to now, it's me who has done everything. Like their immunisations, getting them in school, putting their name down for school, the uniforms, everything what's involved around. So I think that comes across a lot as well, maybe the awareness. So obviously if some, like this lady she's come from Pakistan she's newly been married, she's got two young children now sometimes they might not feel confident enough because they've not got language skills or maybe they're not ..., I don't know, it's a cultural thing as well, where the man feels like he has to be more domineering, which means he needs to make the decisions. Like for example recently I put my son's application for a grammar school and my husband got quite offended by it; and I thought there's nothing to be offended by it. But it's probably just the way he's thinking differently. I thought, I don't know why he's thinking negative about it he should be happy about it. But maybe because I didn't consult him about it, or I didn't ask him. But I didn't think there was a need to because I was thinking what I'm doing has been right up 'til now anyway.

Astur: Yeah *Laughs*

Badr: But there's this thing, like you know where in the Asian society I think the men feel like they need to have this ... big domineering role...

Astur: Yes and I think ... upbringing maybe. Because you were born here, obviously, you're into like you've got your own thing ...

Badr: I think that ...

Astur: ... maybe you might not have a cultural ... was he born here as well?

Badr: ... no he was born in Pakistan, but ... I think that has a big role to play... and I think that you're ... in Pakistan it's a totally different culture. I mean the majority... I'm not saying that there aren't women who are liberated or there's not ... there's women who are ... you know who are working there and who have a voice and things, it's not like that anymore, but ... But. It still exists. That thing of... it still exists...

Astur: Yes definitely ...

Badr: It still exists I think ... in the culture. Where like for example a lot of times, like my husband is like 'let me talk. You don't need to talk' ...

Astur: Yeah *laughs*

Badr: ... and I think 'Okay' and then he struggles sometimes. Because then he can't, he's not finding the right words, or when he's writing something he's asking me 'Oh how do you spell this?' but I don't say it to him because I think it's going to offend him ...

Astur: Yeah *laughs* of course, of course.

Badr: ... but I think these things are still there.

R: Yeah?

Badr: ... but. Yeah, even for myself when I was growing up. Although I was born and bred here and I went to school here and I had English friends and things. There was still that role at home where ... you know it's ... there's more culture there. And you feel quite divided, you feel ...

Astur: You have to be two persons ... one at home and one outside...

R: Oh really!

Badr: You have to feel ... like you've got a double role...

R: Oh, right.

Badr: ... you feel like two different people ...

R: Oh. That's interesting...

Badr: Yeah, well ... like when I ... not completely ... but

Astur: ... because ...

Badr: .... Because I had this bold personality when I was with my friends, we used to ... and then at home ... I was like loud outside and then at home ... you get told 'Oh, stop laughing!'

Astur: Yeah *laughs*

Badr: ... *smiling* 'Stop doing this' and 'Don't do this!' and 'Don't do that!' and you think...



Astur: Yeah I think our children will have a different upbringing because obviously you have the personality that they will be having in the future. Because if you, you understand basically, you and your kids will understand and your kids will have a better relationship than you and your mum had ... because with your mum she kind of had like the culture and you were somebody who was born here who doesn't know anything about that culture ... so especially when my grandma has a conversation, I can see the differences between how I will be with my kids and how my mum, and her mum were at that time. So when I put the two beside ... I can tell the difference ... but obviously my mum was quite understanding and like I didn't have that struggling. But where I had friends who had a similar situation with you ... where mum was having more like her culture ... and the child was having like the culture of where they lived ....

R: [To Astur] Do you think, because you said that your mum was in Italy for a time, do you think that might have been part of it?

Astur: That made a lot of difference. Yeah, yeah. Because she was out of her culture for a long time, I think that made a lot of difference ... like I never had any struggle with my mum because she understood well and she was not into ...

R: But do you recognise that idea of being two people almost that you were talking about?

Astur: I see with other communities but with myself I do, I do see it ...

Badr: there is that difference and I think it's going to exist. Like sometimes I think like my husband because he's quite traditional and he comes across as quite ... he's quite traditional in his values, in the way he thinks, and probably the way he wants \_\_\_\_\_ [daughter] to be... and that sometimes scares me because I think that \_\_\_\_\_ [daughter] is going to be a different sort of individual, maybe. I'm not saying ... in terms of like, I want her to be educated I want her to be able to do her ... if she wants a career. I'm quite open minded about that but I don't know how my husband's going to be feeling about that, you know. He's probably going to think oh, you know he wants to get her married. And I completely don't feel that ... I mean I didn't really get married at a young age, but I got married in my twenties. But now I've got friends

who are in their thirties who aren't married or who haven't settled down and sometimes I think, oh I was quite young ... twenty-two, twenty-three. I still think that was quite young, whereas my mum she was, when she got married, she was eighteen and I think that was even younger ...

Astur: *laughs* yeah ...

Badr: ... you know, obviously, it's a generation gap but my mum was like nineteen when she had me and my brother, and I think now my mum's ... about fifty-three, fifty-four, and I think she's learnt through us because she came into the country at a young age and then she was married ...and I think she ... she ... I mean, she did have some education behind her but she wasn't educated here and I think it's natural to feel ... I mean if I went to live in a different country, it's natural to feel hesitant. Because you don't know, you don't know the place, she wasn't ...

Astur: I think it's related to ... like you mentioned, a lot of the minority communities who are not bringing their kids to the nurseries, it's because of ... they come here, they don't speak the language, they don't know what does it feel like to live and to be around where they are and the people ...

Badr: I think its survival ...

Astur: ... so they keep themselves to themselves ...

Badr: ... and in the culture as well they feel there's a lot of things that are different, because they say, you know the kids ... I was surprised when ... when I was in hospital when I had my children they said you shouldn't put your baby next to you when he's asleep or when you're sleeping because ... it's a health issue, you know, because sometimes if your asleep and the baby can fall down off the bed and things like that. And they should be in their cot, and I remember like I had dozed off and the baby ... because I was breast feeding, the baby was like next to me and we both went to sleep. And then the nurse came and she said 'No. You need to make sure that he's in the cot'. And, whereas in the Asian culture they feel that in these early years that the child should be more with the mum and should be more bonding. I think with the Western culture I think there's more emphasis on routine and like ... the child should ... you

know, go out to nursery and play and have friends and things. Whereas in the Asian culture there's more, like it's more restricted if you like, it's saying that the mothers not really playing the role properly if she like allowing the child to go nursery ... do you see what I'm saying? It's not 'motherly' to be ... or not allowing, or not putting the child to sleep next to her for example.

R: Yeah

Badr: Now I, know my son's still sleeping in the same room as me although he's nearly seven, and he should be in his own bedroom and now I'm saying to my husband, we've got a bunkbed for both of them. It's time that we need to put them both in their own rooms. I mean sometimes even now he says 'Oh mummy I want to sleep with you'. Because my husband works nights so I say 'No. You've got your own bed and I'm going to give you your own room'. But it doesn't mean that I'm not his mum or I don't love him, or I love him less. It's just this thing, whereas in Pakistan, or ... there's like this bond where the children sleep with the mum and dad sometimes and you know this culture's different.

Astur: Yeah, it's a cultural thing, to understand what you are trying to say. But, once you get married, like you said, the marriage can have different types. I got married at eighteen, even though I have been raised here, I've been to school, I went to college. And I got married because it was my choice. Not because my mum had anything to do, or my parents, so I thought *laughs* the teenage thing a band for life and all these things that you chat with your girlfriends with and you ...

Badr: If you don't mind me asking, is your husband Somalian?

Astur: Yes, yes.

Badr: Was he also born here?

Astur: No, no. He came here when he was around fifteen, sixteen ...

Badr: Okay.

Astur: Yeah, he's somebody that I thought, we understand it each other and we loved each other, and we thought it was just a love marriage and so my parents had nothing to do with it. They were even surprised. They were thinking 'You're too young, why

are you getting married?' You know 'Finish your education', 'Finish this, finish that'. So I was actually fighting with them and saying 'You know, it's really not your business. I'm eighteen. I want to do this and ...' It's something that I wanted, so I dropped out of education because I felt like it was too difficult when I was pregnant with my daughter, I found it hard, I was sick I couldn't do anymore. I felt tired, so I felt like I need to take a time-out so when I had my daughter as well she was quite a little bit difficult baby. She was attached to me, she was crying. So I felt, like guilty leaving her, do you know with the childcare and going back to my education. So I felt like, you know what I am not going to do that. So even again, my mum was fighting with me, saying you know 'It's okay to leave your child' she said 'You're coming back at the end of the day, you're not going forever!' So for me to leave her at that time I felt ... I felt guilty. So it's something that I didn't want to do.

Badr: Sometimes I think it's individual preferences as well. You know whether, like I had this where I actually finished my degree off, after I was married. So I had to leave my son in the nursery and I used to feel, it was quite hard. And sometimes, when it's your first child, there is, there's that bond. You're a new mum and you feel guilty, or you worry, it's a natural worry. Although I was in the lecture I kept thinking about my son, thinking 'I don't know whether he's been fed.'

Astur: That's what I mean ...

Badr: Obviously these things don't happen, but you do feel ... individually I think there's this ... thing as his mother and then slowly, it takes time to build that, to become confident again, just like leave him. I've had times when I've actually taken him to a lecture. *(laughs)* Which wasn't really good! But at the time, when I recall that time now I feel 'Oh my God! Did I really do that!' But I had no choice, at the time there was no childcare and although everyone came to hear 'Oh there's a cute baby in the lecture!' *Laughs*

Astur: *Laughs*

Badr: But yeah, I don't know ... it's hard, it was quite difficult, being a mother ...

Astur: Yeah If I'd gone back I would have finished the education and come back into being a mum and a wife ... but I wouldn't change for the time. Yeah, sometimes I think, I actually made the right decision, because I feel like I've done what I wanted to do ... being a mum and being a wife, I've done this so it's time to be me again. And people actually say you know you're quite lucky because I'm twenty eight ...

Badr: Are you?

Astur: Yeah.

Badr: You're still quite young then ... you've got age on your side.

Astur: Yeah, so they say 'You can go and study whatever you want. Do whatever. You've had all your kids.' You feel like you've finished this part and you can start the next part.

Badr: Yeah

Astur: So that's where I think I'm glad I've done this. Because if I would have gone and studied I don't think I would have done my education well, because my mind wouldn't be on that, what I'm actually doing at that time. Because I felt like I'm leaving my mind at home, or where I'm leaving my child. where I go like empty head. I didn't think it was right for me to go and do that, because I felt like this is something that I am not ready to do.

R: It's interesting how we cope with things differently.

Badr: Yeah I mean with \_\_\_\_\_ [daughter's name] she was a very clingy child, you know my daughter she can be very clingy if we'd go to someone's house. She'd like cry and cry she's be really uncomfortable. Whereas my son, wasn't like that at all he used to just get on with it and play. And then when \_\_\_\_\_ [daughter's name] was like that, that was quite hard as well. It took time for her to settle here and having that extra, she's got a condition, you know that's made her a bit ratty as well. She was on steroids for a while. You know, you could get mood swings. It's difficult ... I think it is difficult. It's only now that I've started to feel more comfortable, because now I know that \_\_\_\_\_ [daughter's name] is more settled and she's more happy in herself and I'm more contented as a mother. Because when she was crying all the

time and being ratty, even in hospital when we used to go. Like we have to go every eight weeks now because she has a drip. She used to be like really really upset and it used to upset me; because obviously you can't see your child in pain.

