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Cartographers of Disrupted Belonging: Sudanese Mothers Drawing Maps of Portsmouth (UK)

By Charlotte Sanders¹

Abstract

Map-making is an everyday practice for Sudanese women in Portsmouth. Arriving to the city within the last twenty-five years, women continue to work hard to reconfigure their sense of place, to reorient themselves in urban space, and to relearn the landmarks of everyday life to produce comfortable homes and lives for their families. Through the methodology of 'mental mapping', in which women sketch the city from memory, their practices of everyday cartography are revealed. This invests women's mundane movements in unfamiliar – and frequently hostile – urban spaces with agential power. At the same time, these visual articulations of urban space make clear the limitations of women's mobilities and spatial knowledges in the city. The city's landmarks describe everyday circuits of mothering, timetables of domestic and child-rearing duties which both produce and repress particular urban mobilities. Furthermore, their maps also trace classed and racialised formations of space in Portsmouth, underscoring the centrality of both mothering *and* 'Othering' to the construction of Sudanese women's urban spatialities and spatial knowledges. Interweaving these visual articulations of space with women's oral insights, I show how spatial domination produces particular im/possibilities for subjecthood, belonging and the liveability of life in urban contexts as gender, race and class intersect. More specifically, these routes and rhythms of everyday life disrupt Sudanese women's capacity for relational belongings, the pursuit of study and employment, and the securing of citizenship. Taking the spatial and the temporal contours of the everyday seriously illuminates the infra/structural configurations of domination which shape different sorts of lives in the city through particular nodes of im/mobility and in/visibility. This paper contributes to discussions in critical migration studies and feminist geography by making M/othering – that is mothering *and* 'Othering' – central to conceptualising everyday experiences of disrupted belonging.

Keywords: Mothering; Belonging; Space-time; Mapping, U.K. Portsmouth, U.K.

Introduction: Cartographies of M/Otherhood

Sudanese women make maps in Portsmouth; they are cartographers of the city.² They produce pathways through previously unknown territories, and they reconfigure landmarks in order to remake a sense of place. Through their everyday map-making Sudanese women work to embed their lives in new local spaces and to reproduce 'liveable lives' (Butler, 2004) for their families. Yet just as they claim space, their maps are also restricted, hyper-local in horizon and practical in their destinations, routes and rhythms. Just as they generate landmarks and pathways, there are spaces which remain unreachable; configurations of movement and stasis which reveal an intersectional politics of im/mobility and in/visibility in urban space. In this

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² I refer to the mothers as 'Sudanese' in-line with their self-representations, as opposed to, for example, Sudanese-British.

paper, I explore these spatial and temporal configurations of power through ethnographic fieldwork conducted with eighteen Sudanese women, all mothers, who arrived in Portsmouth within the last twenty-five years and who live in council-allocated housing in the city. I draw upon both their visual and oral articulations of spatial openings and closures in Portsmouth to think critically about geographies of un/belonging in urban space.

This paper considers mundane experiences of movement ‘from one place to another in the course of everyday life’ (Hanson 2010) as embedded in infra/structures of domination, matrices of power which define the im/possibilities of both everyday life and embeddedness in cities. As such, the data explored here also emerges through some autoethnographic research in which I think critically about my own cartographies of Portsmouth as a white middle-class inhabitant, vis-à-vis those of the research participants. In Portsmouth, a naval-port city in South England, my home is no more than 1-1.5 miles from the mothers’ homes. Yet I do not see them as I walk through the (predominantly white, middle class) neighbourhood in which I live; spaces which also happen to be sites of leisure in the city. During fieldwork, however, I would continuously bump into them as I walked through their spaces of residence, *en route* as they were to shops, nurseries and schools. This paper develops through a spatial and temporal reconceptualisation of distance in Portsmouth, which contributes to wider projects across feminist and migration studies theorising the in/habitability of space as formed through gendered, raced and classed matrices of power (Blunt & Rose, 1994; Ruddick, 1996; Massey, 1994; Silvey, 2005; Ahmed, 2000; 2006; Sheller, 2015; Beebejaun, 2017). I do so by conceptualising Sudanese women as simultaneously mother and ‘Other’, tracing the disrupted pathways of m/Otherly belonging in the city.

The following begins with a conceptual review of space, time and subject-making, bringing feminist analyses together with Lefebvre’s theory of *cyclical rhythms* and a Foucauldian understanding of temporality as a technology of subjectification. I think through space-time as a forceful technology, constitutive of the limits of self just as positionality is constitutive of the limits of mobility. I then move to a methodological review of the fieldwork conducted in Portsmouth. More specifically, I provide insights into the process of ‘mental mapping’ (Jung 2012; Giesecking, 2013; Itaoui, 2016) through which Sudanese mothers sketched from memory visual articulations of the everyday pathways and landmarks of their urban cartographies. After introducing and analysing these maps, I then interweave them with the mothers’ oral articulations of space, time and disrupted belonging in Portsmouth. Through their drawings and words, myself and my participants present a critical feminist intervention in the analysis of space and difference in the city. This makes central the role of mothering to shaping the possibilities of place-belonging, whilst insisting upon the inseparability of classed and racialised ‘Othering’ from experiences of mothering. I conclude that space and time are primary nodes of power which impose upon Sudanese mothers’ access to belonging in Portsmouth, mediated through the gendered, raced and classed im/possibilities of their urban map-making.

Space, Time and Subject-Making

Doreen Massey argued that spatial im/mobility is a powerful matrix through which gendered and classed power relations are experienced and reproduced in everyday life, both through explicit and implicit limitations imposed upon women’s mobility (1994: 179). For Massey, spatial restriction is not only imposed through ‘straightforward exclusion by violence’ (*ibid.*), but also in less obvious forms of disruption. Whilst Sudanese mothers’ im/mobilities in

Portsmouth were unquestionably shaped by explicit racist violence,³ they were also more insidiously constrained through infra/structural racism and classism. Citing space as ‘social relations “stretched out”’ (1994: 2), Massey imbues space with intersectional socio-political meaning, as implicated in the social as the social is implicated in space: a dialectical relation through which everyday life is organised *powerfully*. Equally, Massey insists upon the *temporality* of space, what she terms the ‘n-dimensionality’ (1994: 264) of space-time.

