

# **Listening *Differently*: Granular Exclusions of Marginalised Early Career Teachers**

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## Abstract

This research traces the affective encounters of marginalised Early Career Teachers (ECTeachers) teaching Subject English in Birmingham (UK) secondary schools. Within these spaces, teaching English and ideas about ‘becoming a teacher’ are entangled with Eurocentric, western, and normative logics that shape who belongs and how they belong. At its core, this research is about affect: the feelings, forces and relational movements that shape ECTeachers’ ‘becomings’, understood as ongoing re-thinking of normative logics that unfold in complex, often invisible ways. For marginalised ECTeachers, the accumulation of subtle, affective material-discursive conditions, what I term ‘granular exclusions’, produce moments of tension, resistance, and difference, continually (re)shaping their becomings within educational assemblages.

Framed as post-qualitative inquiry (PQI), this research critiques the dominant epistemologies and exclusionary systems that structure Subject English and ECTeacher education in the UK. The research unfolds through confabulative conversations with eight ECTeachers, a research practice developed as an alternative to the linearity of conventional interviews (Johansson, 2016) and draws upon Haraway’s (2016) ‘speculative fabulation’ which invites us to think differently about knowledge and experiences. These open, informal and emergent conversations welcomed the complexity of teacher encounters as they moved in/through/out of dominant white and western spaces. ‘Sticky’ moments were revealed, which I read, using a process of agential cutting (Barad, 2007) and diffraction (Haraway, 1992, Barad, 2014). Experiences of being silenced, surviving and resisting cling and linger beyond these encounters and become part of marginalised ECTeachers’ becomings. I argue it is important to pay attention to these sticky affective encounters, if we (educators, educational policymakers and educational researchers) are to generatively improve experiences for marginalised ECTeachers.

Central to this research is Sara Ahmed’s (2021) work on complaint and the feminist ear; a mode of listening that attends to who is not heard and how they are not heard (Ahmed, 2021). I consider how a ‘feminist ear’ as a researcher position, made possible through representation, becomes an ethical and affective practice that blurs boundaries of participation, and this is a further contribution of this thesis. In respect of this researcher positionality, and research approach, this thesis is framed as *killjoy* work (Ahmed, 2023); the ongoing labour of refusing comfort, exposing injustice and sustaining critique and by plugging in *#Killjoy Moments*, my own voice and presence is made visible. Listening with a feminist ear reimagines educational spaces as sites of ethical relation, but also reveals how everyday acts of refusal, discomfort, and complaint can become productive sites of

knowledge-making and becoming. This thesis contributes to a growing body of scholarship in PQI; it challenges deficit-oriented ways of thinking in ECTeacher education and education broadly as well as methodological contributions through listening differently, creating a '*much needed space*' that brings visibility to ECTeachers' 'granular exclusions', which are routinely ignored or erased.

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*Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim*

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## List of Abbreviations

|            |                                                                   |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A-Levels   | Advanced Level                                                    |
| AO         | Assessment Objective                                              |
| AQA        | Assessments and Qualifications Alliance                           |
| BERA       | British Education Research Association                            |
| BWO        | Body without Organs                                               |
| CCF        | Core Content Framework                                            |
| CPD        | Continued Professional Development                                |
| CRER       | Centre for Race Education Research                                |
| CRED       | Centre for Race Education Disparities                             |
| CRT        | Critical Race Theory                                              |
| DfE        | Department for Education                                          |
| EBACC      | English Baccalaureate                                             |
| EAL        | English as an Additional Language                                 |
| ECF        | Early Career Framework                                            |
| ECT1       | Early Career Teacher Year 1                                       |
| ECT2       | Early Career Teacher Year 2                                       |
| ECTeachers | Early Career Teachers                                             |
| ECTeaching | Early Career Teaching                                             |
| ECTP       | Early Career Teacher Programme                                    |
| EEF        | Education Endowment Foundation                                    |
| EIF        | Education Inspection Framework                                    |
| FBV        | Fundamental British Values                                        |
| FPNM       | Feminist, Posthuman, New Materialist                              |
| GCSE       | General Certificate in Secondary Education                        |
| GDPR       | General Data Protection Regulation                                |
| HEI        | Higher Education Institution                                      |
| HOCEC      | House of Commons Education Committee                              |
| ITE        | Initial Teacher Education                                         |
| ITT        | Initial Teacher Training                                          |
| ITTECF     | Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework               |
| KS3        | Key Stage 3                                                       |
| KS4        | Key Stage 4                                                       |
| MAT        | Multi-Academy Trust                                               |
| NASUWT     | National Union of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers           |
| NFER       | National Foundation for Educational Research                      |
| NPQ        | National Professional Qualifications                              |
| NQT        | Newly Qualified Teacher                                           |
| OCR        | Oxford Cambridge and Royal Society of Arts Examinations           |
| OFSTED     | Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills |
| PGCE       | Post Graduate Certificate in Education                            |
| PGR        | Post Graduate Research                                            |
| PQ         | Post-Qualitative                                                  |
| PQI        | Post-Qualitative Inquiry                                          |
| SEND       | Special Educational Needs and Disabilities                        |
| SCITT      | School-Centred Initial Teacher Training                           |
| UCL        | University College London                                         |

A table of abbreviations, like this, often works to stabilise meaning. This one does not seek to. This table is included as a functional aid to institutional legibility and not as a set of authoritative definitions. The terms gathered here remain in motion with some terms troubled across the thesis whilst others linger as only points of reference. See [page 15](#) for further discussion.

# Opening

## #Killjoy

This thesis is a journey of affect. It is about the feelings or forces that move and affect bodies in time and space. This research inquiry explores the affective encounters of marginalised Early Career Teachers (ECTeachers) of Subject English, tracing how emotions circulate within educational contexts and shape professional lives. It is a narrative of connections, encounters, and emergence, shaped by moments of joy and disruption both for myself as a researcher, and the teachers involved in this research. These moments have ‘guided, dis/disconnected, excited, startled, interrupted, diverted and reoriented’ (Dernikos, et al 2020, p 4) us, whilst continuing to shape our personal and professional lives. I start here with my own feelings and how these have shaped the journey of this thesis – a kind of ‘becoming-thesis’.

This inquiry is situated within post-qualitative theory where I found comfort and solidarity with a range of thinkers; Sara Ahmed, Rosi Braidotti, Karen Barad, Donna Haraway as well as key black feminist thinkers such as Audre Lorde, bell hooks and Sylvia Wynter. I felt recognised and inspired by their work; and as my thinking and writing developed, it became an act of courage, echoing Lorde’s insight that ‘when I use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether or not I am unafraid’ (Lorde, 1997, p 15). Ahmed’s (2010, 2021, 2023) work on affect, complaint and the feminist killjoy has been central to this thesis, and provides a productive lens through which I explored affective moments in greater detail in Parts 4 and 5. As Ahmed (2023) states, the feminist killjoy refuses to remain silent or satisfied with the status quo, unsettling the comfortable narratives that obscure inequality or injustice. I return to the concepts of affect, complaint and becoming in more depth in Part 1, but I foreground killjoy here because in this thesis, it is my lived position.

The feminist killjoy, developed by Sara Ahmed (2010, 2017, 2023), describes the figure who disrupts happiness by pointing out injustice. Sometimes, as Ahmed tells us, being a feminist killjoy can feel like getting in the way of your own happiness, especially if it means that happiness is not noticing the inequalities around us. Those who see expose this ‘happiness’ are often seen as ‘ruining the atmosphere’ (Ahmed, 2023, p 1). But a feminist killjoy uses this as leverage - to tell more of the story, providing a fuller picture of the world, even if it is uncomfortable to hear and to know.

My own experiences resonate with this as they have been full of difficult or disruptive moments that stem from noticing and choosing not to ignore injustices. Being called ‘Paki’, ‘extremist’, ‘bloody immigrant’ outside of school structures, and then within education, being told that I am never quite ready for that promotion, not good enough for ‘outstanding teaching’ in a very white populated school or just ‘simply’ being the ‘complainer’ are a few of many instances that ‘stuck’ with me. Such moments of unease have challenged me to think differently about my role, my identity, my body, my role as a teacher and latterly, my research. I share these throughout the thesis as I call them ‘*#killjoy moments*’ as both resistance and force of transformation, challenging the dominant narratives, producing new ways of being and knowing explored in Part 2 and 3. Ahmed (2023) tells us that one of the hardest parts of being a killjoy is not only talking about other people’s experiences but talking about our own. Although, this has been difficult at times, and I even considered leaving ‘things’ unsaid, it has also been deeply liberating. MacKinnon (1991, p 14) reminds us that ‘we know things with our own lives, and we live that knowledge beyond what any theory has yet theorised’ and as Audre Lorde asserts ‘silence will not protect you’ (Lorde, 1984, p 30). Writing this thesis has required me to sit with vulnerability, recognising that putting this together was both a personal and political act.