Astur: Yeah.

Badr: And now she goes and if they want to check her temperature she's like giving her ear *Laughs*.

Astur: Yeah, she's used to it now.

Badr: She's like having a proper conversation with the nurses and is just like really easy going about it, and now she says like 'Yeah I know I'm going for my medicine.'

Astur: Ahh

Badr: She knows and it's sad, but she knows now that this is the norm for her so ...

Astur: Yeah

Badr: So in that respect, I'm more comfortable now when I go. But when she was upset it used to make me upset as well.

R: Yeah, and do you think she's benefited from coming here now as well?

Badr: Definitely. I mean yesterday \_\_\_\_\_ [practitioner's name] told me, her key worker, that she's gone to the toilet herself. She's now ready for potty training. Which I know because she's talking and I've tried at home as well and I've just been, because I've had loads of guests over, it's been really hard for me to keep going to the toilet. So I thought in the next half term holiday I'm going to start taking her to the toilet. Yeah, she's come on a lot. She like knows really hard words she's like saying 'delicious' 'exciting' and she talks and like her vocabulary is really good. Which is quite, I'm quite surprised, you know and she'll say 'That's disgusting!' *Laughs*

Astur: *Laughs*

Badr: ... and I think 'Oh my God! Is this normal?' *laughs*. She like knows all these big words!

Astur: Yeah they pick out, when they come to the nursery, I see my daughter picking up new words as well. Because they come in and they mix with so many different kids, and so many staff working with them.

Badr: ... and my son was a lot quieter and she's very chatty.

Astur: Girls are a lot chattier ... some. My eldest, she's really really quiet where my son, he's talkative. I actually have a mix. One boy and one girl, the one who's having the speech delay he has a similar personality as my daughter. He's non-talkative but ...

Badr: [to the researcher] Why did you think or why did the study where they say that the ethnic minorities are less likely to be sending their children? There's another thing I think about this, about going to work. Like where there's I think, in some cases, where the mum ... I mean with Western or with English couples, they tend to work. Both of them tend to work so they need to leave the child, you know, in childcare.

Astur: Yeah, where our community don't ... tend to work.

Badr: Whereas Asian, again in Asian roles where the mother ... the ladies seem to be more like a housewife, where she's at home. Why did they assume that they wouldn't be sending their children for childcare?

R: That's what I thought was really interesting actually. It's a good question. Because when I read it and they said, they were looking, like governments do at statistics. The study at the time, they were looking, you're right to the two year old offer was based on your income. So obviously it wasn't all two-year olds, although they're broadening that out now. So of the two year olds that were entitled to, the statistics found there were less from the minority ethnic communities, who were entitled, who were taking it up. Now what was interesting, because I thought 'Okay so why?' and their report said 'Because childcare was not seen as part of the culture' ... and that was it. There was nothing that really identified where they got that answer from. That was it, that was the only explanation. When I read it I thought that seems like a really poor answer, to me.

Badr: Yeah, childcares not ... something ..

R: I'm summarising but that's the sentence because I kept looking and thinking 'who says this? What do they mean?' so that's why I thought I'm actually interested to talk to people and see what they mean by that.

Badr: You know even when I was at uni and I had to leave my son at nursery ... at that time ... at first I used to take my son with me, to the lectures, obviously that couldn't go on. You know, for one off its disrupting other people's learning so then I managed to get ... but my husband was against me putting him into nursery. So I hadn't told him, I just had told him that I take him with me. I know I was hiding it from him, because I just felt he ... he wasn't for it. He just thought 'Why are you going to?' So I thought 'Well the other thing is I leave him with you' But he's asleep at this time, because he's working; so it just was it.

Astur: Sometimes you have to do that ...

Badr: Gradually, he was getting older. When he was like one and a half I told him 'You know, he's at nursery now. That's the way it is ...'

Astur: Yeah

Badr: '... you know you need to accept it' but yeah it was quite a struggle really just finishing the degree off. My husband was like 'You know, you're married now. You've got children. What are you doing, what are you going to uni for?'

Astur: Yeah *Laughs*.

Badr: ... and I was like 'No. That's something that I want to do.' And it is quite difficult when you've got, when you've got someone going against you when you want to do something ...

Astur: Yeah

Badr: ... as well, it makes it very difficult.

Astur: Yeah it's nice to have the support there, a supportive ... partner

Badr: ... a partner yeah, definitely it does. So I found it quite difficult in that respect. So we always usually clash, me and my husband .. *Laughs*



Astur: *Laughs*

Badr: In every sort of thing, in everything!

Astur: In everything *Laughs* yeah opposites

Badr: He'll be saying like one thing and I'll be saying ... and it's like ... but I'm glad I finished my degree and I'm glad I've done what I could. And I think in that situation, I've done my best.

R: Yeah.

Badr: I'm contented no matter how he judges me or if somebody else. I think like from what my life was like and how I've experienced it I think I've done the best I could do, being in that situation; and I think, sometimes I do put myself in the shoes where I think, if say I was born in Pakistan or I was in Pakistan married to my husband, I think 'Oh my God.' I always feel grateful the fact that I was born here and I know I've got more awareness. That fact that I can drive, which makes me much more independent because if I had to rely on my husband I don't know where I'd be. Not saying really bad but in some ...

Astur: Yeah, in some situations yeah

Badr: ... and then I think, yeah, I'm grateful ....

R: That's interesting ...

Badr: ... I mean I'm being really open and honest ...

R: Yes I appreciate that and we respect that.

Astur: Yeah, yeah of course, of course

Badr: Because obviously some things are confidential ...

R: And we'll keep these things confidential.

Astur: Of course, of course. It's not only from your side of the community. Some of my community have a similar thing, so what you're saying I do understand.

Badr: A lot of Asian women have got this, you know, issue going on where the husband wants to be more domineering or where they don't want to see the woman as independent, you know, or bold, or outspoken and I think some women are a bit hesitant involving this.

Astur: Yes I think that plays a big role, where we don't get to see. Or like you said they do this sort of a study and we feel like we are at the bottom of it, like we don't like take our kids to school or like when they do this research we get into trouble for not being part of the community.

R: I think that's an interesting point that idea of well it's almost like a dismissal.

Astur: We live here but we don't get ...

Badr: ... it's a stereotype. We've got like these stereotype images and sometimes it's not just ... there's a lot of other things ... people like to view it like a typical scenario ... but there are a lot of interesting things underlying ...

R: That's those stories ... hidden at the bottom of all of that.

Astur: Yeah it's like we're here, but we're not here.

Badr: Where we are now with my husband, I say like 'The kids are growing up we need more activities at the weekend' it would be nice if he was involved as well. You know going maybe for example swimming together as a family. Doing things more and he doesn't really want to be much involved. He's a bit laid back like that.

Astur: yeah I think because you are in charge of the kids it's like she can do it.

Badr: Yeah, but I don't feel ... even though I can do it, it would be nice if the children feel we are doing more things as a family. Rather than just the mum because mum's always doing everything anyway. But you know, things like getting involved in activities.

Astur: Yeah.

R: There's like a gender and a cultural thing there ... you could take that gender thing and I could describe something very similar from when my children were little.

Badr: Yeah it is gender as well.

R: It's an interesting mix of men and women and culture as well.

Badr: Yeah I always say it to my husband. I say 'It's not my mum's era, it's not your mum's era and it's not our dads' era.' Because he always goes back to 'Oh my dad did this.' *Laughs*

Astur: Yes, yes *Laughs*

Badr: ... and I say 'that was your dad and that's you'. But I don't want my son to be like this. Do you know what I mean? And I don't expect my daughter to be like me, likewise, because obviously times have changed. I've got that open-mindedness to accept that these kids ... you know I'm not saying that I want them to go wild ... or do whatever they want, or I'm not upbringing them properly. I tell them, I send my son to mosque and I tell them 'We're Muslims and this is our religion'. But the religion and the culture is totally different.

Astur: It is totally different. Like the FGM ...

Badr: So you get this stereotype where people thinks it's the religion which is ...

Astur: I think the religion gets dragged in the middle but its ...

Badr: ... exploited more ...

Astur: ... it's nothing to do with that ...

Badr: it's more to do with culture ... its more culture.

Astur: Yes ... and for example, somebody, a Muslim person does something. Like in the media, for example ... Muslim gets dragged ... which is nothing to do with Islam. Because Islam is peace. I mean the word of Islam means 'peace'. But in the media, you see like bombing happens (*claps hands*) like terrorism, you feel like ... for example, somebody who does not know anything and who reads from the media, will see me covered up like this will say, she is a terrorist, but it's nothing to do ... because the media does that and people only see from the media side, and don't get involved in the community, so we get dragged ... Islam and the religion gets dragged in the middle. But when there is nothing to do with it. Because I as a Muslim am against

them, but they are just using the name of Islam. But because you might not know anything about that. You might see and think 'Oh they are all the same!' because you read from the media: 'This is what they do and this is the community who does it'. So for example, I get told like, 'She's English, she does this, English people do this (*gestures to me*) blah blah blah'. Now you see like (*clicks fingers*) straight away I use that in my head. And because of what I have read and what I have seen I don't get to know you as a person. So I come with what I had in my mind and I attack you. That's like not fair as well. Because I think its good to get to know the person rather than just ...

Badr: ... it is just using stereotypes ... like people say like people think like people in Pakistan, they think that Asian girls who are born and bred here are probably like Western, completely Western ...

Astur: ... Western, yeah.

Badr: oh they are Western, they are not religious. Or they are not accepting us and I always think that is not fair. I mean I was born here and I fit into their conversations ... but I don't know if they accept me as one of them though. That's thing

Astur: yeah

Badr: But they say like 'You're from here' but it's quite ... because when I'm, its only until I speak English that they don't realise that I'm actually, I was born here. They actually think, a lot of my husband's friends think I was from Pakistan. But I think they have this image, because we've been born and bred and educated here which makes, not a bad person but you hear these stories don't you ...

Astur: ... like you are not one of ...

Badr: Yeah

Astur: ... like you are big head and you want to do what you want to do ...

Badr: Yeah, these sort of images and its wrong though because I always say: 'you know individuality counts' You shouldn't just be judgemental about people because certain people have done this or ... you know and ... yes.

Astur: Yes. You have the good mentality, it's just that they have the old mentality ...

Badr: Its quite interesting. But even with regards to for example, it's not only the ethnic minorities. If you see the Western for example, if you go to the fifties, sixties, gender roles were different. You know and now gender roles are different between men and women. I think it's as time has progressed, it's to do with time I think more than anything.

Astur: Yes because in 2020 definitely things will be much different than they are today.

Badr: Yeah or in another ten years' time. Its only in the past ten years that we've seen technologies being so ... you know when I was a child I didn't have an iPad or even like these little games. We would like think that was something really big like a Nintendo.

Astur: It's like Facebook, Whatsap, Twitter as the time goes things will change. So in the future we might think like What'sap is old stuff ... like we do with emails and messaging and using MSN when I was in high school they were like Whatsap. So I think like you said time does change ...

Badr: I do think it's to do with time and I always say 'every time you need to change' and ..

Astur: But in our culture they don't move like from the times ...

Badr: They don't they don't move back, they don't move forward. Like whenever my husband's like relating to do his dad and I say 'Yes but you should just take the good things.' You know I admire my mum ...

Astur: ... Yeah and move with the time you're in ...

Badr: ... I admire my mum but I don't think I need to become like my mum.