Here, I also underscore the power of the timetable (Foucault, 1991 [1975]: 149-152) alongside Lefebvre’s ‘cyclical rhythms’ (1991: 221-222) of daily life to the (re)construction of spaces and subjects; the powerful means through which bodies are made “docile” (Foucault 1991 [1975]: 135). A Foucauldian understanding of subjectification underscores not only the spatiality but the temporality of subject-making, the ways in which ‘[t]ime penetrates the body and with it all the meticulous controls of power’ (1991 [1975]: 152). Through detailing the inherence of the ‘timetable’ to constructing disciplined bodies, Foucault elucidates the power of temporal control in forming particular kinds of subjects through the imposition of schedule and repetition. Equally, Foucault considers the construction of bounded spaces

At once architectural, functional and hierarchical...[to] provide fixed positions.... [T]hey guarantee the obedience of individuals, but also a better economy of time and gesture (*ibid.*: 148).

Through the temporal-spatial control of bodies, then, useful subjects are re/made through encouraging mobility that is necessary and structured, and discouraging the free-flow of bodies through urban environments. I consider this in conversation with Lefebvre’s notion that urban space is defined by *rhythms*, both cyclical and alternating (1991). Lefebvre defined *cyclical rhythms* as those with “big and simple intervals” which are sites of rhythmic repetition (1991: 221). He defined *alternating rhythms* as much shorter, staccato moments in daily-life in which linear time is interrupted through fleeting encounters and interactions in space. Here, I use Lefebvre’s notion of cyclical rhythms to conceptualise how repetitive practices in the city –in Lefebvre’s words, those which ‘hardly ever var[y] except for a few exceptions’ (*ibid.*) – are both constituted by, and constitutive of, particular gendered, classed and raced positionalities in the city, both spatially and temporally.

Certainly, there is a growing appreciation across multiple disciplines for the primacy of space in theorising the social (Silvey, 2006). As Silvey argues, ‘at the centre of this work is attention to the roles that gender and other social differences play in shaping unequal geographies of mobility, belonging, exclusion, and displacement’ (*ibid.*). This article draws heavily on the work of feminist geographers (Spain, 1992; McDowell, 1999) and particularly those attuned to the multiplicity of socio-political subjectivity and positionality (Valentine, 2007; Hopkins & Noble, 2009; Nightingale, 2011) as they relate to spatial experiences and formations. This is particularly necessary because migration studies as a field continues to focus on mobility as the primary spatial experience of migrants; obscuring the ways in which, for some, migration is also experienced as inherently *immobilising* (Ahmed *et al*, 2003). As Brah asserts, we need to think deeply about migration as also encompassing processes of being re-fixed in space and time in locations of arrival (1996). Similarly, discussions of mothering in migration studies literatures focus heavily on transnational practices of mothering, and less so on mothering in new social, political and economic contexts both local and national (see also Gilmartin and Migge, 2016).

³ Sudanese women described multiple experiences of being hypervisibilised as Muslims in Portsmouth, including being objects of surveillance and being harassed in the street. They also shared experiences of being invisibilised; being dismissed, ignored and rejected by members of the white population. Anti-Muslim and anti-‘immigrant’ racism have been prevalent issues in Portsmouth in recent years (MEND 2011; The News 2015).

Feminist scholarship (see Reynolds, 2005; Erel, 2009; Gedalof, 2009; Christou and Michail, 2015; Gilmartin & Migge, 2016) has increasingly looked to mothering to complicate existing conceptualisations of gender and migration. These studies have underscored the need to examine both migrancy *and* motherhood as central to the im/possibilities of place-belonging and, thus, our inability to theorise either without recourse to the other. I contribute to these critical analyses through examining Sudanese mothers' everyday experiences of spatiality and temporality in Portsmouth, additionally emphasising the materiality of their subject positions – as *gendered, raced and classed* – as crucial to such an analysis. I also bring this to bear upon wider conceptualisations of space, time and power. Throughout, I follow Massey (1994) in arguing that alongside exclusion by violence (which also happens to these women) there are also more implicit ways in which bodies are encouraged toward and away from particular spaces-times in the city, what I think through here as being m/Otherly space-times of disrupted belonging in Portsmouth.

Finally, as Amin and Thrift emphasise, alongside analysing the city as a site of dynamism and transformation, we also must consider it 'as much a means of shutting down possibility as it is a means, through the openness of some (and only some) encounters, of opening it up' (2002: 105). This is also about how spaces are produced through particular configurations of race and class, emerging through the bodies that can/not reach them (Ahmed, 2006). It is about the powerful and yet banal mechanisms through which my neighbourhood in Portsmouth is produced as a white middle-class space where Sudanese mothers are almost entirely unseen. Their invisibility continuously reproduces the space as white. This everyday spatial politics of in/visibility also necessarily produces particular kinds of lives in the city, with differentiated configurations of possibility and liveability.

Re-Mapping the City: Doing Geography with Sudanese Mothers in Portsmouth

This paper draws upon insights from sixteen months of doctoral ethnographic fieldwork with eighteen Sudanese mothers in Portsmouth, conducted between March 2016 and July 2017. Portsmouth is the second most densely populated city in the UK, and the Home Office has classified it as a (so-called) 'asylum seeker dispersal area' (Portsmouth.gov.uk 2015). Yet it has not been the object of migration research. As of 2011, the UK census data estimated there to be approximately 18,000 Sudan-born residents of England and Wales (ONS, 2011), out of a total of 22,000 in the UK. In Portsmouth, I estimate⁴ the number of Sudan-born residents to be approximately 200, not counting UK-born children. Migration to Portsmouth reflects wider Sudan-Britain migratory trends (see Fábos, 2012; Wilcock, 2018), with the first three families arriving into the city over thirty years ago through post/colonial educational partnerships between the Universities of Khartoum and Portsmouth. In the late 1990s/early 2000s, Darfuri Sudanese fleeing genocide in Western Sudan also began to arrive (Wilcock, 2018) and, finally, since the 1990s - with the deteriorating economic situation in Sudan – a new wave of Northern Sudanese migrated to Portsmouth seeking more secure livelihoods for their families.