My professional experiences, working in education, have always been responsive to issues of injustice and inequality. As a Subject English secondary school teacher in England and someone who is also a British Bangladeshi Muslim woman, these experiences were something that either bothered me or left me in wonder. I was left frustrated with curriculum, prescribed pedagogy, assessment protocols, how people are treated, how people are left feeling and how ‘fixed’ and ‘one-way’ education is. Often, I felt like an outsider, and at times I still do, witnessing and experiencing racism, sexism and other forms of systemic exclusion; it became ‘expected’ as I moved through education. Nothing much changes. I was left bothered and I felt this (a lot), but I carried on (sometimes because you have no other choice).

Being bothered was to feel annoyed, irritated, or a sense of discomfort, while wonder was more of a disruption that unsettled familiar paths of thought and action. Wonder, in this sense, is relational - it connects us to that which unsettles and calls us to question the known, or the things we take for granted (MacLure, 2013). Ahmed (2004) calls these moments of wonder ‘affective encounters’, moments where emotions like discomfort, confusion, or frustration expose the invisible structures that shape our lives, challenging us to resist and reimagine the spaces we inhabit. Speaking about ‘affective encounters’ often generates discomfort because it interrupts the normative logics of the dominant group, and that emotive disruption is exactly what produces the ‘feminist killjoy’ (Ahmed,

2023). This thesis interrogates the invisible structures and affective encounters felt by myself and the teachers in this study, to better understand what shapes ECTeachers of Subject English, and how we might need to 'listen differently' in order to hear what 'affective encounters' have to tell us.

Throughout this becoming-thesis, I found myself thinking and then writing about moments that bothered me or left me in wonder through *#killjoy moments*. As the research unfolded, Ahmed's (2021) work on complaint started to matter. Complaint becomes a site of knowledge production that exposes institutional power and it is through complaint that we learn about problems, yet institutions respond by treating the complaint itself as the problem (Ahmed, 2021). Attending to complaint, affect and killjoy makes it possible to see the ways in which marginalised or 'problem' bodies (like mine and those of my participants) are pushed to the margins. To be able to hear complaints, 'you have to dismantle the barriers that stop us from hearing the complaints... the walls, the doors that render so much of what is said, what is done, invisible and inaudible' (Ahmed, 2021, p 16). This thesis attempts to listen through these barriers.

Over the last four years, I have met and spoken with many people about researching and each time, I felt something. I felt a sense of responsibility, pressure, purpose and meaning, not always at the same time but it made me think for certain about the nature of my work. I felt connected to others and vice versa, through different parts of my identity – as a woman, as a Muslim, as a working mother, as a teacher, even as a post-graduate research (PGR) representative. All of these facets of my identity, and more, mattered albeit in different proportions and at different times.

### *#Killjoy moment*

*'Salya – you know how it is'*

*'They don't get it'*

*\*Eyes roll\**

*'Yes – this is important work you're doing'<sup>1</sup>*

*They recognise the work because they recognise themselves.*

People recognised my work was and is important, especially those interested in social justice. It is the lens of race and ECTeachers' intersectional identities that are significant in their experiences of equity and social justice. Increasingly, I felt the daunting yet worthy nature of my research as being *something I've got to do, not just for me but for others*. I am reminded of bell hooks' statement

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<sup>1</sup> Some comments made to me by others (marginalised bodies) during this research journey

‘people are hungry to hear the dissenting voice’ (hooks, 2002). I see my research as an act of reclaiming space and resisting the deficit narratives that often marginalise people whose intersectional identities, particularly racialised identities, place them at a disadvantage within educational spaces. My lived experience as a Muslim woman of Bangladeshi heritage, raised and educated in Birmingham, has been shaped by such ‘affective economies’, another term used by Ahmed (2004) to describe what emotions do in social and professional spaces.

In this thesis, the killjoy's disruptive affect is not a hindrance but a necessary force for transformation, both personal and professionally. Through this inquiry, I have embraced the discomfort, confusion, and wonder that have shaped my journey, seeing them as productive forces that have (re)shaped my thinking, opening up new possibilities for understanding complexities in education. In this way, this thesis becomes more than an academic output, but an ongoing process of becoming, shaped by the entangled affects of wonder, resistance, and refusal as I continue becoming killjoy.

### **#Killjoy Moment**

*To begin is to disturb. To unpick what has been tightly bound and unpack what has been carefully concealed and then make space for what has been silenced. It begins with a call to listen – not to a loud voice but to those historically unheard. This is a commitment to discomfort.*

## Stickiness

This research begins from a concern that has gathered slowly, and as something that has stuck to bodies, to language and in educational spaces. The concern is focused around how racially marginalised ECTeachers experience teaching Subject English in secondary school spaces. Their experiences, and mine as a previous Subject English teacher, are situated within wider structural inequalities in the education system. Kotonya et al (2025) shows that the teaching workforce does not reflect the ethnic diversity of either the UK working age population or the student population and by foregrounding the lived experiences of marginalised ECTeachers teaching Subject English, this research seeks to understand the conditions that shape how bodies move in/through/out of the educational spaces. Emerging from my own and participant's lived conditions rather than abstract questions, the inquiry is shaped by what Ahmed (2004, 2010) describes as stickiness; the way emotions, histories and power relations cling to certain bodies and not others, accumulating over time. These accumulations leave traces, shaping how certain bodies are able to move, to speak and be recognised within certain spaces.

Rather than treating these traces as background information, this research ‘stays with the trouble’ (Haraway, 2016), lingering with the unresolved, affective and material stickiness that continue to shape how bodies are positioned, recognised and constrained within educational spaces. It attends to how the experiences of marginalised ECTeachers of Subject English take form through repeated encounters, how they exist in policies, practices and interactions and how they sediment into what feels normal, everyday practice. In this sense, this inquiry does not proceed in a linear or hierarchical way, it moves through connections and traces, following what emerges as the concern spreads and appears across different sites and moments.

This research aims to explore and foreground the lived experiences of marginalised ECTeachers of Subject English, particularly those whose intersectional and racialised identities place them at a disadvantage within educational spaces. It seeks to trace how exclusion, Eurocentric curriculum structures, and deficit narratives operate, persist, and are felt, while highlighting the ways these experiences can be resisted, reconfigured, and voiced. By paying close attention to bodies, lived experience, and the assemblages encountered in practice, this research seeks to disrupt dominant narratives, illuminate the complexities of navigating educational and professional spaces, and create a space for the ‘complaints’ and realities of marginalisation to be expressed and acknowledged.

What follows in Part 1, is what I call setting the scene, and is a political and ethical act, making visible the conditions through which meaning is made and through which deficit framings of marginalised ECTeachers are sustained (Gillborn, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006). First, I will outline the decisions I made regarding how I used language in this thesis, before outlining the education crisis that situates this inquiry. Positioned as a post-qualitative inquiry, this research is an entangled practice that moves with and through stickiness of race, identity and power that continue to appear in educational spaces. This research does not aim to resolve this stickiness, but trace how they work, persist and they might be felt, resisted and reconfigured through research that stays close to bodies and lived experience and so it is significant and timely to ‘set the scene’.

# Part 1 - Introduction

## 1.1 Language in this thesis

Here, I clarify my position in relation to the terminology of ITE (Initial Teacher Education). While ITT (Initial Teacher Training) appears in this thesis, particularly where it is mobilised in policy texts, my preferred term is Initial Teacher Education (ITE). This preference is deliberate and moves towards an understanding of becoming teacher as relational and a holistic account of professional learning and education, rather than a simplistic notion of training teachers through ITT. In choosing ITE, I align with feminist refusals of reproducing language to contain and more towards a commitment to education as a practice of becoming (St, Pierre, 2018).

I explore the experiences of marginalised ECTeachers which encompasses the training years and first two years post-teacher training qualification. This definition, called the 'Golden Thread' (DfE, 2019), expanded upon in Part 2, is an expectation for all ECTeachers, training providers and schools. It dictates that upon completion of teacher training and a 2-year induction programme under the ECF, teachers are fully prepared and qualified to teach in schools. Although, thinking about the ECTeacher in such fixed and binary ways is unhelpful, it is an idea that I hope to trouble and re-conceptualise in this thesis, moving towards a teacher-becoming, flexible and fluid in nature rather than a fixed and static identity. I extend the DfE's definition of an ECTeacher by including pre-service teachers to encompass the 'beginning' of their teacher-becomings and explore their lived experience considering the backdrop of concerning disparity.

Since this thesis interrogates the dominant and pervasive forms of knowledge within the ITE, ECTeaching, and Subject English spaces, it is crucial to critically examine the terminology used to describe those positioned outside these dominant structures at this early stage of the thesis. In my own becoming researcher–writer, I was increasingly attuned not only to what I was writing, but to how writing itself was working on me. This growing attentiveness to affect, irritation, and pauses made post-qualitative research as entangled, embodied, and an ongoing process rather than a linear method (St. Pierre, 2011; 2018) make sense in the context of my research and my research journey.