Astur: Yeah, yeah of course I understand what you mean. You are like your own person. That is one thing I do believe my kids are all different, they all have each personalities. Like my mum said ... I have three sisters and two brothers so we were all different so like my mum always said 'don't expect all your kids to be the same'

and I do get it. Before when I was a bit big-headed I didn't want to understand what my mum said and I was like 'Yeah my son's having a speech problem' you know because he's different from other kids and he shouldn't be and stuff like that. But over the last two years I just felt 'oh I shouldn't be thinking like that' as I grow as well I realise things are different so I am looking at a different perspective than I was two years ago. So yes I do get what you mean.

Badr: I think it's a learning journey. I think you learn from your children as well I mean like a lot of things that my grandma used to say ... she's passed away now but ... like what she used to say. But I was a lot younger then and that comes to my mind and it reflects on my life and I can see her words 'this is how this is' and I think 'oh my God that is it' but she was like my grandma. It was a different generation all together but obviously I think there are truths that go through. But its interesting ... I think we've gone off the points!

R: No its okay it is interesting and thank you ...

Badr: There's like a lot ... obviously there are main factors like for example the income level, obviously life-styles and the culture. But then there's obviously there's other individual things ... it might just be individual preferences.

R: Well of you are alright if we close now.

Badr: I think like it's really good that we are sending our children for early learning because I think if I wasn't sending my daughter I wouldn't be involved in a study like this. We wouldn't have any awareness. You know sometimes coming to school you meet new mums and you do get involved. And I think motherhood itself I think you do get, there are times when you do get isolated because it's a big change. Before you were on your own and you were independent and you were just thinking about yourself and now ...

Astur: Yeah you have to think about these kids before yourself.

Badr: and sometimes in a lot of ways I felt like I've lost myself somewhere, I don't know who I am anymore. A lot of times I've felt like that. But now like meeting other people ... I'm slowly ... I'm still not quite there.

R: I'm not sure I am ... (*laughs*)

Badr: (*laughs*) if you know what I mean I think it's rewarding because now we've spoken for the last half hour or whatever, but its been good because we've let out a lot of thoughts and feelings ...

Astur: Yes, yes.

Badr: I think when I go home I can feel much more fresh. I've spoken out what I felt and thought.

## Appendix II

Interview with liaison worker 23/10/15

Liaison Worker Liaison Worker Alex (LW Alex)

Researcher R

R: You have put so much effort into this (study) and the email conversations we've had, and I think it was just really important to talk to you about your experiences of engaging mums in things like the two year old offer and also in doing studies such as this. It became a bit different than we had thought, but I think that is actually quite interesting as I was talking to my supervisor, I thought that would be something to look at. So have you worked in these SureStart centres for long?

LW Alex: Well if I give you a bit of background ...

R: Yes that would be great.

LW Alex: The first thing to say really is, I haven't got much experience of engaging parents on the two year offer because it is quite a new thing. I also, in terms of time capacity, have very little unfortunately to engage individually with groups of people. The only group I've managed to do that with, in the last twelve months was my 'getting ready for school' group, and that was not for two year olds. In addition to that, however, I do supervise, plan with and monitor the 'stay and play' groups for local parents who bring their children into the centre. So I do have dealings with parents then. I work with the outreach workers, but also when I go in I kind of 'model' without saying to them 'why are you standing watching?' and 'this is what I want you to do'. It's more I kind of go in and sit on the floor, always sit on the floor, and whatever the child is doing I sort of, as in early years, good early years practice of supporting children in self-chosen play; I support the child and extend, hoping that the parents are picking up on what I'm doing. I'm aware sometimes they are, sometimes they walk off because they think 'Oh great, she's playing with Tommy so I can just go off and talk to my friend.' When that happens I leave it for a minute and then go over and say 'Do you want to come back now, and see what I've been doing with your child?' Now, they never say 'no', very compliant, but it's more in terms of



... watching ... The kind of parents we have around here, it's more a watching, supervisory role. Play is definitely not on their agenda. Is that the kind of thing you want to know?

R: Yes absolutely, your experiences ...

L W Alex: When I have spoken to South Asian workers about this and said 'Look, I know you are also South Asian and you tell me that play has no part in your culture, this is your job now'. I don't actually say it like that, if you understand, '... but you know I don't really want you taking photographs all the time and drifting. I want you to engage, because it's by watching you that parents pick things up'. Because we know that people don't always learn by being told. So it's much more, a kind of gentle 'this is what we do, and this why we're doing it'. ... Back to twos, we are starting a group, a targeted group, for eligible twos. Now those parents, in time, we haven't got it set up yet because we've just got the data from city council. These will be children ... who are eligible for the two year funded place but for whatever reason they're not taking it up.

R: Oh, right.

L W Alex: Now there are quite a lot of parents who voluntarily do not want their child to come, because they feel they're too young. That's good from my point of view, that's good but it's also bad. If it's that they were doing something nice with them at home, that would be good; but my outreach team tell me that actually isn't the case. They are in front of the TV or being ignored, not ignored, but left to get on. When I ask them why that is, there is a very strong ... what can I say? ... There's no emphasis on children developing skills of independence. So they're babied, particularly, and I will say this because you know this is my experience, particularly boys. And I went to observe a letters and sounds session the other day at \_\_\_\_\_ [name of local centre], which was very good. And the children who, this was for threes, but the children were just three, the children who will not sit down, even for two minutes, are predominantly, and this is terribly, this is awful to say it really, but they kind of pampered, over-dressed, over fed little boys.

R: right.

L W Alex: Still in nappies, mothers have no interest in getting them out of nappies because they don't want to. The child doesn't want to. So there's a big job on our hands to really developing skills of independence, which starts before they're three and, as the display up the wall probably shows, getting ready for school starts when you're a baby actually. So in terms of my experience, that has been ... and that isn't just South Asian. I've worked most of my teaching life has been in \_\_\_\_\_ [names another area in the city, mainly white working class]. Again not making any great generalisations, but there isn't a strong play culture with the children I worked with there in the families. So when they start nursery school, nursery *in* the school, it would be very, very much, well even with a reading book, at three 'well they can't read so ...' Not for a while but they are here to learn through play, so learn through play I would say, that's the biggest job of the lot really. Because parents can't see, if they don't understand the value of play, they can't see that they can learn through it. 'They're just playing' *is just* playing and that's it. So, that's been my experience of being here for now six years. Predominant lack of interest in play, and I am told by mainly Pakistani workers, that that's because it is not in their culture. They're busy, traditionally they're busy, their words not mine, 'cooking, cleaning, looking after men' so they haven't got time to play with the children. The children in turn learn very early that they have to just get on, on their own. If they're creative, in my kind of observation. If they're creative children or they've had opportunities to be outside, or whatever. They can do quite a lot, and that's a skill, isn't it, that a lot of other children who are directed all the time actually can't do. So it isn't all bad, being left, you know I think when I think back about my own children and I have four. You know, quite quickly certainly my eldest I did not have an awful lot of time. I used to hear them read whilst I was washing up. You know it wasn't sit down and lets be cosy, I was on my own after, when my youngest was three, so you know, there was a lot to do, teaching full-time, coming home, hearing them read ... all that ... so it's not, I'm not saying it's not just a kind of South Asian thing, but it's not all bad if it is. Because children can learn to get on, and that's a good skill, when they get to school they're not constantly wanting you to ... to interact when you've got thirty children, which ... you know. So ... if you want to direct me a bit then I'll know if I'm keeping on the right track? Is that the kind of thing you want?

R: Yes absolutely it's interesting to hear your experience and your voice in this; and like you say that working with families in the community and your experience of engaging with families and the relationships you build up, because that's something that has really come out with talking to mums. This value in building relationships ...

L W Alex: ... yes of trust and non-judging. It's terribly easy to ... some of the young nursery staff will say 'what are we meant to do with the parents if they're not interested?' and you know I would have said that at twenty two, I would have felt fed up. It's not the end of the story though. Yesterday I had my supervision with \_\_\_\_\_ [colleague's name] and she's wanting me to develop a kind of home learning ... kind of package ...

L W Alex: Oh yes?

L W Alex: ... for the outreach workers to go into the homes to work with parents to show them what they can do in the home. So it's not all about bringing them into here to do great and wonderful things, it's about what can you do at home. Which if I had the time I could do very quickly. But, you know, it's another of those .... I can set things up but then I don't have time to monitor, to check outcomes, to you know ... it's another of those things ...

R: ... yes it sounds like quite a big job.

L W Alex: ... it's a huge job.

R: so do you manage a group of outreach workers?

L W Alex: I manage the early years aspect of their work. They are called early years outreach workers, we only have four across two centres, which is ridiculous. Two of them were old nursery nurses; no, one of them is a nursery nurse of old, so she has got some kind of almost innate knowledge going on. Some of it's a bit out of date, but you know, she's happy to learn and so that's good. Two others are South Asian, one of them is extremely good on play and developing. She's very interested so she reads a lot and she's very, very good. The other two were in different roles, and their roles were disestablished so they then were interviewed for this job because they could use their skills in this job; but they haven't got the early years

experience. So the planning is done with me, and it's very much based on the prime areas. I can give you a planning sheet if you want before you go. Just so you can see the kind of thing we do. There's quite a long evaluation on that because obviously we need to know that what they're doing is making a difference. Opportunities to talk about 'next steps, and to follow each child, or some children. So it is all kind of changing in terms of ... groups have always been open to everybody, but know because of the lack of people resource we're having to target our groups a lot more narrowly. Which is a shame but ...

R: Do you mean the groups that you run in the settings?

L W Alex: The groups that are run here, yes. So the targeted two will be for eligible twos whose parents are not accessing provision. So at least they've got something.

R: Is that going to be with your outreach workers?

L W Alex: That will be with outreach, volunteers and my supervision. So I will ... we tried this last year but with two very disinterested workers who have now gone.

R: Yes but that's important, isn't it.

L W Alex: Very, very. Not getting it at all. So it just turned into another stay and play. I tried to do some tracking with the parents, which is interesting as well. Because, as you will know, when you track children, even with an interpreter to interpret some of the aspects, the early years aspects, everybody can do everything because they think you are asking them because you ... parents are anxious that they sound as if the children ... they're not honest in short. So that didn't really work. So the whole kind of format needs to be thought very clearly about.

R: What you are going to do.

L W Alex: Yes, because it can't be like that. And it won't be just coming in for one session. It'll be 'this is what you've come in for. This is what you can do at home following on.' And the outreach workers will visit them at home, and I've been trained in REAL. Do you know REAL? Raising early attainment in literacy?

R: Oh yes I have.

L W Alex: Absolutely wonderful. Probably the best training I've been on for a long time. That was wonderful training. So I'm hoping we can use their materials, even though they're geared at three year olds I can easily knock them down a bit for twos. And they can use their materials when they go into peoples' homes. So that's kind of going to be going on. But I'm not in a position to say how that's going to go yet, because we don't know. In my experience if you get the right people, who've got the time; whose husbands will allow them to and get out of the room when you're there. I mean that's an awful thing to say but if you're wanting to talk to women and there's a man in the corner watching what you say, you do not get ... We're meant to encourage dads to come in and we do; and yesterday, wonderful at the baby group everybody had brought their husband, which was really lovely. That's a bit different to what I'm talking about. So one of the people I asked to come to your group, well actually two said yes and then I had a husband phone me up and say 'What is this about? She can come but I will be there too.' So I had to say 'Well no actually'.

R: So there was a real worry there.

L W Alex: It's 'what are you going to say? Are you going to disclose something?' so you know ...