I focus on mothers who have arrived in the last twenty-five years primarily because those who arrived beforehand have older children, mostly no longer at home. Whilst the mothers who took part in my research all live in council housing, this is not true of *all* Sudanese mothers in the city, although it is of most. Comparative work is a fruitful way to further analyse spatial-temporal formations of m/Otherhood in the city, however it is outside the scope of this article. I originally approached participants as a PhD researcher in March 2016, through the

⁴ This estimation has been achieved both through observation and through conversation with the 'Sudanese Community'. Local government does not hold specific data about the Sudanese population in the city and, furthermore, some individuals – such as single males – are more transient residents than others.

committee of the official ‘Sudanese Community’ of Portsmouth. Over the course of my fieldwork I moved closer to the method of ‘snowball sampling’ as women would introduce me to friends interested in taking part. Additionally, I continued to meet new participants at ‘Sudanese Community’ events throughout the fieldwork duration. The longevity and intensity of the fieldwork – coupled with its necessity of becoming embedded in family life - produced relationships which troubled the masculinist figure of the ‘detached’ researcher (Blakely, 2007). Instead, my affective investment in the lives of the women will no doubt be clear throughout this analysis.

My ethnographic research methods included participatory observation -- walking with women through the timetables of their day -- conducting informal interviews (more akin to conversations) at women’s homes or while walking together, and ‘mental mapping’. ‘Mental mapping’ required participants to sketch visual representations of Portsmouth. Following Giesecking (2013) and Itou (2016), albeit in different contexts, I aimed to provide as few prompts as possible throughout map-making. Although I was sometimes asked for help with spelling, I did not prompt locations. During this process I also collected detailed notes of the women’s responses to map-making for my later reference. Women drew the maps alone, and I chose their homes as the locations for mapping so as to prompt security and comfort. Nevertheless, the women found mental mapping difficult. They doubted their knowledge of the city and struggled to situate everyday landmarks in relation to each other. If landmarks outside of the areas of their everyday were recalled – the beach, for example – these were eventually abandoned in most cases. As such, the methodology of mapping itself reflected the limits of their urban spatialities.

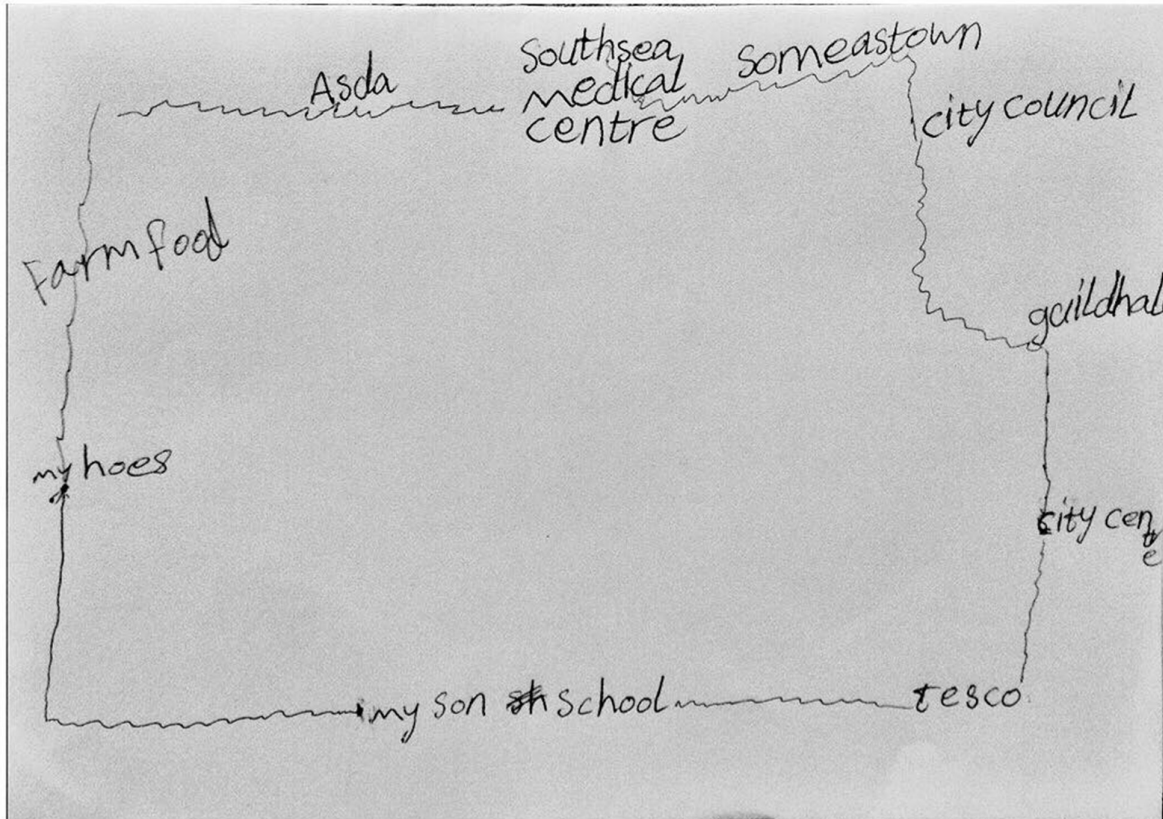
In line with Rodo’-de-Zarate’s claims as to the conceptual efficacy of maps, mental mapping was used as a means to animate ‘the relationship between three dimensions: power structures (the social), lived experience (the psychological) and places (the geographical)’ (2013: 925) in the everyday lives of Sudanese mothers. Additionally, the maps illuminated the ways in which the women ‘produce and experience space, forms of spatial intelligence, and dynamics of human–environment relations’ (Giesecking, 2013: 712), underscoring and elucidating the interactions between everyday geography and infra/structures of domination.

Finally, it must be noted that alongside the general informed consent gained from participants, the use of maps and mapping raises particular ethical concerns regarding anonymity. In this case, one effect of women’s maps not reflecting the ‘official’ cartography of the city is that they obscure precise locations, thus protecting anonymity. Where necessary, I have also obscured names of schools and have changed minor details about the mothers who direct the following analyses. All names are anonymised throughout, and I sought consent with the participants to publish this data.