In particular, I grappled with the complexities of language used to describe both myself and my participants, reflecting on terms that balance empowerment to lived experiences. Initially, I adopted the term Global Majority—a relatively recent, progressive term used to describe individuals who are Black, Asian, Brown, dual-heritage, Indigenous to the global South, and/or racialised as ethnic

minorities. This term is often celebrated for reframing these groups as part of a global majority, rather than as disadvantaged or defined by colonial histories. It moves away from terms like BAME (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic), people of colour, or ethnic minorities, which are frequently criticised for positioning non-white identities in relation to whiteness and for their inaccuracy in global contexts (Campbell-Stevens, 2021).

However, as I progressed through the research and considered the specific context of this study in Birmingham, I realised that the term Global Majority did not accurately represent the lived realities of either my participants or myself. None of my participants identified as part of the Global Majority, with most of them never having heard of the term before. Despite Birmingham's rich diversity, the socio-political dynamics in this context position us as being in the margins, navigating predominantly white spaces. Here, the term Global Majority felt disconnected from our shared experiences of marginalisation, particularly in relation to exclusion from power structures and systemic inequities.

To address this, I turned to black feminist thought such as Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality, which acknowledges the intersection of multiple identities and how they shape unique experiences of discrimination and privilege, embedding a structural lens to experiences of inequality. This is complemented by Yuval-Davies (2014) concept of situated intersectionality, foregrounding the contextual and relational nature of social, economic, political and personal inequalities, which provided a contextual lens. In this study, I use the term marginalised to reflect the shared experiences of systemic exclusion that unite my participants and myself, while also preserving the complex and specific individual identities. Importantly, I do not impose marginalised as a fixed or homogenous label; rather, I use it as a broad, subjective term to discuss experiences of exclusion from power and resources. The participants' narratives are presented with their own self-identified terms, including Black Muslim, Brown/Indian, and Pakistani man, among others. This approach prioritises participant agency and ensures self-representation – I speak about the participants as they want to be spoken about whilst maintaining anonymity.

My decision to use 'marginalised' as a term, reflects a strategic effort to foreground situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988) and lived experiences that challenge Eurocentric power structures and biases entrenched in education. By framing our experiences within the term marginalised, I aim to highlight the realities of exclusion while recognising the intersectionality of our diverse backgrounds. This aligns with the PQI call to dismantle dominant power structures and adopt language that more inclusively represents those who have been systematically excluded. By using marginalised as a fluid,

intersectional term, this study resists categorising and fixing, instead, acknowledging the dynamic and situated nature of identity within specific socio-political contexts.

### **#Killjoy Moment**

*A deeply depressing issue of thinking of what to categorise myself (and others) without fear of homogenising or offending. The difference caused by groups and the effect it has is upsetting. I remind myself of the teaching of Prophet Muhammed (peace and blessings upon him): 'There is no superiority of an Arab over non-Arab, or the white person over a black one, except in terms of piety. There should not be any inherent superiority.'*

As my engagement with this thesis, and with education more broadly, deepened, I became increasingly aware of the density and pervasive use of acronyms that saturate educational discourse. Terms, such as, ECT (Early Career Teachers), GCSE (General Certificate in Secondary Education), PGCE (Post-Graduate Certificate in Education), AO (Assessment Objectives) and others listed above (List of Abbreviations) circulate with ease across policy texts, institutional spaces and everyday professional talk, often without explanation or thought.

I reproduce these acronyms throughout this thesis because they are not incidental, they are part of the material-discursive assemblage of education (Barad, 2007). They appear here as they are mobilised in policy and practice. Yet, my growing discomfort with their accumulation matters as the language does something (Ahmed, 2017). Acronyms compress complex lives, labour and inequities into manageable, homogenous forms, obscuring the histories that exceed their compression (Wynter, 2003). I discuss this in more detail in Part 2 – [Terrain 6](#). Acronyms move quickly, they demand fluency and reward those who operate 'successfully' in educational spaces, whilst marking others who do not, as outsiders. To speak with acronyms with ease is to signal professional belonging, to hesitate or be unaware of them is to be deemed deficient. My sense of feeling 'fed up' with the overuse of acronyms is an affective response to power doing its quiet work (Ahmed, 2014). This power is not overt but operates through familiarity, explored further along in Part 2. This attentiveness aligns to valuing feeling as a site of knowledge (Lorde, 1984) and troubling the smoothness of bureaucratic language that so often operates through over-simplification. In this sense, naming my irritation is a feminist intervention that resists the demand for neutrality. In the next section, I map the broader contextual 'concern' to situate and better understand the experiences of marginalised ECTeachers.

## 1.2 The concern

Education, particularly in schools, has always been subject to change and is one of the most heavily influenced policy areas from the government (Ball, 2017). School education can be considered as operating within a shifting assemblage of policies, bodies and affects, shaped and re-shaped by political-socio-geo-economic factors. Over the last decade, UK schools have been influenced by an entangled set of global crises, a context often described as a ‘polycrisis’, referring to ‘the causal entanglement of crisis in multiple global systems in ways that significantly degrade humanity’s prospects’ (Lawrence et al, 2024, p 4). These crises are multi-faceted, interconnected and mutually reinforcing (Liu and Renn 2025). These include economic instability, geopolitical conflict including ongoing genocide in Palestine, global social justice movements such as Black Lives Matter, the Covid-19 pandemic, and political turbulence such as the rise in far-right ideologies across continents (Lawrence et al., 2024). This ‘polycrisis’ operates as relational and emergent forces, creating complex, ongoing pressures that shape societal and educational landscapes. In the UK, in mid-2024, the landslide General Election victory for the Labour Party signalled a new political era, likely to reconfigure the educational landscape through further policy shifts in years to come, deepening the marginalisation of economically disadvantaged and racialised bodies in UK society (Khan and Blavo, 2022; Callender, 2020). Gilroy (2004) argues that the effect of changing and shifting policy and turbulent events disproportionately affect marginalised communities, leading to heightened exclusionary practices and opportunities, which Reay (2017) and Ladson-Billings (2006) argue, creates volatile encounters within educational spaces as systemic discrimination is reproduced and exacerbated through policy and institutional practices.

Within this macro-level ‘polycrisis’, UK schools experience further, contemporary situated crises that reflect and magnify inequalities for racially marginalised ECTeachers. This is the concern that this research explores, particularly for those who choose to teach Subject English. I will outline these contemporary situated crises below in Part 1.5 and develop the discussions further in Part 2. These crises can also be understood as moments that draw attention to the systemic issues and reveal the situated nature of this research (Haraway, 1988). Ahmed’s (2014) work on emotions that ‘stick’ has been useful in thinking about how these situated crisis ‘stick’ to bodies through histories of contact and affective landscapes are marked by historical power relations, often played out through the crises. The phrase ‘stick to bodies’ refers to the way emotions, meanings, or values become attached to certain bodies or objects through social and cultural practices. Ahmed (2010) explores how emotions like happiness, fear, or disgust are not just individual feelings but are shaped by social relations and histories, suggesting emotions ‘stick’ to bodies in ways that reinforce social norms and hierarchies. For

example, certain bodies might be marked as sources of happiness (like the image of a 'happy family'), while others are associated with fear or disruption (as with racialised bodies in some contexts). This 'sticking' process reflects broader systems of power and inequality, showing how emotions work to maintain or challenge dominant discourses. I use the words 'stick', 'sticky' and 'residue' in this thesis to conceptualise how emotions attach to bodies and shape experiences of marginalisation. In this sense, the affective experiences of racially marginalised ECTeachers are understood as being produced through longer histories of racialisation and marginalisation and are amplified during periods of crises; revealing affect as a key tool through which inequality is reproduced in education. Zembylas et al (2022) argue that educational crises are deeply affective and political as opposed to a temporary disruption. Often crises carry negative connotations, but they can also serve as an interruption and opens up space to challenge dominant ways of thinking, doing, being in education (Biesta, 2020).

### *1.2.1 Crisis 'Otherwise'*

While the language of crisis has already been introduced, it has so far been used in its conventional sense, pointing towards breakdown, deficit or failure. The dominant ways of thinking in education are often considered outdated and inadequate in dealing with the current, complex and messy climate in education, one that is full of constant socio-economic-political-cultural movement (Ahmed, 2023, Ball, 2014, Braidotti, 2013, Haraway, 1988). I understand a crisis to have two meanings; one where crisis is seen as a moment of difficulty that needs immediate action to be resolved, meaning that the goal is to restore balance or return to a stable state. Alternatively, we can view crisis as more of an opportunity for change. This research draws upon PQI scholarship to thinking about crisis otherwise. Thinking about it as an opportunity for change, reimagining crisis as productive and generative sites of knowledge-making. In his book, *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze (1994) conceptualises moments of disruption as ruptures in the habitual 'image of thought' that exposes dominant ways of knowing, and it is those moments of rupture that he argues is 'something in the world that forces us think (Deleuze, 1994, p139). Crisis, in this sense, is not a problem that awaits a resolution since 'problems are not reducible to the solutions which they engender' (Deleuze, 1994, p 158). Similarly, Grosz (2011) describes a crisis as a significant, but productive disruption, that forces us to rethink, reshape and redefine boundaries, identities and norms. I use both the conventional and this alternative understanding of crisis in this thesis to explore how issues of social justice and equity become more pressing for marginalised bodies, particularly those racialised and positioned outside dominant narratives as they move in/through/out of the education system.