R: I hadn't anticipated that. Of all the things I had anticipated that wasn't a major one and that's perhaps my naivety. I suppose thinking of me as an outsider coming in.

L W Alex: Yes, but if you sat in reception for any length of time when there's, for example, baby registration, or midwife visit or ... the men are coming to support the wives, you know it's not like they're coming to ... But if you try and engage them, because I love babies, you know and I see them and I say, you know 'Oh how old are they?' They tend to be, and this is no huge generalisation, experience of everything ... sometimes there's a great .... I'm aware that the mum is a bit anxious about what she says. So that's yeah ...

R: Well it's an interesting thing. I mean, it is what it is.

L W Alex: But in terms of people not accessing twos, the two year old provision, I mean there are places round here, private day nurseries that have spaces. We haven't

any spaces. But there are and one of our ... another role for me is to find out who's got the spaces, find out the parents who haven't accessed a place and ask them if they want to go ...

R: Oh okay so try and ...

L W Alex: ... match people up. So that's going on as well.

R: That's interesting that some of the ... that you here are full then ...

L W Alex: with knobs on yes! We always have a lot ...

R: ... but there's obviously that feeling of wanting to come and do that.

L W Alex: Yes, absolutely here and \_\_\_\_ [name of the other children' centre]. Well I think that if you have been here with this as your culture. Well if you have come here to register the birth and they come here maybe for 'talk time' so that's with the outreach workers if they have any housing issues or whatever. This becomes a place they're familiar with. 'Oh and by the way you've got day care' also if you've got children in the school next door up to \_\_\_\_ [name of the other children' centre] it's very handy. And the nurseries have only been open for two years, and they've both got 'good' you know we are working towards 'outstanding'. So the standard, I think is becoming even higher.

R: So it's familiar in the community.

L W Alex: It's familiar, people still do regard this as a safe place to come, so that is good.

R: It's interesting that this is a place that people trust but that element of ... I don't know ...

L W Alex: ... well I don't want to make too much of that.

R: ... it's probably me coming in as a stranger and to be honest why would people want to come and talk to me about anything (laughs).

L W Alex: Well the only group, well there were two groups that ran here years ago, were stopped because unfortunately the people running them, how can I put it ...

they were local women. Wonderful standing \_\_\_\_ [name of woman] got an OBE for her services to the Bangladeshi community round here and well deserved. People came for her. Women were allowed to come on their own to that group. That alone to me was absolutely amazing. I used to go in, \_\_\_\_ [woman's name] used to ask me to go in and talk to them about play and what have you. And then there was another group called \_\_\_\_\_ [name] run by \_\_\_\_\_ [woman's name] who is Indian, but still South Asian. So those two women who are still with us but older now. Their way of working was very personable, but sadly doesn't fit in now with all the criteria that we have to satisfy OFSTED with. So it was based on relationships which to me is more important than anything else, however, doesn't seem to be now. So those groups have been changed. But they were, to answer your question about a safe place, those were safe groups. If I'd been running them they probably wouldn't have been allowed to come. Because I wouldn't be of the same culture. So it is something that has to develop over the years I think.

R: Yes and that's it I suppose things will change, and you are part of making that change.

L W Alex: But we are getting away from your two year olds.

R: Yes a bit ...

L W Alex: ... but I'm fine ... if you want me to ... the actual culture of why people are sending ... and I use culture nothing to do with South Asian ... I would suspect is predominantly the same as anywhere. If you've got a lot to do and somebody's saying 'I'll have your child for fifteen hours.' I don't think it's any more complicated than that. I think 'right have them 'because actually I've got dinner to cook, I've got shopping to do, I've got a baby, I've got a child to get to school. Lovely. You have them.' Which is why it's hard then for them to see, and this I would say was the same in \_\_\_\_ [names area ion the city] it's the same everywhere, that I regarded then as their time. Now they don't go off and have their nails painted, but they're having time just to catch up on 'housely' duties. So coming to talk ... when I said 'could you spare an hour' there was an anxiety about 'well would I get everything else done' because I know they think it's their time. I have tried at \_\_\_\_ [name of the other children'

centre] last year to talk to parents about 'Would they like one morning a week to stay for an hour and play with the child. Or half an hour and then get some information about what to do at home. They all said but there was absolutely no take up no matter however we tried to promote it. So I don't think some parents see it as a great learning opportunity, because they 'only' play in any case. That's fine, go and let them play then I can get the washing up done.

R: That idea then is that time is almost like a gift then. Which is quite interesting when you think about what the government's agenda is for what you do with that time.

L W Alex: yes

R: I can see that coming along the road. So what's being done?

L W Alex: I think that's already going on. We are trying to kind of pre-empt that here, by all the training that I do with all the workers really. I've developed a two year programme, I was asked to do it. It's a fifteen page document with lots of pictures, no it's probably twenty odd now, to give that to our nursery workers who don't really have time. They work so hard they haven't time to read it. If they had it would be hard, they would agree with it, because I've based it on what I've seen. But it's hard then to always implement. There's always staff issues going on, as in absences. They work very long hours at very low pay. At the national early years conference that I went to a couple of weeks ago, someone from the government was saying that Lidl actually now pay more. So certainly in London they've lost nursery workers to Lidl. Some of our lovely girls take stuff home in the evenings, you know, they're paid thirteen thousand, which is better than a lot of nurseries but its ... and they get much better conditions ... but it's still you know, you can't really expect them to take some great big document home.

R: So what is it that you've made?

L W Alex: Well it was to focus what they were doing, because in my kind of educational experience, people are happy with threes, wrongly in some ways, because they think they are getting letters and numbers, you know, drilled into them. Wrong. But people feel, and there's not as many nappies going on, and children they



can converse more. Then you get the 'baby lovers' who are happy with the babies. And there's always this kind of 'Oh. What do you do with twos?' which is what I'm going to call my document 'What do we do with twos?' because it's very different to what they think. So as it is it's a document that I was asked to do for the company but in its form it can't be used. I have to break it down. So I have two year meetings with all the two year leaders for all the nurseries. We meet and we pick out a section, unpick it. I give them tasks. They go and do it and then we have another meeting to work a bit ...

R: Is that with the other nurseries around here?

L W Alex: No. There's seven of our own nurseries.

R: Oh right. \_\_\_\_\_ [name of company] nurseries.

L W Alex: Yes. So that's the way it works. If we could somehow, to get back to twos and parents, if we could somehow engage the parents in coming to I don't know ... look at that document ... or talk through it a bit, that would be such a great thing. But they really, hence the fact that it's been so hard to get parents to speak to you. They don't want to. Just play, you go and do that. That's fine, and I'll pick you up. And you know ...

R: So in many ways me asking about engaging in the two year offer, it seems an obvious answer probably. Like you say it's time that they could spend better ...

L W Alex: ... oh yes, 'Why do you want to know about two year olds?' Well 'You want my child for fifteen hours a week'. I'm not saying that all, you know, as in any community in any group of people you get people who are wanting more than that. When I did my school readiness group, next door in the school with the Reception teacher, last summer. Different age of child, but it's really interesting what impact that's had on the children whose parents came to that group. Because we weren't sure we actually, I mean \_\_\_\_\_ [colleague's name] is South Asian so she was able to speak Urdu to them, \_\_\_\_\_ [colleague's name] came to be able to speak Bengali, so you know so there wasn't a language issue. But there were two things that happened that were amazing we had three days came without the wives and really, really took

on board what we were saying. And, very sadly really, one mum had a baby on the Friday, and because she said she's come on the Tuesday, she came without her baby for the hour. She said he was sleeping. She just lived locally. Bless her she came staggering in ...

R: That's a real commitment, isn't it!

L W Alex: Oh you know that was just amazing, she was Bengali, so \_\_\_\_\_ [colleague's name] could speak to her. We sent her off after a cup of tea after half an hour, we were thinking that babies probably needing feeding or whatever, anyway, you need some rest but thank you. So it was, it's getting the timing right. Their idea of school readiness which isn't just for threes, back to twos. I want to start it with the parents in the two year room now. I don't want to do it just as this quick fix thing in July so they're ready for September. But that's going to be a challenge because 'Why do you want to talk to me about getting ready for school when they're not going for two years?' so I think in terms of your research, I think there's barriers to get across, some of it's cultural, some of it isn't and I think some of it is to do with restrictions placed on them from other family members, let's say. Mother in laws as well, in my experience follow them around 'where are you going? What are you doing? Who are you doing it with?' often live with them, so they're very, very controlled. So, you know, it's quite hard to get people on their own to talk, to tell you what they're doing and what they'd like to do.

R: But it's interesting, hearing all the different approaches you're taking to draw people in and draw families in. Like when you were talking about the school readiness you were doing in the summer, and how much people engaged with that. You were saying it's all about change, so maybe that's it the signs of things changing?

R: Yes.

L W Alex: Maybe that's it, the signs of things are starting to change.

L W Alex: Yes well we were very impressed. They came thinking they were going to be told how to teach their children to read and write and learn their numbers. So we got that out of the way first. And then we thought the disadvantage of doing that is

that is all they've come for they won't come back. But actually they did. And then the next week it was toileting, developing skills of independence. And then we did one on behaviour. And it was, it was interesting ...

R: ... so you ran them over a few weeks ...

L W Alex: We ran them over six weeks.

R: Wow.

L W Alex: Yes. I mean it an hour in the morning once a week but I mean they came, they dropped their children off at school or at nursery, has a cup of tea. And then \_\_\_\_\_ [colleague's name] and I either did it on our own or together and took a theme a week, as it were. I'd give you a booklet on it but I'm not allowed to as there need to be some changes made to it.

R: Oh no, no it's fine it doesn't matter.

L W Alex: They all got a book to follow the programme so ...

R: That was quite a commitment then for six weeks.

L W Alex: I think it was really good. I mean they didn't all come back but most of them did and even if they couldn't stay for the whole time, they'd come and say 'I'm really sorry I've only got twenty minutes. What have I missed?' So it was quite, yeah, that was good. So what else would you like to know from me?

R: Well you know you've talked a lot about your role and what you do and its so interesting to hear about all these different groups that your running and all these different approaches that you're taking. And that idea of kind of adapting the two year old offer to for those families have chosen not to take it up and trying another way round.

L W Alex: Yes I mean I don't want to sound in any way unduly negative about all this ...

R: No I understand but that's not what is coming across ...

L W Alex: Good ...

R: I think what's coming across is your effort and commitment to it ...

L W Alex: Yes it's about us trying something else really. And I think the going into homes, what would happen with that is, again, some workers are more experienced than others. But if they have a very clear 'this is what we're doing today'. Like we'll do this lovely scrap book idea of environmental print which is a lovely thing to do with children, I mean they put the glue on and then they have a matching game. I mean there's some lovely stuff and I think that would work very nicely with a lot of our families. I think it's just getting the ... if I say the right group of people I don't mean the 'right' group, but in terms of measuring impact you do need an interested group of people. You don't want to go round when you've arranged a visit and them not be in. Because that's what's happened before. I'll say 'have you been to see ...' 'Yes well, I'm sure they were in but they wouldn't open the door'. That happens a lot, we want them to say 'Great \_\_\_\_\_ [colleague's name]' that's one of our workers, '... is coming today with a lovely bag of things to do'. It's going to take twenty minutes and we can leave you with it and you can do things on your own. So yes it's all being worked on.

R: Yes. I think that's it really, just trying different ways and adapting them.