Mapping the Everyday: Portsmouth at the Limits

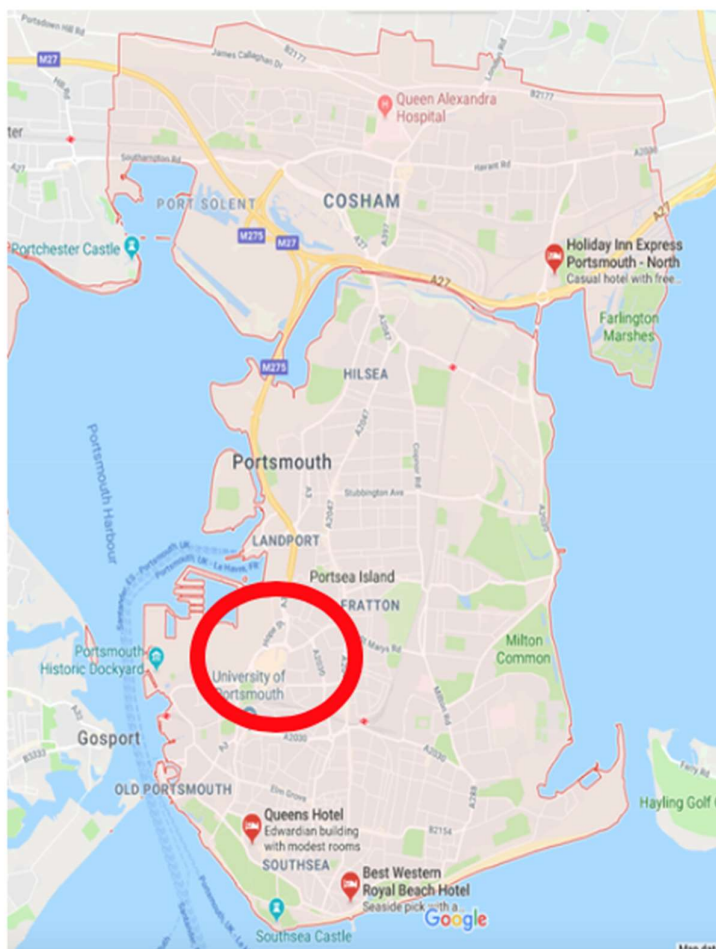
Drawn below (Figure.1.) is a map of Portsmouth, the cartographer a Sudanese mother of two. Zeena drew the map instantaneously and from memory. She began at the starting point of her house, and traced her cityscape around the page, stopping at intervals of landmark, looking up at me to say ‘this here is Farmfoods’, ‘this here is Asda’ (both local budget supermarkets). In so doing, Zeena drew a fusion of past with present, a remembering of place in the city locating the self in space-time. Instantly striking is how the landmarks drawn are *all* practical destinations, a means to food shopping, clothes shopping, seeing the doctor, dropping off and collecting her son, negotiating with Council services at the City Council. Zeena has learnt the city, but the places which form the pathways of her embodied knowledge, translated to the page, reflect the nature of her routes as emerging through her gendered role as mother and wife. Through the circularity of the map, Zeena draws Portsmouth as a route pursued over

and again, without end. Zeena's Portsmouth is a cyclical rhythm (Lefebvre, 1996) of (necessary and structured) daily-life as a mother - there is no room to meander, to stray, or to wander, and the 'middle' remains uncharted. More than anything, Zeena's map is a timetable of her places to be.



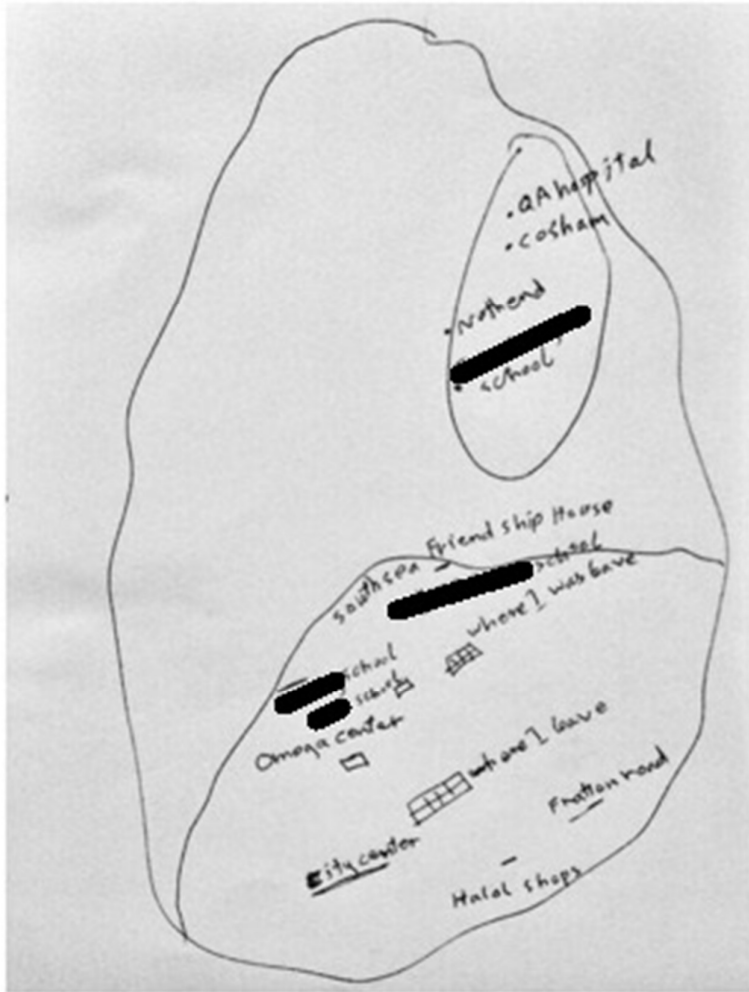
[Figure.1. 'Zeena's Map']

In the subsequent map (Figure.2.) 'Google Maps' as cartographer draws the boundaries of the area *officially* defined as Portsmouth. The circle I have imposed shows the area which Zeena's map demarcated as Portsmouth. Not only are her landmarks practical, the area which emerges as 'her Portsmouth' is extremely limited. Hers is also a cartography of classed mothering in the city: the circle of her day-to-day life falls into the top 10% of the most deprived areas of England (Indices of Deprivation, 2015). Her home is located on one of the city's council estates, and access to public transport which might allow urban exploration outside of these limits is financially implausible. Indeed, as Shilliam (2018) argues, and as I shall elucidate in what follows, class is always a racialised experience. Zeena's life - as her map illustrates - emerges through intersections of gender, race and class which both produce place and regulates its boundaries.