Extending this into educational research, Zemblyas (2015, p 176) thinks about crisis as an affective and political condition, showing that crisis is lived through 'affective intensities that shapes what becomes thinkable, sayable and doable' in educational spaces. Thinking about crisis otherwise allows research to move beyond deficit framings of teachers, schooling, attending instead to how crisis operates as an affective-epistemological 'crisis' that reconfigures subjectivities, knowledge practices and possibilities for resistance within ECTeacher assemblages, which this thesis explores. This research will put PQ theories and concepts in education to better account for the multiple, entangled, constantly shifting teaching practices in ECTeaching. Multi-theoretical, through PQI and multi-methodological approaches, through doing the research, offers an opportunity for an assemblage study where there is a need for a praxis which includes systems and complexity thinking similar to what hooks (2000) describes as 'a way of thinking and behaving that honours principles of inter-being and interconnectedness' (2000, p 77). Strom et al (2019, p 2) argue that this PQI way of thinking can help us understand the 'growing educational complexities, enabling strategies to resist and create alternatives to the patterns of injustice' seen in marginalised ECTeachers, discussed in more detail in Part 5 and 6.

### 1.3 Research in situ

I draw upon the concept of 'situated intersectionality' (Yuval-Davies, 2014, p 91), which builds on earlier work on intersectionality developed by Crenshaw (1991) who highlighted how social categories such as gender, race and class intersect to produce compound and shifting forms of inequality and shape how marginalised identities are formed. Extending this, situated intersectionality pays attention to the situated or contextual differences shaping the experiences of marginalised ECTeachers, recognising that these are socio-culturally, historically, economically situated. It further recognises that such experiences are always temporally, spatially and materially located, but that ECTeachers may experience shifting, fluid and sometimes contradictory positions across a life course (Rodriguez et al 2023, p.234). I use this concept to think about the body and affect as a site of knowledge making. This research acknowledges that teaching and becoming a teacher of Subject English is a complex process. But for those already positioned within marginalised and racialised assemblages, this space becomes an even more difficult site of becoming. This research situates itself within these volatile forces and feelings, acknowledging that teaching, and becoming-teacher is an ongoing, complex and process.

This doctoral research, initiated some time in 2022, coincides with a period of significant flux and uncertainty in English education as described above through the crises. Our experiences and practices

are deeply rooted in where, when and with whom we exist. This very notion of our 'situatedness' (Haraway, 2016) shapes not only our lives but also the development of this thesis. The concept of 'politics of location' emphasises how struggles for power and equity are tied to specific places and the experiences within them (Borsa, 1990). This lens will be crucial for understanding the experiences of marginalised ECTeachers of Subject English in secondary level state education in the UK. The landscape of which this research is situated is important and the following points outline the key parts of this research:

- Time period: 2022-2026
- Location: Birmingham, UK
- Who: Racially Marginalised ECTeachers
- Specifically: Subject English taught in secondary schools

The thesis extends beyond the singular experiences of the marginalised ECTeacher. It delves into the intricate web of material and affective elements that co-constitute the educational environment, an assemblage, that they navigate. I discuss the concepts of materiality and affect in more detail below; but as a way of introducing the concept, these ideas involve how 'things' (Bennett, 2010) can shape teacher 'becomings' from policies around professionalism and standardisation to histories, language, religious clothing and more are relevant to this thesis.

Drawing on Sara Ahmed's conceptualisations of affect, this research also examines how the emotional dimensions of the educational landscape impact these teachers. Ahmed (2004) posits that affects are not merely individual feelings but are relational and can influence how teachers and students engage with their environments. This understanding emphasises how affective experiences—like feelings of belonging or alienation—are intertwined with the material conditions of the classroom and institutional structures such as schools and ITE institutions. Thus, by considering the affect generated in these structures and forces discussed earlier, we can further illuminate the challenges and possibilities faced by marginalised ECTeachers.

## 1.4 Listening *Differently*

The capacity to listen attentively to experiences that are often marginalised, dismissed or unheard, is central to this thesis. Representation, through my own researcher positionality, operates affectively and relationally as the ways I listened, responded and was positioned by teachers in this study mattered. I discuss representation in more detail later in [Part 3](#), where a clear connection between

me and the participants in this research becomes evident. This connection was *felt* (by both sides) and stemmed from a shared sense of being recognised. Informed by feminist ways of listening, explored in more detail in Part 3, this part of my identity as researcher had much to do with my representation, and shaped how participants understood me and how safe they felt to speak. This thesis is more than knowledge exchange. It is about the trust and belief the participants had to share their experiences with me.

*‘People like us don’t get to do Phd’s’*

*‘We don’t get these opportunities’*

*‘We need people like you to tell our stories’*

*‘You don’t see many Muslim, Asian women in academia’*

*‘You’re doing important work<sup>2</sup>’*

It has been a huge privilege and opportunity to have been able to do this doctorate, but with that comes a sense of response-ability, a concept distinct from responsibility (Haraway, 2016). Response-ability entails an ongoing process of critical reflection and action, recognising the need for the ITE/ECTeaching space to become a sustainable, socially just and equitable space for all bodies. This principle has guided the methodology and ethical considerations throughout my research journey and will be discussed further along in the Part 2 and 3.

### **#Killjoy Moment**

*This work feels like a duty.*

Although questions and enquiries about the experiences of teachers from marginalised backgrounds are not new, in this research they are framed from renewed ethical, ontological, and epistemological standpoints. By listening differently, with a feminist ear, which I explain in [1.7.8](#) and [Part 3](#), to the experiences of marginalised ECTeachers of Subject English, paying attention to affect, embodiment and materiality, I aim to uncover the complexities of navigating a curriculum and profession rooted in Eurocentric perspectives and knowledge. This project seeks to disrupt the dominant narratives and illuminate how such bodies negotiate their becomings in and around this complex space, and although the situated nature of this research was centred on Subject English ECTeachers, this research speaks to all teachers by validating their experiences and giving them a platform to voice and be heard.

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<sup>2</sup> some of the comments made to me by participants and others from marginalised backgrounds

## 1.5 Contextual Crises

The crises that are outlined below form the contextual, situated condition that expose the affective, racialised and systemic inequities of working in education. Here, I outline the crises briefly and explicate how they intensify existing injustices, which I then build on in Part 2 in greater detail. All of these volatile crises form the assemblage that teachers find themselves in, alongside other parts of their identity that are relevant for them. By already laying out the contextual mapping of this research above, we can begin to see a unique ‘politics of location’ emerge.

### Crisis 1 – Neoliberal Education

Neoliberal reforms have reshaped education in England into a market-driven, standardised and performance oriented system that intensifies accountability while contributing to teacher pressure, social inequality and wider socio-political tensions (Ball, 2016). As Ball (2016) argues, neoliberalism reframes education in economic and performative terms, positioning individuals as responsible for both success and failure (Taylor, 2023). This is evident in policies such as academisation (DfE, 2010), which enables schools to operate with increased autonomy from local authority oversight (DfE, 2014), alongside league tables (Education Reform Act 1988; House of Commons Education Committee, 2017), standardised testing (GCSE, A-Levels), teacher standards framework (DfE, 2012; 2019) and performance related measures that prioritise measurable outcomes and competition. Rasco (2020) argues standardisation operates as a political tool that regulates behaviour and embeds neoliberal values across education systems. I draw upon these policies in greater detail in Part 2 that follows.

These neoliberal developments restructure teachers’ work and professional identities, embedding outcome based accountability, increased surveillance and heightened workload (Lingard, 2010; NEU, 2024). Although framed as promoting choice and equity, such reforms disproportionately benefit white, middle-class groups while exacerbating existing racial and socioeconomic inequalities (Jabbar et al., 2022; O’Neal and Bridgeforth, 2025). Alongside these structural changes, austerity measures following the 2008 financial crisis and the ongoing cost of living crisis have intensified social inequalities and affective pressures such as anxiety, insecurity and alienation. Responsibility for navigating these conditions is increasingly individualised, extending to teachers’ wellbeing.

At a societal level, these pressures intersect with rising political and social tensions in the UK. Events such as the far-right associated riots of summer 2024, alongside increases in hate crime and Islamophobia (Mondon and Winter, 2024), and the continuing economic effects of Brexit (Portes and

Springford, 2023), contribute to a more polarised national climate (Cronin and Schneer, 2024). In this context, neoliberal conditions of insecurity across income, housing and education create fertile ground for the politicisation of grievances (Lygdopoulos, 2023), with anti-immigration narratives gaining traction (Addley, 2025).