L W Alex: Yes. And there are parents of course, without sounding, it isn't all about let's just throw them in and leave them. I would say having spoken to the managers it kind of goes in two groups in a way. There are quite a lot of parents who do that, actually for sound reasons...

Interruptions as someone walks in ...

L W Alex: so is there anything else? I don't want you to think that all parents are ... because then the other group, there's a few who want to know 'When are you going to start teaching them to read and write?' Both is a misunderstanding, but well meant. They want them to be able to compete with everybody else. They want them 'school ready' but ...

R: ... but what that means ...

L W Alex: ... but what that means has got to be unpicked and made very kind of attainable really. And it's not about, as one mum said, 'When are you going to teach

her to speak English?’ So there’s a lot of misunderstanding on that as well. Because the speech and language team tell us very clearly ‘You speak in your own language at home, unless you are absolutely fluent in English.’ I’m sure you knew that. That was a big surprise to me, six years ago I didn’t know that if they come into school as fluent Urdu speakers they will learn to speak English much quicker than if they come in with a broken down, stilted version of English. So it makes perfect sense when it’s explained but that’s the kind of thing that parents, I’ve seen parents physically kind of sigh when you tell them that ‘you’re doing the right thing. Well done.’ You know, sing them rhymes in Urdu, read them books in Gujarati; whatever language, that’s great because we’re after fluency and confidence. So we are, you know it isn’t all, ‘thank you very much keep them there and I’ll come back at half eleven.’ So, yes...

R: Oh, thank you very much \_\_\_\_\_ [participant’s name].

L W Alex: No thank you it was nice to see you. (37 minutes)

### Appendix III

Interview with mums 11/12/15 Longsight Children's centre.

Mother3: Abir

Mother 4: Bahja

Mother 5: Cala

LW Alex

FSW Beena

Mother 6: Dalal

Researcher: This is to listen to your stories and your voices because generally people don't ask the mums. So okay you've chosen to bring your children to the two year old offer so I would like to hear why and why are your experiences. So can I, just to start off, A did you say you're Polish?

Abir: Yeah ...

R: So you came here from Poland as an adult?

Abir: Yes I came first time in 2007, then in 2009 I met my husband and started a family  
*laughs*

R: Ah right and you converted to Islam then, when you met your husband?

Abir: Yes. My husband is from Bangladesh. So I don't want to use information about my husband.

Abir: Oh yes I understand. It is purely for background.

Bahja: Yeah, I'm from, basically from Pakistan, and I got married and then I came here twenty ... exactly ... after next week it's going to be twenty years. *Laughs*.

R: Ah right *laughs*.

Abir: So long!

Bahja: Yeah, twenty years this year and I've got four children. They all are grown up they go colleges, I've got three daughters and one son.

Abir: And now a little one you said, four years?

Bahja: no, no she's going to be four next week. So I've got one son, he's eighteen, and daughter's sixteen and then another

Abir: Oh you've got quite a big gap ...

Bahja: Yes ... and then another daughter she's thirteen and then after she's going to be four. So then a big gap between ...

Abir: All of them ...

Bahja: Yeah. No, no not all of them ...

R: Yes because the eldest three are of a similar age ...

Bahja: Yes eighteen, sixteen and then sorry she's thirteen and then three. She will be four next week but at the moment she is three. So there is a big gap but not with three children ...

Abir: I have five year old daughter who is just in the Reception here in this school ...

Bahja: In this school? Oh okay.

Abir: ... and then my son who is just settling in the nursery now and is starting in January.

R: ... and how old is he? Did you say he is two?

Abir: Tomorrow two. Exact tomorrow two.

R: And your third baby due any time *laughs*

Abir: *laughs* Yes that's right, also a boy ...

Bahja: So I had three children, when they were three, after like three and a half and three, they went to school straight away.

R: Yeah

Bahja: ... but now like, it's very hard to get in, to get a place in school. It was never so hard before as it is now.

R: Right.

Bahja: Because the other three children, they went to [names a local school] it was like a family school. Their father and their aunties went there. Same school and then their children were going to the same school. So, but now they're saying 'No. no we haven't got any places' so my daughter didn't get any place there and so she is coming here. But I'm going to try again. Hopefully she will get place somewhere.

Abir: Yeah so I live just a few roads away, so really close and if my son can a little bit walk, he's walking properly but sometimes he's just want to ... 'take me, take me!' I don't have time to hold him in my hands anymore.

Bahja: So my older children, I didn't have any problem because then there was no scheme like two years old childcare. But with this, the younger one, when I heard about this I said 'that's good. I will send my daughter to this group, to play and to have the child care and she'd really enjoy it ...

Abir: What's her name?

Bahja: [Names child] she was like ...

Abir: She's in Butterflies, no? She's in this nursery here? Or another nursery?

Bahja: No she's coming here [names the nursery]

Abir: Yeah, this one so there's three rooms baby room, honey bees and Butterflies. So which one?

Bahja: She's three she's in [names nursery]. Yeah, where was I, what was I saying I forgot.

R: That she's three but when she was two you decided to bring her ...

Bahja: Yes, when she was two, I was looking forward to send her somewhere. But then she didn't get any place or some funding system I don't know. There was some issues going on. But finally she got a place and it was a private nursery. I send her over



there, and I wasn't happy. One thing I would say. You know these private nurseries. I've sent my daughter there as well. And I'm not saying all are same ... but you know, these private nurseries are nowhere near so good as these nurseries here.

R: Right ...

Bahja: All they are doing. Honestly, I really want to say, all they are doing, they are just money making. It's just like business for them. When they were like, I've seen it. When someone was visiting, then they were like make it really nice and they were really good. I'm not saying they were doing any harm to children but the atmosphere, and the place was so dirty, and my daughter, she was not learning anything. I thought this is just a waste of time. She's not even doing anything. All she was doing was just sitting on a computer and for three hours all she did was just computer. I was like, I knew she liked going on the computer and listening to songs and kiddy songs. But it doesn't mean you let her sit like for two hours over there. It was really bad experience for me and then finally she got a place here because I was trying really hard, pushing for her to get a place in these nurseries, I tried here and thankfully she got a place here. And since she's coming here, she's learning so much. She's more confident and I can see her difference when you start sending children ...

Abir: ... this is good ...

Bahja: ... your child since two, two and a half, they are very different children to others, who are sitting at home doing nothing. Because, my niece's son is two he's also goes going here in nursery and since he's going to nursery yes he was small and they were 'he's only two, he's a baby'. But actually they're not a baby they want to, and after being here they cry and they want to stay with mummy. But when they settle, after settling they're like the graph is going up. They are learning, they are learning to share, they learn ... basically they learn everything. And for that two or three hours it's like for mummies as well. I'm like having my cup of tea and I can go with my friend and go shopping and I can have some time to myself.

R: Yes, and I think that's important. Isn't it?

Bahja: That's important.

R: For you to have that time.

Bahja: Yeah, yeah.

R: So were you saying to your niece that it was a good thing to go to the two year old offer.

Bahja: Yeah. Of course because I've seen you know the family were like really pushing her. They are saying 'Oh he's only two why? He's a baby' He used to cry a lot. He was a first child and when I child cries mummy is there and ...

Interview interrupted by another mum (C) arriving with Family Support Worker Beena, who interprets.

FSW Beena: Speaking own language to (C) introduces me.

R: Hi nice to meet you.

Cala: My name [states name]

Stops interview while settle mother and introduce and explain the research and interview process for consent with FSW Beena translating. Restarts interview.

R: So we were just talking about you saying to your family about encouraging them to come to ...

Bahja: ... yeah and they were not encouraging her because he used to cry and her grandmother and nanny were 'Oh no no don't, he's only small don't send him. He's like going to go school all of his life. Just, just ... don't ... when he'll be three then you send him'. Even they are born and ... and brought up here, his grandmother still they were like saying stuff like this. Maybe she was like, with her grandson, maybe she loved so much she doesn't want to see him crying ... But she still made her effort and she sent her son to nursery. And after three months when he was settled, I've seen him improving so much. He was learning lots of words. Before he was not able to speak properly ... and I've seen a massive difference ...

R: Yeah.

Bahja: Especially also in my daughter as well. She's a very quick learner, since she's come to this nursery, not the other one, this one. She has learnt large. Every day she is learning a new thing.

R: Yes, you feel that it's important for the children to come but where they go is also important? You are talking about the quality.

Bahja: Yes. I think it's lack of .... I won't say knowledge ...

FSW Beena: No no

Bahja: ... People don't know the benefits of sending their two years old child. Like when they will know it properly then they will encourage other people. Then one day they will realise and they will send their children. I think on Asian people it is mostly their family pressure as well from what I have seen. With my experience. Like nannies and grandmothers are saying 'No, no. You are sending him or her when he or she is three is too early.' That's why. Maybe mothers want to send them, especially who are living with joint family. It's more pressure on you, daughter in laws as well. They have to make happy their father in law and mother in law.

R: Right ...

Bahja: So it's very hard to go against their decision.

R: that's interesting, isn't it?

Bahja: So it's a new ... I think it's, I won't say it's less, it's very common in Asian families  
*Laughs.*

R: Yes. So that family pressure from different generations ...

FSW Beena: Can I interrupt?

R: Yes please do [name]

FSW Beena: Because this two years funding, this concept is new in the Asian community. And our bond is always we think 'Oh the little baby with mum and dad and grandparents'. And he or she is so little if she go to a new environment she can't adjust and mum stay at home depressing. Nowhere to go, nowhere to play, nowhere

to touch out. Now there is two, so if we want to break this concept we have to go through long way. Now they are understanding through their friend, word of mouth 'It is good. Your children learn how to share, how to do potty training. Or open up their coat and shoes. But you know it is, I think, in five years' time it will be clear in our communities.

Bahja: Yes. I told you I have seen so much pressure on my niece. Even her own mother is saying 'don't send him'. Or 'send him when he's three, send him when he's three'. But she said 'no. I'm going to send him.

R: And how do the family feel now they have seen him going there?

Bahja: Yeah. They are happy now. Before her grandmother was really like sad. 'Oh he was crying' but it's her first grandson and it is very emotional as well. They can't see him or her crying so they say 'don't send him. He's going to go school whole of his life'. They don't see that when you send the child, it's so much ... they are more confident. They can ... I don't know, I have seen with my own children. They went when they were three, three and a half. But she's going since she was two and she's a chatterbox, she's got a different personality from all of ... like they were shy, but she's not.

R: So you think that's helped, coming here at two?

FSW Beena: And the other point is family couldn't detach their children from them when coming to school. Children are happy but parents are unhappy. *Laughs.*

R: *Laughs*

Bahja: Some mummies as well. Even I was really sad. Sometimes I'm 'Am I doing the right thing?' I was fighting my own self. 'Oh am I doing the right thing? Maybe I won't send her tomorrow'.

R: Especially when you went to the first nursery and that wasn't a good experience.

Bahja: Yes that did put me off.

R: I guess it would have been very easy to say 'I won't do it then'.

Bahja: Yes, you know sometime I used to say this is not the right place. They are just grabbing money, from people I don't know how they do it. But it's just really bad experience for me. It nearly put me off.

R: Yes but then like you say, somewhere like here where it is much better ...

Bahja: yeah I was coming here and I was trying to get a place here. Because I am coming here since this place is made. I'm coming here, there was a group, to do the chatting, a chat group. But then my son had [names medical procedure] and I was off from this place because I was just in hospital and now he is better and he's doing really well in college. Yeah but now I'm free so ...

R: So this is somewhere you felt more secure to bring your daughter because you've got a good relationship with this place?

Bahja: Yes.