[Figure.2. ‘Portsmouth’. Source: Google Maps. Map Data ©2019 Google. Author Annotated.]

The second map of Portsmouth (Figure.3.) is drawn by Rabab, a mother of five. Again, landmarks are practical places of mothering: home, their last home, four schools, the location of the Sunday Sudanese Arabic school, the city centre shopping area and halal shops.



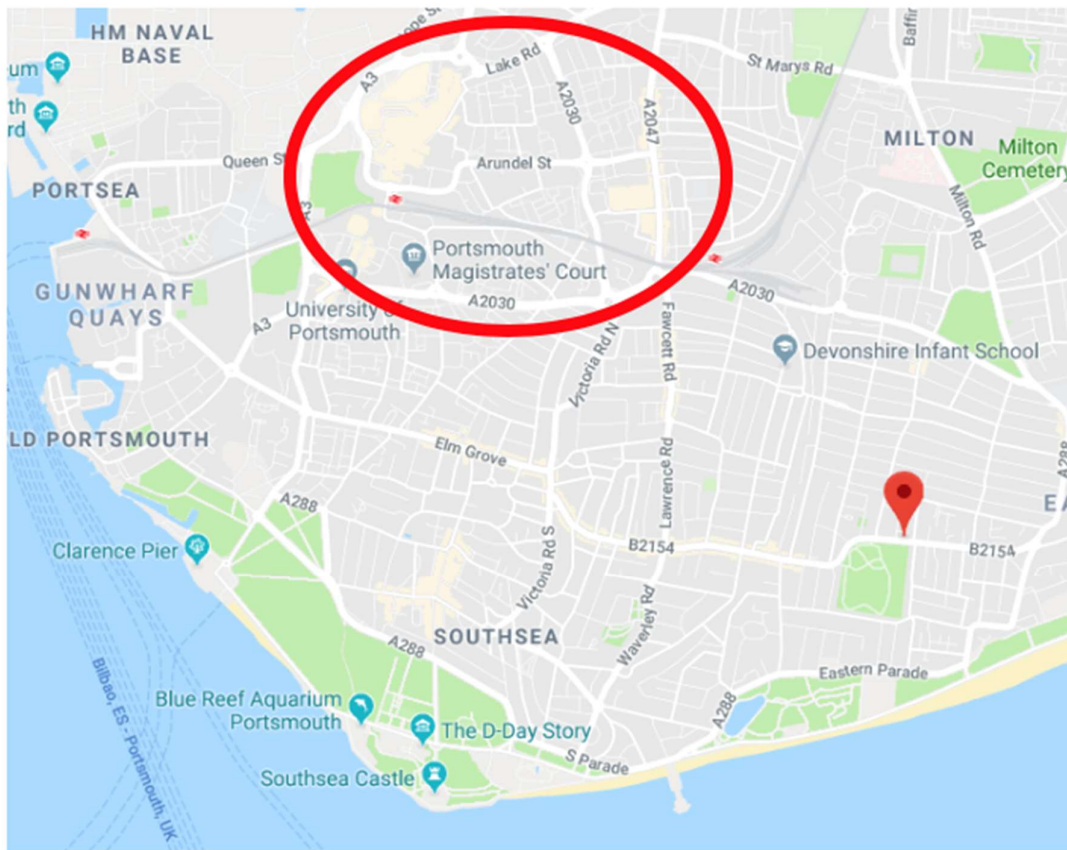
[Figure.3. ‘Rabab’s Map’]

This time the map reflects the area officially defined as ‘Portsmouth’ more closely. There is knowledge of spaces outside of the hyper-local but they are separated by a boundary which severs the everyday from those ‘other’ places, visited not inhabited. Rabab has a daughter who was

placed in the school marked at the top right of her map, before she was able to have her moved to one more accessible to the family. Another of Rabab’s children suffered an illness, thus she has also travelled occasionally to the Queen Alexandra (QA) hospital. On travelling to the hospital she has seen through the window other parts of Portsmouth, places like ‘North End’. She only passes through, but this has constructed a spatial knowledge of the city not found in the first map: a knowledge of the scope of the city, of expanse. Again, this is a mobility directed by her role as mother, and the myriad spaces in-between and to the side of these landmarks remain absent. Once more, her everyday experience of Portsmouth emerges through a spatial-temporal node of power, through particular configurations of distance and frequency of travel.

Mothering forms the basis for Rabab and Zeena’s knowledge of the city, producing place but also restricting everyday movement through its spaces. These im/mobilities are equally inseparable from their raced and classed positionalities in the city. M/Othering forms particular kinds of gendered, raced and classed subjectivities in the city, as the spatial and the social co-constitute one another (Reynolds, 2005). Of the mother-cartographers, most maps replicated Zeena’s in their scope (Figure.1.).

As Rodo´-de-Zarate claims, these maps centralise the relationship between power, everyday life and geography (2013). I include below a map (Figure.4.) showing the area in which the everyday mobility of (most) Sudanese mothers in Portsmouth occurred (circled) in relation to the area I live (roughly signposted). What I underscore here is the necessity to view Zeena and Rabab’s maps not only through a spatial lens but as cartographies of temporality, and, furthermore, ones which illuminate eloquently the power invested in time-space. Thinking through space from a position of privilege obscures the distance between my house and their own, privileging space as *geographical*. If you are raising children, tied to school and nursery timetables and without access to private/public transport, this distance is not simplistically spatial; it is *temporal*. The journey is ten minutes by car, perhaps twenty-five by bus, perhaps forty on foot, perhaps an hour with young children in tow. The boundary which Rabab marks on her map shows the limits of the temporally near from the temporally far. Other spaces become unreachable (Ahmed, 2006), as school or nursery timetables – and the need to complete other motherly tasks in between – define the everyday. These maps are reflective of particular spatial timetables of everyday life (Massey, 1994), reflective and productive of the limits of mobility which emerge through the practical places they need to be.