Crisis 1, therefore, situates education within a broader neoliberal and socio-political landscape, shaping the conditions in which marginalised ECTeachers enter and work. This context is explored further in Part 2.

## **Crisis 2 – Recruitment and Retention**

Within this neoliberal economic state, England is experiencing a shortage of teachers. Those from marginalised communities are less likely to enter teaching and stay in teaching than their white counterparts (Demie, 2023). Recent recruitment data is telling of the scale of the issue. Secondary schools face significant difficulties in attracting enough teachers to meet the demands of the profession (Allen, Ford, and Hannay, 2023). The flow of new entrants to ITE dropped by 20% in 2022/23 (DfE, 2023), and only 68.7% of teachers who qualified five years ago remain in service (DfE, 2023). In 2023, recruitment into secondary school ITE programmes failed to meet targets, including a significant shortfall in Subject English teachers (Weale, 2023) despite numerous government drives, campaigns and marketing to ‘get into teaching’ (GOV.uk, 2023). The National Education Union (NEU) reported that a ‘a quarter of newly qualified teachers quit within three years, and a third quit within five’ (NEU, 2025). DfE figures revealed a concerning trend, indicating that 40% of teachers were resigning within their first year, and the departure of new recruits had nearly tripled in six years (Weale, 2015). Concurrently, a survey of NASUWT members found that 68% had contemplated leaving the teaching profession in the past 12 months, with 55% expressing dissatisfaction with their jobs (Weale, 2015). A decade later, the figures are still shocking, as these figures rose to 70% with 43% of teachers feeling dissatisfied with their jobs (NASUWT, 2025). In response, the DfE set out its ambitions for the teaching workforce in the White Paper - Educational Excellence Everywhere (DfE, 2016) and further policy initiatives through DfE (2019, 2024, 2025). It outlined support for school leaders to recruit, train, develop and retain the best possible teachers (Gager and Percival, 2022).

The Lit in Colour (2020) report reveals that 46% of schools in England have no Black, Asian, or minority ethnic teachers. For teachers from racially marginalised backgrounds, the affective intensities of systemic racism and inequality are central to discussions of retention (Tereshchenko, Mills, and Bradbury, 2020). Teachers from these communities contend not only with professional pressures but also with the affective weight of navigating identities that are marginalised in the dominant

educational assemblage (Goodwin, 2020). Race inequalities, lack of opportunities and pay disparities, particularly in education, continue to be a problem for marginalised teachers in England (Vieler-Porter, 2020), despite Vicker-Hulse and Whitehouse (2024) reminding us that students need to see themselves represented in their teachers. The teacher shortage in England, reveals a deeper crisis of entangled bodies, systems and affect. Although there is an ongoing policy commitment to diversify the teaching workforce, there is a gap between the proportion of students and teachers from marginalised backgrounds (DfE, 2018) suggesting a gap between policy intentions and their enactment, illustrating the non-performativity of such commitments (Ahmed, 2012). There is a growing body of research examining this issue (Gorard et al, 2022; Tereshchenko et al, 2025; Jones and Boliver, 2025) yet the challenges that contribute to mis/under representation of marginalised bodies remain (NFER, 2023).

### **Crisis 3 - Schools in Birmingham, England**

The neoliberal framework of schools (Crisis 1) intersects with the unique sociocultural context of Birmingham, England, where this thesis is situated. As the UK's second largest city, with around 50% of its population identifying as 'ethnic minority' (Census, 2021), Birmingham represents a microcosm of multicultural Britain, comprising of 187 different nationalities, and has some unique qualities. For example, it is a very young city, with over 40% of the population aged under 25 years of age (Birmingham City Council, 2017). The diverse, urban landscape of Birmingham is central to the experiences of the marginalised ECTeachers who are teaching and going on to work in Birmingham schools.

Despite this diversity, the teacher workforce does not reflect the population it serves; over 85% of teachers in England are recorded as White British (Gov.uk, 2021). This highlights a broader disconnect between increasingly diverse student populations and the persistence of dominant, Eurocentric ways of knowing and being within education (Smith, 2022; Braidotti, 2007). Birmingham can be understood as a 'super-diverse' city (Birmingham City Council, 2022), characterised by dense layers of cultural, linguistic and social difference. From a Deleuzian perspective, such diversity is not simply demographic but a productive and generative force emerging through relational encounters and processes of becoming (Deleuze, 1994), discussed further in Part 5. However, within a neoliberal education system shaped by standardisation, accountability and competition (Ball, 2016), this generative difference is often reframed as a 'problem' to be measured and controlled. As a result, diversity is rhetorically celebrated (Ahmed, 2022) while being constrained by policies that prioritise uniform outcomes and individualised competition over the relational strengths that emerge from diverse communities,

perpetuating structural inequalities rather than addressing them (Allison and Clarke, 2025; Gandolfi and Mills, 2023; Hordern and Brooks, 2023). In this context, socio-political and community-relevant knowledge is often marginalised, as 'quality' is defined through measurable, market-driven outcomes (Allison and Clarke, 2025).

This produces a central tension where diversity offers rich possibilities for educational practice, it is simultaneously limited by policy frameworks that demand conformity to standardised norms. As such, Birmingham schools can be understood as sites of multiplicity navigating a neoliberal infrastructure within a broader, and often hostile, socio-political environment. This tension is explored further in Parts 4 and 5 of the thesis.

#### **Crisis 4 – Racialised Policies in Education**

Understanding the political backdrop is important as it illustrates volatility and turmoil in education. Education is not only heavily influenced by neoliberal ideology but is also a space shaped by white, western discourses. Policies introduced in education can be considered as being racialised, emerging from systemic inequalities that disproportionately affect marginalised groups. Gillborn (2024) discusses extensively the ways educational policies are structured around white norms, contributing to systemic racial practices. He uses CRT to demonstrate how policies favour and benefit dominant groups (Gillborn, 2008). The ITE/ECTeaching spaces operate within a system heavily influenced by these neo-liberal, Euro-centric, and westernised ideologies (Ellis, 2023, Mirza, 2022). From Braidotti's (2019) perspective, it can also be argued that such systems are underpinned by humanist ontologies and epistemologies that construct the normative subject as male, white, able-bodied and western, rendering other ways of knowing and being as marginal. In Part 2, I argue that there are specific policies in English education that maintain and normalise colonial, racist or marginalising ideologies that contribute to the affective landscape marginalised ECTeachers experience. Examples of such policies are the National Curriculum (DfE, 2014), Fundamental British Values (DfE, 2014), PREVENT (DfE, 2015), Teacher Standards (DfE, 2012, 2019), ITTECF (2025), use of canonical texts and language policies within Subject English (DfE, 2014). These policies are ideologically positioned to maintain specific ways of knowing - a western, dominant form of knowledge production. By doing so, it has the possibility of 'alienating' bodies that do not conform to the dominant knowledge form (Ahmed, 2017).

#### **Crisis 5 – Subject English in secondary schools: a murder**

Subject English is a critical site for this research, having undergone significant reform in recent years. The National Curriculum for English Language and Literature at Key Stages 3 and 4 was last revised in

2014 under the then Education Minister, Michael Gove. Influenced by American E. D. Hirsch, these reforms promoted a 'knowledge-rich' curriculum, defined by Ofsted (2019), a governing educational body, as a curriculum where 'invaluable knowledge pupils need to know' is taught. This approach aligns with Michael Young's concept of 'powerful knowledge', which emphasises knowledge that takes students beyond their everyday experiences (Young et al., 2014). In practice, however, Subject English has increasingly prioritised prescribed content, alongside an intensified focus on technical skills such as spelling, punctuation and grammar, and preparation for the 'knowledge economy' (Lauder et al., 2012). As a result, the curriculum is often content heavy and rooted in predominantly white, Eurocentric traditions, particularly through the literary canon. Critics argue that this has contributed to a narrowing of pedagogical approaches, with reduced emphasis on creativity, dialogue and empathy (Bleiman, 2020; Cushing, 2022). Bennett, Lambert and Smith (2023, p4) describe this as a closing down of opportunities for self-expression and critical engagement within the English classroom – 'a murder'.

Subject English is therefore deeply entangled in colonial and normative understandings of language, privileging particular ways of speaking, writing and reading as the most 'correct' and 'valuable' (Cushing, 2021; Saleh, 2023). This positions the subject as a challenging space for those whose identities, languages and experiences sit outside these dominant norms, complicating their experiences of teaching and learning within a system that is simultaneously a site of constraint and possibility.