Abir: Yes with SureStart. When I had my daughter first I was here alone because my husband was renewing his visa back there in Bangladesh. I was alone. I was pregnant and then I had my child and I didn't have anything. So the SureStart helped me. They give me some clothes. So for little baby, they give me pram. I am really happy with this place and it is really helpful and nice ...

Bahja: Aah.

R: So that trust, that you can trust this place and these people ...

Abir: Yes ...

Bahja: Yes it is really nice.

Abir: ... also gate to protect the stairs, safety gates too, free from here. So really good place and now I'm living near, just five roads and it's very close ...

Interrupted when another mum arrives. Greeted by Beena and R. the room is too small

LW Alex: I'm so sorry if I'd known there would be so many people I would have booked another room.

Another mum arrives.

FSW Beena: Ahh more coming I think we need a bigger room. *Speaks in Urdu to the new mother who has just arrived.* It's alright because I will find a bigger room.

FSW Beena returns with a key.

FSW Beena: We will go to studio 7.

Everyone moves into a bigger room.

Abir: It is quarter to eleven. I will have about ten minutes and then I will have to go.

R: Ah yes I understand.

LW Alex: I don't think there's a room ...

FSW Beena: Yes I already phoned nursery. This one.

LW Alex: Oh. Well done.

Open door.

LW Alex: Oh, excellent. Very nice.

We settle into the new room, organise chairs and toys for the young child of one of the mothers.

Abir: I will take this chair. It is more comfortable I think.

R: *Laughs.* Oh yes you are allowed the most comfortable chair. Are you feeling alright?

Abir: *Laughs.* Yes, yes alright.

R: Beena, Alex has just gone to photocopy some more consent forms for me.

FSW Beena: Oh yes. I will make sure everybody has signed it.

LW Alex: Are you alright? It's wonderful everybody who came. It's so kind.

R: [Beena, please can you help me explain to the mums who have just arrived what this is all about?

FSW Beena: Yes, yes. *Begins to explain using the research information sheet about the study in Urdu to the two newly arrived mothers.* Our culture and everything think returns to Urdu.

*Both mothers nod and are smiling.*

R: Is that okay?

FSW Beena: *Continues in Urdu.*

Bahja: *Joins in the explanation in Urdu.* Compared to other community.

FSW Beena: *Continues in Urdu.*

R: Thank you. So yes I just would like to hear your stories. I think it was interesting what you were just telling me about how when you talk to each other things changes, when you share your experiences. But also they need to be good experiences.

Bahja: People have from what I have seen, people, especially ethnic minority people they don't know their rights as well. Because I've seen not only in this field but other fields as well people don't know their rights, especially women. *Turns to other mums and begins to speak in Urdu.* Because they are new in this country, they are living with families, they are like ... *Speaks Urdu to FSW Beena.* What are your experiences? Women don't know much, they are just staying home and cooking and I think we need to ... aware them and need to tell them. If we tell them, especially new generation, cos I'm not new, I'm now old. *Laughs.* But when you encourage them, they will send their children to the two years old, not only this but other rights as well, other things as well. So ... if they know their rights ... they know what they need to do, they will do it.

R: Yes.

FSW Beena: Another thing is. I always say this phrase to everyone. This thing, everybody has got culture, their culture we used to say culture is like a spider web. Spider do their web ...

*LW Alex returns with more consent forms and places them on the table. A Stands to leave.*

R: Thank you so much for coming I really appreciate it. Thank you. Sorry ...

FSW Beena: Their web comes through their saliva and they put there, into a hole. And if anybody comes straight away hid in their hole they go and wouldn't come out. This is like our Asian culture, on any culture. If you go straight away they will attack, but slowly, slowly word of mouth. Reach parents first and then go for children.

R: Yes, yes you are right this idea that culture doesn't stay the same, it changes. It's an interesting idea.

FSW Beena: Yes, yes.

Bahja: It does, because I've seen changes, because now this is second generation, going now like with my niece now they are getting married. Soon my own children, two, three years they will be like going making couple as well, for themselves. I've seen people changing. But if they know, Asian people or all ethnic minority people know their rights, especially now. Because the children now are more bold and they are more confident. They are not like us, they are not scared or anything. They are ready to take a stand for themselves.

R: Yeah, and that's important for how things move forward ...

Bahja: Yes.

R: ... across all cultures really.

FSW Beena: Yes I think so ...

R: yes, yes ... Do any of the mums want to tell me anything?

FSW Beena: *Speaks in Urdu to one of the mums.*

R: Sorry, can I ask where originally you were from?

FSW Beena: She's from Bangladesh.

R: Bangladesh, thank you.

Dalal: Yes. *Speaks Urdu. Story ... continues in Urdu.*

FSW Beena: Ahh Okay. Story book?



Dalal: Yes story book. *Continues in Urdu.*

FSW Beena: *Begins translating.* 'When my son was two. There is nothing like two years funding and my son is in school now.' This school here. 'But from there I have got something, if something comes for her *Points to little girl playing at her feet.* I will give it to school.' This concept in there is that first child goes to school and she thinks it is more ... good, for the girl, because her son is not reading stories at first when he go to school. But now she knows *points to little girl* she know like reading time, she has got lots of rules and boundaries. 'This is like very good I am very happy because I learn from my son and that is why I send to the two year old offer'.

R: That's interesting, even like in the family from one child to the next child. Yes.

FSW Beena: *Starts speaking Urdu to mum translating my words.* Come on [name of mum]

Dalal: *Speaking Urdu.*

FSW Beena: Ahh.

Dalal: *Continues in Urdu.*

FSW Beena: 'When I was give her to the two years funding. I was so upset I cried.'

R: Ohhh ...

Dalal: Yes ...

FSW Beena: ... and then I thought of her future. I think she stay at home just speak *Urdu.* I think I have to do something for her. And she's not like some time speaking with me ... That's why I think I have to give her to school or nursery. She will learn and now I'm happy.'

R: You feel happier now?

Dalal: Yes.

FSW Beena: Confident as well.

R: *To D.* Do you? Do you feel it's changed you?

FSW Beena: *Translates into Urdu.*

Dalal: *Speaking Urdu.*

FSW Beena: 'Before when I was giving her to this two years nursery. It was unknown fear. What is going to happen to her? Is she going to settle down? Or will she come back with lots of fear and crying. Now I'm okay'

R: And that's similar to what you said. So you have to be brave really.

Bahja: Yes. You take a big step.

FSW Beena: *Speaking Urdu.* 'Now I have got this experience I will tell others'. Word of mouth.

R: Right. So it is back about trust again then?

FSW Beena: Trust. Yes.

R: That you trust somebody with your children ... Thank you. What do other mums think?

FSW Beena: *Indicating C.* She is from Pakistan, and she is from Pakistan too. *Indicating E.* And Afghanistan. *Indicating F.*

F: No Peshwari.

FSW Beena: Ahh Peshwari. They are all Pakistan just different cities.

Cala: Yes different cities. *Speaks in Urdu.*

FSW Beena: Ahh.

Cala: *Continues in Urdu.* Stories. *Continues in Urdu.* Pictures. *Continues in Urdu.*

Bahja: Hmm. Yes.

Cala: *Continues in Urdu.*

FSW Beena: Ahh. Okay. *Speaks in Urdu.*

Cala: *Continues in Urdu.*

FSW Beena: ... and from her, she say 'Because my eldest child go there, I've got some idea of what is going to happen.' And another point she raised is 'We wanted to give the children but no place.'

Cala: No place.

FSW Beena: 'We waited a long time, long time and we got place in far away. I haven't got driving and I have to walk and this is not easy for me. That is why sometimes we keep our children in the home.'

R: So you need places ...

FSW Beena: ... walking distance.

R: But ones that you can trust as well.

Bahja: Yes. After that experience ...

FSW Beena: ... another thing, they are happy now because children learn lots of different things, coming to this crèche place and you know she ...her ... youngest children follow elder she sit down with book and other things. Can I ask another question?

R: yes, yes.

FSW Beena: *Speaks in Urdu.* Mother in law, father in law *continues in Urdu.*

Cala: Only two years. *Continues in Urdu.*

FSW Beena: Okay. She's saying 'you know my in laws are very progressive. They said, leave it to her, school' but what happened she said 'I can't go very far away, I have to do housework as well. And that's why, and I couldn't drive. The two factors ...' but they are progressive and they say okay. For good reason.

R: And families are all different.

Bahja: Yes always.

Cala: *Speaks in Urdu.*

FSW Beena: *Replies in Urdu.*

Cala: *Speaks in Urdu. Story. Continues in Urdu.*

FSW Beena: *Yes, yes. First day. Continues in Urdu.*

Cala: *Speaks in Urdu.*

FSW Beena: 'Because when I was in first day. I was little bit worried and tense. What is she going to do without mum and dad? New area, new field. And now she's very happy when she comes with her smiling face. Looking at books. She likes bringing books.'

R: Ahh so she is bringing books home?

Cala: Yes.

Bahja: When she was two years old? Two years old, when she was in nursery she was bringing books home? Or in school?

Cala: Nursery. Play group.

Bahja: *Speaks in Urdu.*

Cala: *Replies in Urdu.*

Bahja: Oh right. Okay.

Cala: Story books. *Speaks in Urdu. Library. Speaks in Urdu.*

Bahja: Ahh it's a girl thing. Girls like to bring the books.

Cala: ... and playdough. *Speaks in Urdu.*

Bahja: That's good, that's good.

Cala: *Speaks in Urdu.*

Bahja: yes, same.

Cala: *Speaks in Urdu. Pictures. Continues in Urdu.*

FSW Beena: Ahh interested.

Cala: Likes the picture books.

R: Yes?

Cala: Yeah.

FSW Beena: Interested in the pictures ...

R: ... the pictures in the books ...

Cala: Yes.

FSW Beena: *Speaks Urdu*. And you [uses D's name]

R: Yes. Please I would like to hear your story of bringing your child to the two year old offer.

FSW Beena: *Speaks in Urdu to D*.

Dalal: SureStart ... *Speaks Urdu*.

FSW Beena: Playgroup?

Dalal: Ahha Playgroup. *Continues in Urdu*. Stay and play.

FSW Beena: *Translating* 'I used to come with my children to stay and play, here at SureStart. From there I know I have two years funding.'

R: Ah yes, and from there how did you feel about bringing your child to the two year funding? Was that easy to do or was that difficult?

FSW Beena: *Translates in Urdu to D*.

Dalal: *Speaks on Urdu*.

FSW Beena: Ah. 'Children were very happy to come to this SureStart and in this country the weather, you know, is so ... not welcoming ...'

R: It is awful. *Laughs* ...

FSW Beena: *Laughs* ... yes awful ... sitting down at home, doing nothing, especially with bad days and rainy days, and they wanted to come to nursery. Weekend also they say 'go to nursery' *Laughs*

Dalal: *Laughs* ... yes weekend.

R: *Laughs*. Oh yes? I'm also interested because your children are doing the two year offer and you have that time when they are in childcare. How have you found having that time ... to use? How have people found to use that time? Do you find that valuable? What is your experiences?

FSW Beena: *Speaks in Urdu*.

Bahja: *Laughs*. Time Joins in Urdu.

Dalal: *Speaks in Urdu*. Cleaning.

Bahja: *Laughs* ...

R: *Laughs*. Cleaning ... I understood that.

ALL: *Laugh*.

Dalal: Yes cleaning. *Speaks Urdu*.

FSW Beena: Making lunch and for dinner.