[Figure.4. ‘Their Homes and Mine’. Source: Google Maps. Map Data ©2019 Google. Author Annotated.]

Moving by the Clock: Talking Temporality

These maps visually reflected the mothers' oral articulations of space(-time) in the city. Another participant, Amina, was in her mid-twenties and mother to two children, one of nursery-age and one who had just started school. She had arrived in Portsmouth from Darfur six years ago to join her husband, and fell pregnant within weeks of arrival. Amina described to me the schedule of a normal day in her life, after apologising that I could only visit for an hour or so:

I wake up at 7 o'clock every morning to get son ready for school, take him to school... go to shops on the way back to home to buy food... I have one hour – one hour! – at home to make daughter breakfast, get clothes for nursery, then we go to nursery. I come home, make some food ready for cooking dinner, not much time, then I must go to school collect son, he hungry we come home, small food, we go to nursery, pick my daughter and we come home. I feed them dinner, get ready for bed, then soon it is 7 and they go sleep. Dinner me and my husband. Sleep. Start again. (June 2016).

Amina found her day-to-day life incredibly stressful, but also an insurmountable obstacle to the life she wanted in Portsmouth: to her ability to study English, find work and secure some financial independence, or foster interpersonal relationships with other women in the city. Importantly, she juxtaposed her experiences in Portsmouth with life as part of a supportive extended family network in Sudan. Amina did not understand this timetable as an arbitrary experience of mothering, but rather as situated in the socio-political space-time of Portsmouth itself (Lawler, 2000; Gilmartin & Migge, 2016).

Amina's description of her everyday life underscores the critical significance of time to her spatial experiences. She describes the spaces she inhabits through a sense of rush, of not having time to reach B from A. This relationship between mothering and having 'no time' was pervasive. Mothers described their lives in the city as entirely ordered by time, in ways which they continually struggled with

And here they say you must be here at 8:55, and maybe I am there at 9 o'clock and it's like they shouting at me. When I first had my child in nursery I had to set alarm because they were so angry if I was late; they say maybe no nursery for my child. But I have other children too, and jobs, and it is hard on my own (Dana, April 2016)

In Sudan children walk themselves to school, and family they help you, and neighbour and friends. Here you are always busy. I'm always shopping, children to nursery, children to school, coming back, cleaning, cooking (Nadima, November 2016)

Dana, Nadima and Amina located the limits of life within a temporal matrix of power. Furthermore, each mother articulated this rigidity of time as a particular feature of life in Portsmouth, whether they had been mothers in Sudan or not. Timetables of mothering (mothering whilst 'Other', as the next section will elucidate) formed Sudanese mothers' subjectivities in Portsmouth through disciplining their urban mobility (Foucault, 1991 [1975]; Gedalof, 2009).

Rhythms of Subject-Making: Gender, Class, Race and Space-Time

The physical labour involved in mothering was a palpable classed and racialised reality of day-to-day motherhood in Portsmouth. The financial impossibility of private and/or public transport meant that women spent much of the day frantically walking, carrying shopping, and hoisting pushchairs up flights of stairs in their council blocks. For Sudanese mothers, their racialised positionality in Portsmouth was experienced in part through classed configurations of housing in the city. This too directed the limits of their motherly mobility. In addition, all were unemployed in Portsmouth and their husbands' situations were also precarious, mostly employed on zero-hours contracts, which made working hours and wages sporadic and unreliable.

People of colour (defined officially as "Black and minority Ethnic") in Britain are twice as likely to be unemployed than white-British members of the population (Gov.uk, 2018). Dependent on welfare, Sudanese mothers are eligible for free nursery care for their pre-school age children, of which the local council provides 15 hours, comprising of three hours, five days a week (Portsmouth City Council Childcare Guide, 2017; see also Gilmartin & Migge, 2016). Here, a mother's class position in the city further inflects the limits of her spatial-temporal agency, as the nursery hours provided, coupled with the school-timetable of other children, do not allow for significant time-slots for free urban mobility. Recently, the government has added an additional 15 hours of childcare, but only for 'working families', with the vision that doing so will provide an incentive for parents to get back to, or increase work (Institute for Fiscal Studies 2016). This obscures the racialised-classed exclusions which obstruct access to employment in the first place, particularly for mothers. Race-class positionality in the city defines the school/nursery timetable of mothers' everyday lives, and by restricting movement to these time-spaces, actively obstructs mobility outside of these m/Otherly boundaries (Massey, 1994; Ahmed, 2000).

Dependence on the welfare state defines Sudanese mothers' im/mobility in another central way. The school/nursery system in the city, like the rest of the UK, functions through a 'Catchment Area' system of education governance, where children attend nursery and school in the same area in which their homes are situated. Of course, this is very useful to

Sudanese mothers, particularly as they do not have access to transport. Yet, it also restricts their mobility to hyper-local urban space. At the same time, families are placed in their council housing, and cannot choose its locations; nor then can they choose the hyper-local amenities available to them, or local possibilities for sociality or access to public space. As the Public Health Annual Report (Portsmouth City Council, 2016) acknowledged, being housed in council housing profoundly impacts inhabitants' ability to access public (and particularly green) space due to estates so often being isolated by major roads and roundabouts (Ravetz, 2001).

Portsmouth, all situated within the relatively small area of mothers' everyday mobility (and within the boundaries of Zeena and Rabab's maps). Housing allocation in Portsmouth deeply influences the capacity to traverse city space, and mobility is obstructed continuously by classed urban infrastructure. This is a primary feature of council housing in the city, and one which deeply inflects urban temporalities of movement. Pictured below are four such roundabouts (Figure.5.) in Portsmouth, all situated within the relatively small area of mothers' everyday mobility (and within the boundaries of Zeena and Rabab's maps). Housing allocation in Portsmouth deeply influences the capacity to traverse city space, and mobility is obstructed continuously by classed urban infrastructure. This is a primary feature of council housing in the city, and one which deeply inflects urban temporalities of movement.



[Figure.5. ‘Roundabouts’. Source: Google Maps. Imagery ©2019 Google, Map Data ©2019 Google.]