## **Crisis 6 – Marginalised bodies as ECTeachers**

It is widely reported that there are significant ethnic or racial disparities in teacher career progression, particularly in the early career stages (Worth et al, 2022, Ambition Institute, 2022). Research highlights that applicants from white ethnic backgrounds have higher acceptance rates to ITT/ITE courses than every other group (Smith, 2022). It is interesting to note that people from Asian, black and other ethnic backgrounds are over-represented among applicants to ITT/ITE, suggesting that despite the initial interest in entering the profession, acceptance rates onto the courses are significantly lower than their white counterparts. These disparities continue as teachers progress in their careers, with significantly under-representation at senior leadership and headship from those from marginalised communities. The DfE (2018) reports that 8% of teachers come from ethnic minority backgrounds, with 3% of headteachers from ethnic minority backgrounds. In an NFER report (2024), McLean et al show that some 60% of schools in England had an all-white teaching staff, suggesting that there are low acceptance rates of ethnic minority applicants onto ITE programmes. Retention is also significantly lower for racially minoritised teachers, pointing out that high workload, 'overt and covert racial

discrimination; disillusionment with their ability to make a difference for pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and a lack of opportunities for progression' (Sharp and Aston, 2024, p 4). Tensions and difficulties exist in reducing and eliminating disparities for racially marginalised teachers entering and staying in the profession. I use Ahmed's (2021) work on 'affective labour' in Parts 4 and 5 to explore the affective burden placed on marginalised ECTeachers as they navigate in/through/out of a system of built on exclusion.

Having a diverse workforce, particularly in education, offers the opportunity to enhance the opportunities for all bodies. It allows for culturally responsive pedagogies to be adopted, where culturally relevant teaching builds on students and teachers' cultural references to exchange knowledge, allowing room for inclusivity for marginalised groups. Representation in education is crucial, students who see themselves represented by their teachers perform better (Gershenson et al 2019) and the same is true for teachers.

### **#Killjoy Moment**

*It does not surprise me to read about the research on recruitment and retention statistics for those who are marginalised. Everything seems so much harder for us. The system is designed to filter us out. So many obstacles, instances of microaggression and being invisible. Predictable for us as it is a system built on exclusion.*

#### *1.5.1 Epistemologies in crisis*

The crises discussed do not just form the contextual framing of this research, they actively produce particular epistemologies. Many stakeholders in education continue to maintain and practise traditional and universal ways of thinking, rooted in evidence based, western ways of knowing through their practices, norms, discourses and understandings of education (Ball, 2021), explored in Part 2. In the UK, teachers are forced, through policy and pedagogy, to teach in ways that do not take in account the value of diversity and sociocultural informed pedagogies (Ball, 2007; Ladson-Billing 1994, Gillborn, 2008; Marshall et al, 2016), not least because of the accountability of the performance measured neoliberal school as outlined earlier. They preserve the knowledge conceptualisations of rational humanism and that humans are the supreme beings, underlying the 'neoliberal education movement' (Martin and Strom, 2015). This research recognises that there is no 'blame' on the teacher as this reflects a neoliberal, individualistic approach. Rather the focus is shifted to the way teachers are being trained and what shapes dominant educational assemblages they are situated in, paying attention to government ideologies, policies, practices, histories and materialities. Colonial knowledge practices are key to knowledge conceptualisations presented in Part 2. By this, I refer to ways in which

ITE/ECTeaching/Subject English spaces have been shaped by colonialism, privileging western ways of knowing, whilst marginalising other epistemologies. I use decolonial thinkers such as Mignolo (2011), Tuhiwai-Smith (1999), Lorde (1984), Wynter (1995), hooks (1981) and Spivak (1988) to explore intersectionality and the need to decolonise knowledge systems and by having a narrowed knowledge production, what might this represent and/embody for those in the ITE/ECTeaching/Subject English spaces.

This research, therefore, foregrounds the situated knowledges of marginalised ECTeachers, recognising that knowledge is embodied and produced through specific socio-historical-material conditions. Drawing on the critique of universal knowledge by Feminist, Posthuman, New Materialist scholarship (FPNM) (Ahmed, 2013, Franklin-Phipps (2018), Braidotti, 2019, Barad, 2007, Taylor, 2021), the research rejects the idea of singular, objective knowledge and emphasises the importance of location, history and context in understanding experience (Haraway, 2016) particularly in the context of a racialised, neoliberal education landscape.

### **#Killjoy Moment**

*The crisis list is an absolute mess. A painful reminder that privilege gives you the upper hand.*

## **1.6 Research Enquiry**

The research aims to explore the lived experience of marginalised ECTeachers of Subject English, through paying attention to the assemblages they encounter. I outline the concept of assemblage in [1.7.3](#) but here I discuss how the research enquiry guiding this study formed. It did not emerge fully formed and from the beginning stages of the research journey. Instead, I worked through several iterations of research questions, with each one trying to define or set clear boundaries for what to concentrate on and where things should go. However, these formulations increasingly felt at odds with the concern of the study outlined above, and with the post-qualitative orientation shaping the inquiry. As the research developed, it became clear that questions designed to specify outcomes, or lines of answer risked narrowing what could be noticed about teachers' experiences before the inquiry had begun.

The study is therefore oriented by a single research enquiry:

***What becomes possible to notice about the experiences of marginalised ECTeachers of subject English in Birmingham, UK, through a post-qualitative inquiry?***

This enquiry reflects a deliberate shift towards emergence. The phrasing ‘what becomes possible’ acknowledges that the inquiry is shaped through ongoing engagements with theory, participants, place, and my own researcher position, rather than determined in advance. In this sense, the enquiry is not a refinement of earlier research questions but a reorientation of the research itself (St. Pierre, 2011; 2017). Arriving at a single enquiry was not a way of ‘simplifying’ the research, but a decision to remain with complexity. The enquiry helps provide a guiding perspective that helps us to understand and connect experiences of marginalisation, subject English, policies in teacher education and the context of Birmingham, without assuming boundaries. This allows the inquiry to remain responsive to what emerges, including the possibility of uncertainty and affect (Lather, 2013).

In explicitly naming the study as a post-qualitative inquiry, this research acknowledges that the ways we conduct research shape what we come to know. The enquiry therefore is not working on a problem to be solved, but as an openness to attend carefully to the conditions under which particular experiences, that is marginalised ECTeachers of Subject English, come into view.

## 1.7 Conceptual Framework

*‘I came to theory desperate ... to comprehend- to grasp what was happening around and within me’  
(bell hooks, 1991, p 1).*

Like hooks, at the beginning stage of this thesis, I grappled with the different theoretical paradigms that underpin most of the research in education. I was always aspiring for socially just and equitable forms of thinking and working in education and research. I was drawn to post-qualitative ways of thinking as this felt ethical. St Pierre (2014) articulates post-qualitative inquiry begins research by asking how knowledge is produced with the world, rather than being extracted from it. Post-qualitative inquiry therefore ‘put theory to work’ as method, treating thinking, reading, writing as inseparable and ongoing practices rather than discrete stages (St Pierre, 2020). Lather (2013) also adds that post-qualitative inquiry as an entangled, ethical and political practice remains open to uncertainty and is experiential, keeping inquiry open to what might emerge.

It is also a theoretical perspective that is ‘emergent, material, practical, political and relational, entailing a socially engaged and situated mode of producing knowledge’ (Coole and Frost, 2010 p 29). I particularly draw upon Feminist, Posthuman, New Materialist (FPNM) that draws inspiration from the philosophical work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Haraway’s (2016) situated knowledges and Barad’s

(2007) entanglement of discourse and materiality. As I read and re-read such scholarship, I found that while it often made sense (though not always), I needed a deeper and personal understanding. A similar feeling other researchers have experienced (Aagaard, 2022). I needed to understand myself and others like me, in different terms, particularly how we endure and survive navigating our way in/out/through educational systems. Thus, engaging with certain scholarship became more than fuelling intellectual curiosity, it was discovering ways to continue to live. Critically engaging with a feminist killjoy lens, black feminist perspectives and FPNM, enabled me to feel, to connect and be heard in ways that previous scholarship had not. Affect theory resonated as it helped explain how such feelings and forces move bodies (Ahmed, 2014), ‘as it gets closer to the skin’ (Ahmed, 2017). The feminist killjoy lens is a key aspect of this thesis, and through the killjoy moments shared through a scattering of irruptions or disruptions already seen as *#killjoy moments*, and through writing the thesis itself, it is a way of refusing to stay silent or satisfied with the status quo, disrupting and unsettling the dominant discourses.

### *#Killjoy Moment*

*Reading theory has been hard. It has also been frustrating and liberating. But I’ve understood that moments of being connected to ideas, from those who have been marginalised, has elevated my thinking and presence in this world full of injustice. Jarring and joyous. Theory is not about feeling good, it’s about facing the injustice. The injustice won’t fix itself, especially when it’s not heard or understood.*

I employ post-qualitative thinking in this thesis as it puts theory to work as an ‘emergent, embodied and processual practice of knowledge-making’ (Taylor, 2021 in Taylor et al. 2024). Engaging particularly with FPNM allowed me to better attend to the ‘inherent complexity’ of teaching (Strom 2015, p 4). It is through this, I noticed the need for an alternative conceptual framework (Cochran-Smith et al, 2014) as the current, dominant discourse in education appeared to create more unjust and unfavourable outcomes for those who are marginalised, discussed earlier in ‘[Crisis otherwise](#)’ and built upon in the cartography in Part 2.