Dalal: *Continues in Urdu*.

FSW Beena: Ahh yes. 'When the children will come, I give my all time to children. That's why when children are here I do the housework.'

R: So does it, do you feel that's helpful then? To have that time when you can do that?

FSW Beena: Helpful? *Speaks in Urdu*.

Dalal: *Speaks in Urdu*.

FSW Beena: 'I can do my time ...'

Dalal: ... *speaks Urdu*.

Bahja: Yeah *Laughs*

Dalal: *Laughs* ... *continues in Urdu*.

Bahja: *Laughs*. 'Just can tidy'. She tidies everything.

Dalal: Everything can go tidy. *Laughs*. *Continues in Urdu*. *Laughs*.

FSW Beena: Ahh yes. 'When my, when I was with my children I couldn't do any housework, anything like that. So when I give them to this school I come back and I tidy and I clean and cook ...'

Bahja: It's a target for us as well to finish our cleaning in these two hours ... *Laughs*.

FSW Beena: *Laughs*. Yes they can plan for this.

R: *Laughs*. Right so this is like the time to get that work done?

Bahja: Yes or like I go, when my husband doesn't go work on Thursday, the rest of the week he is not at home but on Thursday is his day off, and we go for breakfast for these two hours.

R: Ahh on Thursday ...

FSW Beena: Ahh.

Bahja: Yes on Thursday. That time with my husband so it's good.

R: That's good, when life's so busy.

Bahja: I've got the other children as well so like the kids who go college. Some are coming early, some are coming late so I pick my children by myself. I don't let them coming home on buses and stuff. Then after twelve o'clock I'm getting more busy, some children need collecting, then another one and another one. It's ... it gets really ... so these two hours *laughs* I quickly finish my work, cooking and everything.

R: I think that's an interesting part of this because we think about the benefits to the children. But we should think about the benefits also to you as women, as mothers how do you use that time ...

Bahja: I plan my day for this *Laughs*.

R: Sorry how did you say you use this time?

Cala: I use this time I go to shopping. Normal. Sometimes town and supermarket.

R: Yes, so do you find that helps?

Cala: Yes easier.

FSW Beena: Everybody needs time for 'me'. *Laughs.*

R: Yes, especially when you've got young children. It's quite hard when you've got a lot to do. The other thing I was interested in was that you were talking about how you share, you find this a good thing it is helpful so you can pass that on to your friends and family. But I'm interested about, when you think about your childhoods when you were younger and now. How do you think your children's lives are changing from yours and what you think about that? Things like this two year old childcare, how that changes their childhoods?

Bahja: Shall I tell my experience?

R: Yes. Please.

FSW Beena: Yes tell your experience.

Bahja: You know when I was three, I used to go nursery. I was two and a half. My mum was a teacher and my parents were really into ... very ... very determined. They were not highly educated, but they always encouraged me, and I think I'm not, I'm also doing the same thing. But they've done really well with me. *Laughs.* And when I was two and a half my mum used to always bring some basic books, the books in Pakistan were dual language books then or English books. And when I was three I used to go to Nursery and when I was three and a half I used to read stories. And when I went from nursery to proper school, because I was so small, teacher used to say 'why, she's too small. Can she read? My mum, in Pakistan they take a test before they ... enter, before admission, yes before admission. And because I used to go to nursery, my mum was a teacher and she worked so hard with me. And when they took my test they were so surprised, 'We didn't know a three years-old child can read!' ...

R: Right.

Bahja: ... and they took me in their school because I passed their test. Yeah, and so because I was brought up that way, I don't know if it is the same experience, but yeah, because they put pressure on me when I was tiny though. *Laughs.*

R: *Laughs.*



Bahja: Sometimes I used to think 'Oh my, it is too much' because they really did too much. *Laughs.*

FSW Beena: Yeah.

Bahja: Yeah, but the thing is then I did my graduation and I did well but I think it was too much pressure for me. *Laughs.*

FSW Beena: Ahh. *Laugh.*

R: Do you think that influenced you to want your daughter to go to the two year old child care?

Bahja: Oh yeah. I would love to send her and I would encourage everyone to send them. But in Pakistan it is different. Over here it is, education, kids are playing, kids are ... they are learning through play and it is different. But in Pakistan it is different. You won't believe but when I was three, I could write and recognise all the letters and numbers at least one to fifty. I could write them, I could read stories as well, their effort was like fruitful, I would say. Yeah and I could do all these things, but over there I missed all my playing stuff. I didn't play that much, as I've seen my children playing. I didn't play, like those children. So ... that's why I'm a bit soft on my children. Because I've missed that ...

R: ... I think that happens a lot, doesn't it? Our childhoods, we try and ...

Bahja: *Laughs...* I wasn't allowed to watch TV more than one hour, and I wasn't allowed to do this, I wasn't allowed to do that. That was ...

FSW Beena: You know that is definitely a concept bearing on our minds. In our culture, we come from different countries, Asia, ethnic minority, we think: 'If my children go to the school, it's hard for them, all the writing, all the reading. Memorise everything, maths and everything.' That is our concept, they think that is normal. 'This is how I was taught, myself. And when he is ready for school, four or five, then ... school.' It is our concept, we have to change our concept as well. In our country we didn't read the story, we learnt from alphabet, 'A, B, C *Speaks in Urdu*'. This was our culture. If you don't memorise teachers were very ...

Bahja: ... shout ...

FSW Beena: ... shout at me and all day I couldn't do anything, I couldn't memorise. This concept is still in our mind. That is why we didn't encourage ...

Bahja: That is why, I told you I wasn't as strict as my parents were with me. So ... but I'm happy that children learn nicely over here. *Laughs*. But over there is too much pressure.

R: Yes. That's interesting, then to think that, well you think it's going to be this but actually its different, it's this.

FSW Beena: So different. But you know, still we couldn't find without learning 'ABC' they can still spell everything. How did this happen? And counting. We always ... memorise number and everything. But the way these children these teach like they haven't got this concept.

Bahja: Yeah.

R: It's true really even within this country a few generations ago you wouldn't do this. This is quite recent, all the idea of play ...

Bahja: Well on me it was too much pressure. But when I see, when I think now we say 'oh kids can't do it'. But if I learnt when I was five I could read thick, English, not paragraph big whole book. I could read English and Urdu, and used to do maths, and subtraction and all stuff. But if I was five and I was able to do this, why can't they do it! They can do it.

Cala: *Speaks Urdu*.

Bahja: Yeah, even sometimes they used to shout. Sometimes they used to even hit us ...

FSW Beena: Yes.

Bahja: ... on our hands. I used to hate, I remember I didn't want my teacher to like shout and hit me. And so I had to learn. They did teach me. *Laughs*.

R: *Laughs*. You did learn a lot.

Bahja: Yeah, I remember when I was five. When I compare my children. They seem don't, but then I think 'no, no they are playing, they are living their life'. So, I have missed my childhood. Like, hardly I used to have TV and I wasn't allowed too much play and just used to stay home and ...

FSW Beena: Another thing is, because we have got that idea in our minds. It already works, and we wanted to give our children our confident ...

Bahja: ... freedom, yeah, ...

FSW Beena: ... we don't want to break their confident, 'New world, new things, new faces, strangers, all that. We don't want to send them to strangers unless they have grown up to five ... they have got confidence, now go school.'

Bahja: Yeah

FSW Beena: This is another concept ...

R: Yeah

Cala: Pakistan people, *Speaks in Urdu*.

Bahja: Yeah. When I used to write as well, even now kids when they are five, they can write I think everything, they can write stories, they can write ...

Cala: *Speaks in Urdu*.

Bahja: Yes, 'There was just one holiday and then too much pressure'

R: *To other mums*. Did you have the same when you were little?

Cala: Yeah

FSW Beena: A lot of pressure.

Cala: *Speaks in Urdu*.

FSW Beena: 'Just one day off. Friday'. That affects everybody they had the same.

Bahja: But you know what, my parents did not pressurise my other two sisters. You know they didn't graduate, because they put some pressure on me.

FSW Beena: Perhaps different pressure ...

Bahja: ... but they didn't graduate. They left college when they were like second year.

FSW Beena: They give that example, 'look your sister' but they couldn't learn these things ...

Bahja: ... yeah ...

FSW Beena: *Laughs*. They are under this sister ...

Bahja: Yeah, I just keep comparing 'Should I do this? My parents did this, should I? ...'

FSW Beena: Yes, that is an important thing.

Bahja: Yes, so ... it's all an experiment ...

R: It is isn't it, and the other thing I was thinking. Do you think by sending the children to childcare, do you think that ... obviously you can see that it is helpful, you told me how it helps ... do you think that there is anything that is lost because of that. Do you think ...

Bahja: No.

R: ... nothing negative?

Bahja: No nothing negative. It is all positive and we should encourage parents as well, and we should ... they are not aware of it. Mostly parents think they are not aware of this facility or this ... *Speaks in Urdu* two year old *Speaks in Urdu*. The only thing, the only thing ... when child is three or four then they go school. Most people don't know, I think. They just need to ...

Cala: *Speaks in Urdu*. Teacher told my child 'Come to the nursery' *Speaks in Urdu*.

Bahja: She's saying 'because she didn't know ...'

Cala: Playgroup *Speaks in Urdu*.

FSW Beena: Ahh yes. *Speaks in Urdu*. Before, she said 'so many groups here. We used to come and when I come to the health centre to see the Health Visitor. I see this is

very good for the children and if parents feel trust and confidence, then they will come.'

R: Yeah, and I suppose because you've come to so many different things, then you can see there's a lot happening here. Which is different to what you have at a private day nursery. You don't have all of this.

FSW Beena: *Speaks in Urdu. Culture, religion, continues in Urdu.*

Cala: *Speaks in Urdu.*

FSW Beena: Yes. *Speaks in Urdu.*

Dalal: *Speaks in Urdu. Culture. Speaks in Urdu.*

Cala: *Speaks in Urdu. Christmas. Speaks in Urdu.*

Bahja: *Speaks in Urdu. European. Continues in Urdu.*

Dalal: *Speaks in Urdu.*

Bahja: *Speaks in Urdu. Christmas tree. Continues in Urdu.*

Dalal: *Speaks in Urdu.*

FSW Beena: Yes. I said If you have got any fear that if we give the two years child they will forget our culture's norms and values really? They said 'No. We are very happy to come to different communities to mingle with them. And when my child come to home. She do drama for Christmas. Christmas play. We are very happy here.'

R: Right. So do you think that it's good for all the community then? To share?

FSW Beena: *Speaks in Urdu.*

Dalal: *Speaks in Urdu.*

FSW Beena: She said 'I'm very happy because my children are so inclusive. They wanted to learn from different communities, different cultures and they learn respect and we are very happy.'

R: Yeah and I think that's important as, like you said, cultures keep changing and communities change, the whole country changes and that working together ...

FSW Beena: Yes we are adapting ...

R: Yes well, everybody has to, we all adapt.

Bahja: Sorry, I'm sorry to interrupting. When, in our country we only knew about Eid. But our children know about Diwali, they know about Christmas, they know about like ... it is our duty to tell them about our own religion but ... *Speaks in Urdu*. This is their festival, this is Hindu's festival, this is their festival. Do you understand? They know that we are living with different ...

FSW Beena: ... multicultural ...

Bahja: Yeah, multicultural. So they show respect to their religion as well. And they should also be themselves, proud of who we are and also respect their other ... with other children's religions, with other people's religion as well. So it's' all about respecting ourselves and others as well.