Sudanese mothers are not simply ‘migrant mothers’ in the city, but occupy particular intersectional positionalities within it. This profoundly impacts motherhood in concrete material ways (Erel, 2009; Ruddick, 2013). Timetables of nursery and school drop-offs and collections combined with the infra/structural isolation of the council estate generate the rhythms of everyday life in Portsmouth. Just as the timetable constructs the *cyclical rhythm*, so the traffic lights and roundabouts obstruct the enactment of it, adding to feelings of ‘rush’ and temporal scarcity. As the maps suggest, Sudanese mothers’ homes are not so much *spatially* distant from public space – in fact, many of Portsmouth’s estates surround the city centre. But rather, they are temporally distant: ‘islands’ (Ravetz, 2001) from which the city becomes logistically inaccessible; the ability to cover distance inflected by classed temporalities of movement (Beebeejaun, 2017). Race and class – the ordering of migrant difference - are modalities through which the gendered role of mothering is felt and lived, principally through the allocation – and architecture - of council housing. This subject-position directs the map of the city, restricting mothers’ flow through space (Young, 1980) and producing particular experiences of subjection to time (Foucault, 1991 [1975]).

Friends by ‘Appointment’: Disrupting Relational Belonging

Im/mobility disrupted mothers’ access to one another in Portsmouth. They could not logistically collect each other’s children from nursery or school (one way in which the spatial-temporal constraints of mothering could have been somewhat relieved), nor secure time for socialising:

Maybe you see people, but you have to make plans, plan a day, plan a time. No free time here; always like appointment (Randa, July 2016).

Here no time to say hello. Only if someone is sick or if there is a new baby, then you go, you must go to them. But in every day, I see no one, I have no time. Now the council moved me to new house, but children still at old school it takes me forty minutes to walk there, forty minutes back. How can I have time?” (Nadima, November 2016)

Time was also central, then, to articulations of loneliness. As Randa asserts, friendship could feel like another ‘appointment’ in a day already scheduled. The difficulty of forming support networks was a particularly distressing issue for Sudanese mothers. The space-time restrictions of mothering meant that neighbours were often the only plausible source of everyday sociality, and mothers struggled to form meaningful connections with their neighbours. The architectures of council housing – primarily the absence of outdoor and/or shared neighbourhood space – exacerbated isolation. Aliah told me that her home felt to her ‘like a prison’ in which she experienced the loneliness of her life as a mother of five in Portsmouth. She lamented that even after a decade in the same home her neighbourly relations had not moved past infrequent acknowledgement. Many mothers felt rejected by their neighbours:

I took food to my next door neighbour, to say ‘Hello, I am Ayesha, happy to know you, help you, you know?’ She said, ‘Oh, and what ingredients are in this?’ I think she was not comfortable that I had made this, you know and I was foreign, but I said ‘Ok’ and told her. Then later I did it for the next neighbour, I took her food as well. And still I would say hi and they would not say hi to me...But I keep trying and trying...I think maybe people here, they don’t like foreigners (Ayesha, April 2017).

Everyday experiences of racism imposed upon mothering, just as mothering imposed upon the capacity to form alternative relational belongings across city space. Mothers were acutely aware of their ‘foreignness’ in neighbourhood spaces (Ahmed, 2006), but struggled to embed themselves in other communities too - whether through attending ‘Sudanese community’ events, informal gatherings together, the local mosque or council-run social initiatives such as the *Cross Cultural Women’s Group* – due to the temporal unreachability of these spaces within mothering schedules. As Gilmartin and Migge assert, social relationships are central to reconstructing place-belonging for migrant mothers (2016), yet accessing spaces of sociality was difficult and exhausting, with social media often providing the only viable means to networking. As economically vulnerable mothers they struggled to source the networks which would also enable the sharing of resources; including the temporal. This too was juxtaposed with more community-embedded experiences of mothering in Sudan:

‘In Sudan you have your neighbour, sister, auntie, friend... your mum. All of them they helping you, children playing together. Very different to here, just me, my kids.’ (Wifaq, April 2017)

Instead, immobilising temporal restrictions reproduced the social isolation which made combatting those same limitations evermore challenging. The repetitive rhythms of mothering without support continuously reproduced mothers as particular subjects in Portsmouth; individualised subjects who frequently articulated their lives as peripheral, despite the geographical proximity of city space. The inability to construct constellations of community reinforced the centrality of nuclear-family mothering to their sense of self and belonging in the city, as opposed to other forms of intimate connection, like friendship. As mothering obstructed mobility outside of the ‘A-to-B’ routes of home-shop-school, mothers’ ability to be *in* spaces, particularly in a leisurely sense (as leisure requires time), was profoundly limited. Plans achieved were often subjected to cancellation:

“My house always so quiet, no one coming. Sometimes I invite guest to dinner, then in the day they call me saying too busy, or children sick, or husband got shift, he working. I eat dinner on my own” (Amina, June 2016)

Mothering in Portsmouth meant a reconfiguration of intimate life into one centred on the nuclear family. Many cited their children as their main source of interpersonal relationship, particularly with husbands working shift work, or searching for work. Spaces of potential belonging were restricted to local encounters, either with neighbours or at the school/nursery gates (Gilmartin & Migge, 2016). The promise of these encounters were frequently disrupted by racialised experiences of ‘foreignness’, as well as a lack of confidence in communicating in English (Reynolds, 2005), to which I now turn.

‘There is no Crèche’: Study and Work as Inaccessible Spaces

Without networks of support, and with time and mobility scarce resources, mothers struggled to pursue their own education and/or employment ambitions. As Ayesha and I quickly sipped our drinks ahead of the nursery run, she told me that her husband was keen for another child, but that she had refused:

It is too hard here... Even now I am so busy. The mum she has no time for herself you know. I want to work, study, have my life. There is no time for the mum here. Her whole life is nursery, school, nursery, school (February, 2017)

Ayesha had studied to University level in Sudan but since arriving in the UK had begun retraining in Childcare, with hopes of working around school pick-ups and holidays. Indeed, Ayesha had only been able to study in Portsmouth because she had been able to afford an online course and could study at home. Equally, she had an already substantial knowledge of English on arrival to Portsmouth, which made accessing study much easier than for other mothers. When I last saw Ayesha she told me that in the next academic year she was poised to be walking a forty-minute round-trip to the same school *three times a day*, due to the different ages of her children. This was going to make even necessary tasks difficult to fit in, never mind studying and/or working. Ayesha felt dejected, but continued to ask her childrens’ pre/schools for work experience opportunities, as logistically this was her only option for building an employment portfolio. This would be further unwaged labour to incorporate into her day-to-day life (Haraway, 2001).