Arriving at complex theoretical and conceptual frameworks has not been easy or straightforward, it has ‘stretched’ my own thinking (St Pierre, 2020) much more than I envisioned and using these as ‘weapons’ (Deleuze, 1992, p 4) or instruments of transformation has encouraged and motivated me to see an alternative way of thinking. I begin here with an outline of key interrelated concepts drawn from PQI that have shaped my thinking and this thesis: affect, becoming, assemblage, intra-action,

materiality, cartography, as ways of thinking otherwise, whilst also taking up Critical Race Theory and decolonisation alongside post-qualitative inquiry challenging neutrality and foregrounding power. Listening with a feminist ear also becomes a key 'weapon' as I work through this thesis and continue to become-researcher. In the section that follows, I discuss these key concepts.

### 1.7.1 Affect

As discussed earlier, I employ the concept of affect throughout this thesis. It is what has nurtured this research and my own thinking. Affect is understood to be more than just feelings and emotions but the way in which bodies responsively change their spatial surroundings or find ways of surviving it. I particularly make use of Ahmed's conceptualisation of affect. Ahmed's (2010) work is significant as it shows how affect circulates between bodies and environments, shaping experiences and the orientation of bodies towards the world. Morrison (2020, p 146) through their careful examination of Ahmed's use of affect tells us that affect 'connects us to, or separates us from, others, and is linked to the politics of space, mobility, action, power and the formation of identity'. Ahmed views affect as a bodily intentionality as she writes:

*to be affected by something is to evaluate that thing. Evaluations are expressed in how bodies turn toward things... (Ahmed, 2010, p32)*

Here, Ahmed is stating that affect, often seen as a separate category from emotion, is actually a fundamental part of how we understand and engage with the world. It is not just about feelings, but also about the way we unconsciously evaluate things. Our implicit judgments about objects and situations are based on our values, experiences, and cultural background, and these judgments shape our understanding of the world. Ahmed explains affect 'is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects and contrasts Massumi's work, which suggests that affects are autonomous and distinct from emotions' (Ahmed, 2010, p 230-231). Hickey-Moody (2013, p 274) describes affect as 'rhythmic trace of the world incorporated into a body-becoming', that is the trace of the thing that has affected you has 'stuck', it has become part of you as you are continually becoming. I use the term affect and 'stick' to describe the experiences of the marginalised Subject English ECTeachers, that can often leave traces as they experience professional becoming. Navaro-Yashin (2009) argue affectivity to be understood as a socio-material process, particularly as an intensity or energy that shapes experiences. Such intensities or energies produce affects that then shape experience. By engaging with FPNM perspectives and working within the affective assemblage, which refers to the that which collectively generate such intensities, Warren (2020, p 22) explicates

that 'bodies, matter, thoughts, and emotions are produced within these teaching practices and relationalities'. This is a key ontological shift as bodies and affect become sites of knowledge-making through affective relations.

Affect, as a bodily impulse or sensation, can begin as a sensory experience or ingrained habit. However, it can unexpectedly surge, intensifying our capacity for action and reaction (Ahmed, 2014, Hickey-Moody 2020; Massumi, 1987; Stewart, 2007). These surges often catch us off guard, surprising us with their intensity and unpredictability. They can be disorienting but remind us that anything is possible at any moment. This thesis sees the body as not just a passive object of knowledge but an active agent in the production of knowledge. The body is not just a container of experiences but a site of experience and emotions that move us and shape how we are moved which

*involves interpretations of sensations and feelings not only in the sense that we interpret what we feel, but also in that what we feel might be dependent on past interpretations that are not necessarily made by us... knowledge cannot be separated from the bodily world of feeling and sensation; knowledge is bound up with what makes us sweat, shudder, tremble, all those feelings that are crucially felt on the bodily surface, the skin surface where we touch and are touched by the world (Ahmed, 2014, p171).*

Affect is more than just feelings and emotions, but rather 'pre-personal and precognitive intensities that augment and/or diminish a body's capacity to act' (in Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p 15). I am interested in what affect *does* rather than what it *is*. Affect is a material force, through intensities, energies, flows, that register on/within/across bodies to produce and shape our experiences, relationships, and understandings (Massumi, 1995). It is a performative act (Ball, 2003; 2012; 2017), produced through social interactions and embedded in the structures of power and privilege. Here, affect has and is continuing to shape my experiences of working in education as a teacher/researcher, but also the teachers as an ongoing movement in their teacher becoming.

### **1.7.2 Becoming**

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) use the term becoming to describe a process as well as a site of multiplicities. Becoming is ongoing and dynamic and evolves with time. Becoming happens between the 'no longer' and the 'not yet', whilst also tracing the 'possible patterns of becoming' (Braidotti 2013, p 49). Shaping and reshaping of personal and social worlds, entangled with other agents, constitute acts of becoming. Feelings motivate and instigate becomings making the process of becoming

affective. Deleuze emphasises the dynamic and fluid nature of existence, encouraging a focus on the process of becoming rather than the fixed state.

*...there is no being beyond becoming, nothing beyond multiplicity; neither multiplicity nor becoming are appearances or illusions. But neither are there multiple or eternal realities which would be, in turn, like essences beyond appearance. Multiplicity is the inseparable manifestation, essential transformation and constant symptom of unity. Multiplicity is the affirmation of unity; becoming is the affirmation of being.* (Deleuze, 1985, p 23)

The concept of becoming allows us to think about being in a state of constant flux and consider other elements, in this case not just the ECTeacher, through the ‘intersections of multiple agents’ (Jones and Ellis, 2019, p 5). I mobilise the concept of becoming and argue that multiple agents, materiality and affective agents play a significant role in the experience of marginalised ECTeachers of Subject English. Instead of using teacher identity, which alludes to a fixed and stable state, I employ teacher becoming as fluid and in flux. Teacher identity is a term commonly and normatively used in education and despite some movement towards a fluid and dynamic definition, teacher identity is often linked to the attainment of specific goals or outcomes. Neoliberal policies have significantly shaped the construction of teacher identity (Sach, 2003, Carabine, 2021, Ball, 2016). Performative measures related to pay, continuous professional development programmes often allude to the ‘attainment’ of something in order to continue becoming a better, more improved teacher. I use the term becoming teacher to illuminate the constantly shifting and evolving nature of being entangled with multiple agents, to conceptualise the field of teacher education and professionalism beyond fixed categories and standardisation towards a continuous flow of change and transformation. I explore this notion of teacher identity and teacher becomings in more detail in Part 2.

It is not only the teacher *becomings* that have mattered in this thesis, but my own *becomings* throughout this period of time, *becoming* teacher educator, researcher and writer as well as the *becoming* of this thesis, which I have written about earlier and document further as I continue to write.

### **1.7.3 Assemblage**

Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of assemblage is mobilised here as it offers a means of thinking of ‘bodies beyond oppositional categories’ (in Bazzul and Kayumova, 2015 p 3) and reframes our understanding of the encounters between bodies and objects. Assemblage offers a different way of understanding the body in its connection with other bodies, both human and more-than human, linking the bodily experiences to material objects and social practice.

In this thesis, I refer to the marginalised ECTeacher as part of the assemblage in situ and recognise the multitude of connections and influences that shape their experiences. Viewing the marginalised ECTeacher as an assemblage allows the considerations of the various components connected to this space, such as teachers, students, policies, curriculum, discourse as well as the physical classroom space, technology, social, cultural climate of the school, biographies, histories etc. This is not an exhaustive list but an illustration at what matters and what elements are collectively shaping teaching practices (Strom, 2015, p2). The marginalised ECTeacher of Subject English becomes a key component within this dynamic system, shaping and being shaped by the materiality and more-than-human actants that surround them.

If we start thinking about teaching as an 'assemblage', which conceptualises that any number of components intra-act in dynamic ways, folding and unfolding in multiple directions (DeLanda, 2006), then you can start to think about the different assemblages that exist within the teaching spaces. Deleuze (2007, p 177) states that in assemblages '... you find state of things, bodies, various combinations of bodies...modes of expressions...'. By focusing on the relationality and becoming of these elements we can challenge the traditional notions of teacher identity and development.