R: Yes and I suppose to start very young with that ...

Bahja: Well we were ... *Speaks in Urdu*. We used to listen, well there is Christmas. *Continues in Urdu*. Yeah, we didn't know. But now it's good that our children know and are with different children.

R: That's an interesting idea about what children need know and to do to prepare themselves as adults.

Bahja: Yeah.

R: Is that something you think is important?

Bahja: It is to respect to respect other people as well to see. My children got friends some are related to like different religions. My daughter has got friends she's Hindu, my son has got friends who are like different cultures and religion. And so we don't mind we respect ... they don't see, maybe, the way we used to be brought up in Pakistan. 'He is this, he is this' It was a bit like that.

FSW Beena: Yes

Bahja: Racism or whatever. We would hardly see any different, different ...

R: ... different cultures?

Bahja: Different cultures, yes, yeah. And when we used to see it was 'Oh look, he's ...' in a hundred people there used to be ...

FSW Beena: ... one...

Bahja: only one. So the same, ... *Laughs*. But our children are totally different. They respect them, they mingle with them. They don't think that he's Hindu, or he's Christian or he's Sikh. They just living together ...

FSW Beena: ... everybody is just Manchester.

Bahja: Yeah. I get that they don't see it. Maybe we see it this way. I see his friend is this, but they, our children ... they don't see it. So this is a good thing.

R: Yes ... it is.

Bahja: Yeah

R: That's interesting that that's something that you think, as well as 'getting ready for school' and things like that. But it is also a chance to actually mix with other children.

FSW Beena: Monica, can interrupt one moment?

R: Yes.

FSW Beena: Another thing happen in our community. When they give their name to 'two years', it's a long waiting list, long time. They are fed up, they are fed up. They say 'No we are not waiting for this'. And when they will phone they will straight away go to this school. That is another thing happening here ...

Bahja: Yes.

R: ... so there's not enough places?

FSW Beena: Not enough places. We always say, give her name and your surrounding childcare give two, three, and they come to me and say 'No [name], nowhere in any place is funding at any level. What do we do?' And we used to do lots of groups here. Now funding cut any, and now they don't want to come here as well.

R: That's important, ... for a government report to say 'well people are not taking up the offer.' But you can't if it's not there ...

Bahja: Yeah, my daughter who is thirteen now. It happened with her, when her name came she's try for big school. *Speaks Urdu*. Then it was not like two years old, it was three years old to go to nursery. And I gave her name, but waiting list was so long, when her name came she was going to school. So I said 'No, she's going to school now.'

R: So really there's not enough ... places.

FSW Beena: ... places, yeah.

R: ... in urban areas, where there's a lot of people and cities.

FSW Beena: Especially in this area ... *Laughs* ... high demand ...

Bahja: Yes, high demand, especially in this area. It's too much, high demand people got so many children, in every house they've got four or five children ... families are extending.

R: So really that's something that government needs to do. Yeah, that's interesting, I'll make a note of that.

FSW Beena: Yeah *Laughs*

Bahja: *Laughs*.

R: But that's your experience of it. Thank you. Does anybody want to add anything else?

FSW Beena: *Speaks in Urdu*.

Bahja: We could look at advertise to people, tell people, through media or through different sources. People would send their children to two year offer. So ...

R: Yes there are different ways of doing this.

FSW Beena: I think, before they come, we have to do something for the parents. Call them, do just one day talking about your two year fund, what's happening there, and



we can bring them to show the nursery. Then they will, the parents will be interested. We have to show them what is the path and what we can do. And this is very, very ... good path. Nobody is taking your children, another concept. Because, they think ... this is another unknown fear. Because I do much community work. They say 'If we give to them, a new atmosphere, a new ... they will forget us, they wouldn't respect us.' This is, 'we have to teach them respect from house, then when we are satisfied, then bring them to school.' That is another, especially our ... father in law, mother in law, mum, like all generation. They have got another concept: first respect your mum, dad, grandparents. When you are happy, they are happy then send to school, good thing.

R: So when the children go to the two year old childcare, do the families feel that the children still have that respect? Or do they feel they might lose it?

FSW Beena: *Speaks in Urdu to mums.* Not for yourself, other parents.

Bahja: Maybe, but I don't agree with this.

FSW Beena: Maybe a little bit to understand what is the value of the family.

Bahja: But kids come here only for like two hours, three hours, five, six hours. But rest of time they're with their parents. So it is our duty to teach them some things as well. It's not like our job to just do cooking and sitting with your families, etc, etc. But it's our duty to teach ...

FSW Beena: ... yes our duty. Another thing, this is not big, but little thing. In here, lots of parents, especially dad go out at night time. Night time when mum on her own, like half past one, two o'clock and mum has to wake up and bring dinner to the husband and then sit down with him and talk to them. And then when like early in the morning they go to bed, and they haven't got energy again to wake up at eight o'clock again, taking their children ... and too much for the mum.

R: Yes, I know when I read to prepare I have heard that story happens a lot.

Bahja: Yes.

FSW Beena: When two years old and they can say 'one is afternoon and one is morning'. But afternoon, they have got their time, lunch, get ready lunch, washing, go to shop and quarter past three they are wanting to go pick up elder children. That is some time.

R: Yes, if it's the afternoon childcare, not the morning.

FSW Beena: Because our lady, we are like a role model. We are doing sort of, especially in ... I am not saying in other culture. But in Pakistan culture and Bangladesh, they have to please everybody. And this is ...

Cala: ... full time cooking.

Bahja: ... too much cooking!

FSW Beena: ... full time *Laughs*.

R: Yes.

FSW Beena: And that is the concept they are taking on. 'The lady can do everything', and they have to satisfy mother in law ...

Bahja: Yes they tell their stories 'we used to ... when we came here we had hard time, we were like ... we used to work at home, we used to look after our children.' One thing is that time was different. Now is different ...

FSW Beena: ... and they sometimes compare 'Oh, you have got so lavish lifestyle. When we were here we used to bring coal in for doing the heater ... and, you know, no washing machine, and ...'

Bahja: ... they make us feel guilty! *Laughs*

FSW Beena: *Laughs*. Yes guilty feeling comes to us ...

*Dalal leaves the room to collect her child.*

FSW Beena: Thank you Dalal

R: Thank you, thank you very much. *Shakes hands*.

Dalal: Thank you.

FSW Beena: *Speaks in Urdu to Dalal.*

R: Thank you so much.

Bahja: Thank you too ...

R: I've really enjoyed listening to you all. I think it's great just to be able to talk and to tell me rather than just answer questions ...

Bahja: *To FSW Beena.* You know before when you used to do that course years ago ...

FSW Beena: Yes [name] Group and [Name2] Group...

Bahja: Yes, [Name1] Group and [Name2] Group ... and it was really good for Asian ...  
*speaks in Urdu ...*

Cala: *Responds in Urdu.*

Bahja: *Speaks in Urdu* School, college ... *continues in Urdu.* Coffee group to talk.  
*Continues in Urdu.* Share and talk problems. *Continues in Urdu.* In those groups, we were like friends ...

FSW Beena: ... yes, friends ...

Bahja: ... talking and meeting, because we didn't used to work, we always at home and depressing ...

R: So, you didn't see each other when you were at home?

Bahja: ... and when we started this group and then we met new people, I used to talk, thirteen, fourteen years before, I'm talking about. How many years? *Speaks in Urdu.* But it was a really good experience for the Asian mums like us because we didn't have any friends but at home. I've got friends now, it's been like ... some big time, yeah but still many Asian women are coming from Pakistan to this area. They don't have friends, they don't have ... especially families they don't have time to meet new people because they don't work. When you go to work, you meet new people. When you are at home, you only see your family.

R: Yes.

Bahja: But with that group we used to meet each other and used to learn about new groups and what's going on. It's new things going on for children. Is there any group going on, is something ... but now it's finished.

FSW Beena: Finished. All funding cut, cut.

Bahja: So, yeah ...

FSW Beena: And another thing. That time, the other facilities they can keep their children in the crèche when we are going to group. From six months and they have got the idea to new area, new things. And this is also working when they do like for child's two years funding.

R: Yeah, yeah.

FSW Beena: This is primary purpose ...

R: ... so you miss that?

Bahja: Yeah, yeah. But I ...

R: ... I guess you felt the benefit of it ...

Bahja: Yeah, but now they have finished those groups. I think that if there is time for those groups. That maybe, new coming mums can mingle with other ladies and have ... make friends and have good chat. Because in our culture we don't go clubs and we don't have night life and we just have ...

Cala: ... *Inaudible* time ... *Laughs*

Bahja: *Laughs*.

FSW Beena: This is I feel the lesson and they are saying they have taken their theme from this ...

R: To be able to talk about your experiences ...

Cala: Yes.

FSW Beena: And every group, we talk about different, different things ...

Bahja: Yes.

FSW Beena: ... and if that group was here, we could talk about two years funding. Yes. This is like a workshop. But no funding ...

R: Yes.

Bahja: It's finished. I'm really gutted that those groups are finished now. Beena, do you remember there was another group called, no a course called 'stress relief course' ...

FSW Beena: Yes 'stress relief' yes we did that upstairs ...

Bahja: ... lots of courses as well. Yeah.

FSW Beena: And, we got a yoga thing. Lots of different things.

Bahja: Yes.

Cala: *Speaks in Urdu.*

FSW Beena: They are missing these things so much. No funds ...

R: Yes. Is there no other way to start them up?

Bahja: No but whenever she meets me I always: 'Beena, have you started a new group?' Anything, anything.

FSW Beena: *Laughs.* Yes. Every time she asks me! 'When is the group coming?'

Bahja: Every time she says 'no'.

FSW Beena: We couldn't say no or yes. This is the dilemma now. All it is money, no funding.

R: You need the space ...

FSW Beena: Yeah.

R: ... to be able to meet ...

FSW Beena: And this is a big pressure. If we teach the parents then parents can go to teach the children. My concept.

R: Yes when my children were little I stopped working and I know what you mean because suddenly I felt quite alone. But I didn't have any family around, just me and my husband and he was out at work. But I used to go to mother and toddler groups and I made such good friends. I know what you mean.

Bahja: Yeah, yeah.

FSW Beena: And you couldn't believe. Lots of grandmothers come to our group as well.

Bahja: You know some grandmothers used to come with their daughter-in-laws, because they didn't want their daughter-in-law to mingle with other ladies as well.

FSW Beena: Grandmothers and mothers-in-law the same ... *Laughs*.

Bahja: I remember, *Laughs* they used to watch, keep an eye on them. *Laughs*. You know I've seen so much!

R: *Laughs*.

FSW Beena: We enjoyed that day.

Bahja: Yes I miss those days.

FSW Beena: We also miss but we can't do anything because, you know ...

Bahja: Yeah. I used to have family, but sometimes you don't need family, you need your own ...

FSW Beena: ... friends ...

Bahja: ... yes, friends. Where you can say why worry, where you can ... then I made friends Beena and [names others] ... yeah ...

FSW Beena: And we can do sometimes, you know, *inaudible* parties, 'memory lane', bring their photos ... sometimes ...

Bahja: Once we went out as well.

FSW Beena: Yes went out.

Bahja: So it was really nice.

FSW Beena: In some group we started pre ESOL so role play to learn English. And we take them to grocery shop, to health centre, how to do an appointment. This sort of thing. It is so nice.

R: Yes.

Bahja: But now those groups are all finished. Yeah.

R: That's interesting to think that you need someone to do a community project.

FSW Beena: We are waiting for that day.