A few months later I received a frantic phone-call from Amina, whose ‘timetable’ I introduced earlier, desperate for help with a college English-Language exam. After a long battle to change her daughter’s nursery slot gaining a place at college had been a huge victory for Amina. She still had to leave class early, but she was thrilled nonetheless. Now, she was struggling to keep up with the multiple demands of her day. When I arrived, Amina was anxious, running late to collect her son, struggling to get her daughter into her pushchair. She hadn’t long been back from college via nursery and an unavoidable food-shop. Papers were strewn across her table, she was wearing a nightdress over her jeans, half in, half out of the house. After Amina had retrieved her son and we had done some revision together, she told me of her decision to not have any more children in Portsmouth, hoping that one day she may be able to ‘make her life’:

My auntie daughter, she in America, and going to study Doctor... They doing very good, and they say to me ‘Amina you been in UK seven years, why you no studying?’ And I think this too, I haven’t done anything here, just baby. I want to do something; studying... Not coming here stay at home, do nothing, just every two years baby, pushchair, baby, new pushchair. No. I don’t want this life. I want study English good, and working, help my family and learning, make my life in UK” (May 2017).

Mothering in Portsmouth was articulated as the primary obstacle to pursuing study and/or employment in the city. Not only would this provide economic capital but also provide pathways to place-belonging, network formation and the potential intimacy of friendship (McDowell, 1999; Mandel, 2007; Erel, 2009). With urban mobility so fraught with temporal constraint, routes to education were often foreclosed. This is not only about securing work, but also about the ability to learn English, a vital capacity to ‘making life’ in Portsmouth. Indeed, the attainment of British Citizenship itself is impossible without English language study (Gov.uk[a], n.d.), maintaining Sudanese mothers who do not speak English as ‘non-citizen-subjects’ of the State.⁵ Even after eleven years, Aliah’s linguistic skills remain limited due to the intervals of mothering labour which have forced her to leave college multiple times:

I arrive here 14 October 2006, and I start college learn English in January, but then I pregnant and my son he came 2007. I was at Portsmouth College and there is no crèche so I stop my English. Then 4 months another baby coming, my son number two. So I staying at home and no can study. Then 5 years between this son and my daughter, so I start again. Then stop for her. Now this year starting again (Aliah, June 2017).

Later, Nadima would also explain how many mothers relied upon their children to pass on English skills to them at home. Sudanese mothers’ articulations of disrupted belonging in Portsmouth show how experiences of being both mother and ‘Other’ emerge as co-constitutive (Reynolds, 2005) through *space and time* as gendered, raced and classed technologies of power. Their words and experiences speak back to former Prime Minister David Cameron’s assertion that ‘Muslim women’ (as he so defined) do not want to learn English in Britain (The Guardian, 2016),⁶ underscoring instead the role of local and state level governance and governmentality – through unequal housing, unequal childcare provision and urban infrastructure – in (re)producing the spatial-temporal restrictions which foreclose pathways to

⁵ The only exemptions are being aged over-65, or able to prove a disability which forecloses study.

⁶ Cameron also held the women’s ‘patriarchal menfolk’ accountable, as opposed to the exclusionary policies of his own government (The Guardian 2016)

educational and employment spaces. For Sudanese mothers, these spaces held promises of ‘making life’ in Portsmouth, the absence of which was felt as frustrating, lonely and exhausting (Christou & Michail, 2015: 4-5).

Mapping and/as a M/Otherly Politics of Belonging

Beginning with two maps of Portsmouth, this paper has raised the ‘spectres’ (Gordon 1997: 6) of space, time and power through the footsteps of m/Others. Sudanese mothers are cartographers of Portsmouth, yet their ability to draw the city reflects the disruption of their urban belonging. Following others (see Jung 2012; Rodo’-de-Zarate, 2013; Itaoui, 2016), I have asserted the efficacy of mapping in complexing discussions of gender and mobility, and to furthering our conceptualisation of how motherhood and migration interweave in shaping the contours of everyday life (Gedalof, 2009). These are experiences which impose boundaries upon the city, as the scarcity of time renders spaces unreachable. The kinds of spaces one can and cannot inhabit fundamentally shape everyday experiences of self. They also construct spaces as gendered, racialised and classed through the bodies which can and cannot move toward or through them (Massey, 1994; Ahmed, 2006; Ruddick, 2013; Valentine, 2007). It is imperative that we think critically through the architectures and infra/structures of disrupted belonging and of in/visibility in urban space. Mapping is a vital tool in such work, allowing Sudanese mothers to trace their own lives and subjectivities onto the page and to make central their embodied knowledges of ‘place’ in the city.

Analysing both visual and oral articulations of disrupted spatiality, this paper has stressed the necessity to think through ‘time’ as a primary technology of power in mediating access to city space, emerging through gendered, raced and classed structures of domination. It has interrogated, as Foucault suggests (1991 [1975]), how time forms the very mechanism through which multiple matrices of power ‘penetrate’ the body. Sudanese mothers consistently referenced the scarcity and rigidity of time in their articulations of urban space and belonging. Their experiences reinforce the capacity for *cyclical rhythms* (Lefebvre, 1996) and routes of everyday life to construct ways of being and becoming which not only feel tedious but also stifling to the capacity to make life liveable. Whilst discussions of bodies as ‘penetrated by time’ removes important recognition of the strategies through which mothers push back against spatial-temporal control, it is also vital to think through the routes and rhythms of their mundane daily lives as reconstitutive of particular forms and limits of subjecthood, emerging through urban im/mobility (Gedalof, 2009).

Applying a feminist lens of analysis to the spatial and temporal ordering of alterity produces feminist micro-theories of power which underscore both the banality of domination and its efficacy. It also allows us to trace the multiplicities of positionality and subject-making, underscoring the inseparable nature of motherhood and ‘Otherhood’ to the capacity to know and to embed oneself in urban space. Through their words and maps, m/Others teach us their own politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011) in Portsmouth. They will continue to draw new pathways to the city.

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