Assemblages are understood as dynamic, and constantly shifting arrangements of relationships, materials, discourses, affect that come together to produce particular conditions of possibility, in this case teacher becomings. Assemblages are fluid and unpredictable, the elements within an assemblage interact and shape how teachers live, feel and move through their professional spaces. This research attends to the assemblage the participants find themselves in at a particular moment(s), paying attention to the stories they tell. Guided by Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) philosophy of assemblage, this thesis is organised around an intentionally fluid line of enquiry. This enquiry is not treated as a fixed framework, but as a provocative and nuanced approach that fosters continual questioning through the logic of 'and, and, and...' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). It supports an exploratory approach to thinking, doing, reading 'data' and becoming-with the research, allowing space for unexpected encounters and understanding of the experiences of marginalised ECTeachers of Subject English.

#### **1.7.4 Intra-action**

Intra-action is a key concept in this thesis where it challenges the conventional notions of interaction and emphasises the inseparability of entities and the nature of their relationships. Barad (2007) contrasts 'intra-action' with 'interaction', where the former highlights the mutual constitution of

entities through inherent connections, whilst latter implies that separate entities act upon each other. Barad (2007) describes intra-action 'as a dynamism of forces' (Barad, 2007, p 141), in which all designated 'things' or 'agents' are constantly exchanging, diffracting, influencing, and working inseparably. Intra-action describes the mutual constitution of entangled agency. In this regard, people and things are fused together – this is intra(actions) and not inter(action). The two bodies intra-act and are not completely separated from each other. In this thesis it is the multiple and complex intra-actions that the marginalised ECTeacher of Subject English encounter which matter, and I pay particular attention to what these intra-actions mean for future practice and their own teacher becomings. Thinking in terms of intra-actions means moving away from subject-object oppositions, linearity, cause and effect relationships as well as individual agency and towards the entanglement of inseparable agencies.

### 1.7.5 Materiality

In this thesis, I draw upon post-qualitative theory to use materiality for thinking with, rather than about, the research. Materiality is not treated as a set of discrete objects to be analysed, but as an active and relational force that shapes the production of knowledge. Matter here shapes what can be thought, felt, said and known. Following Barad's (2007) notion of intra-action, above, matter is not made up of passive elements, but rather a 'doing', emerging through intra-actions (Barad, 2007, p140) and so materiality is understood as emerging through entangled relations between bodies, discourses, affects, spaces, texts and representations (Maclure, 2013). From these perspectives, the research attends to how particular material-discursive elements come to matter in and through the research process itself. I use this concept of materiality throughout the research itself, particularly when approaching data as 'lively' and affective, producing moments of intensity that resist analytical closure (Maclure, 2013, p 658). In this thesis, I use materiality with actual objects, such as items of clothing (hijab<sup>3</sup>, niqab<sup>4</sup>, keffiyeh<sup>5</sup>, bits of paper etc (Part 3) that illuminate the experiences of marginalised ECTeachers. Maclure's work on materiality invites us to remain with the uncertainty and Braidotti (2013) situates these material elements within an explicitly ethical and political frame, arguing materiality shapes subjectivity, thought and knowledge through embodied relations that are always historically and socially located (Braidotti, 2013, p 61). Taken together, these thinkers position

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<sup>3</sup> Hijab in Islam is a head covering worn by many Muslim women as an expression of modesty and devotion to God

<sup>4</sup> Niqab is a face veil worn by some Muslim women that covers the face except for the eyes as an expression of modesty and religious commitment

<sup>5</sup> Keffiyeh is a traditional Middle Eastern scarf typically patterned in black/white or red/white worn for protection from the sun and dust and widely recognised as a symbol of Palestinian identity and solidarity.

materiality as a generative framework that does something. This is explored throughout this research as it conditions the ECTeachers professional becomings.

### 1.7.6 Cartography

Post-qualitative approaches offer a critical alternative to a traditional 'literature review', which resembles a static and objective view of a given space, often human-centred and not acknowledging the complex interplay of material, affective and embodied forces that shape educational experiences. By presenting a post-qualitative cartography, which I call a *Killjoy Cartography*, of Subject English and the wider ECTeaching spaces, rather than a traditional literature review, there is the opportunity to challenge the dominant discourses, whilst expanding the focus beyond human perspectives, considering the agency and interconnectedness of material and affective elements (Braidotti, 2006, Ahmed, 2014). The *Killjoy Cartography* does not resemble a literature review as it does not establish themes or a gap, but traces the connections across policy, practice and materials. It is presented as an exploratory chapter, rather than something classified, offering a mapping of the conditions that makes Subject Teacher teaching possible for marginalised bodies. The chapter is then split into 'Terrains' (Terrain 1, Terrain 2 etc), each marking a different zone of forces through which marginalisation is reproduced and encountered. Movement between the Terrains is not linear but recursive and at times acts like a rupture. Short crossings signal shifts in orientation rather than argumentative transitions. The map does not stabilise meaning but is a situated tracing of edges, blockages and openings encountered along the way. As a nomadic cartographer, I invite the reader to come along to different points on the map, following emergent paths in the manner of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) rhizome, attending to the multiplicities that illuminate the experiences of marginalised teachers of Subject English.

By integrating post-qualitative inquiry and Ahmed's (2022) feminist killjoy work, a *Killjoy Cartography* can become more of an inclusive, critical and creative practice, whilst speaking out against the injustice. It can reveal the power dynamics embedded within these spaces, challenging dominant discourses and acknowledging the material and affective forces that shape the experiences of the marginalised ECTeacher of Subject English. It allows for another layer to emerge as a way of understanding a complex space. My discussions within the killjoy cartography oscillate between the micro-level spaces such as in schools and classrooms and then the macro level of broader educational spaces. This approach attends to the nuances of practice while critically engaging with the broader socio-political and material conditions of educations, offering a richer and more ethically attuned way of understanding complex educational matters. Ahmed (2019) argues that traditional academic ways

of writing often silence or even exacerbate the marginalisation of already marginalised voices. In response to this, I adopt a killjoy orientation as a writing practice in addition to its conceptual use. As mentioned earlier, I also embed *#Killjoy Moments* throughout to trouble normative expectations of academic writing but also dominant knowledge form.

When attention is given to marginalised voices, they are not only heard but attended to and felt, acknowledging their affective and material presence within the spaces (assemblages) they are in. This is one of the justifications for presenting a *Killjoy Cartography*, allowing for an affective and situated map to emerge.

### 1.7.7 Critical Race Theory and Decolonisation

In this research, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is embedded as a conceptual ‘tool’, alongside the PQ approaches, to pay attention to the racialised dynamics embedded within ECTeaching spaces. CRT’s focus on the centrality of race and systemic inequalities (Delgado and Stefania, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998) allows a critical insight of how educational policies and practices reproduce and sustain marginalisation. Crucially, CRT shifts the focus away from the individual and towards how racism is structurally embedded within institutions and social systems (Gillborn, 2007). Within this research, CRT provides a crucial framework for understanding how institutional practices can maintain racial hierarchies while appearing fair and objective (Gillborn, 2007; Bhopal, 2024).

In this thesis, CRT is applied as a relational and emergent tool that aligns with post-qualitative inquiry, attending to the entanglements of race with policy, institutional norms, material conditions, and affective forces. This approach foregrounds the complexity and relationality of knowledge production (St. Pierre, 2011; Jackson and Mazzei, 2012), enabling the mapping of educational spaces and the reading of data as lived, embodied, and affective experiences of marginalised ECTeachers. By integrating CRT with post-qualitative approaches, this thesis foregrounds how power circulates through educational spaces, shaping ideas about becoming a ECTeacher. Such an approach also draws attention to voices and experiences that may be overlooked or silenced by more traditional methodological and epistemological frameworks, positioning racialised experiences as central to understanding the complex assemblages that constitute ECTeacher spaces.

Building on these commitments, decolonisation is central to this research and shapes both how the study was designed and carried out, as well as its ethical orientation. Responding to Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999, p1) call to ‘challenge the colonisation of our minds’ and to dismantle the power structures

embedded in knowledge production, this thesis engages decolonisation as an ongoing methodological, epistemological, and ethical practice. My chosen approach demands a deep reflection on my own positionality and how it influences the research. My own killjoy moments throughout this thesis, reflects my own intentions to trouble and challenge the dominant narratives that exist, particularly in the spaces I am researching. This self-awareness is crucial to ensuring the research is attentive and responsive to the participants and the research need, ensuring that I am taking a response-able approach. Drawing on Barad (2007), response-ability refers to a relational and ethical accountability in which the researcher is entangled within the research process, recognising that ‘we are part of the world in its ongoing intra-activity’ (Barad, 2007, p 393) and is therefore responsible for how knowledge is made.

As Zembylas (2018) argues, decolonisation is an essential dimension of working with post-qualitative ideas. By thinking with a decolonial lens and alongside CRT and PQI, this thesis works towards unsettling colonial logics within both research practices and educational spaces. Decolonial feminist thinkers are integral to this work and to my own thinking. As Gopal (2021) reminds us:

*Decolonisation is meaningless without a set of principles – anticolonialism – that enables it to emerge as a practice that is sensitive to the present and to context while yet steeped in historical awareness (Gopal, 2021, p 880).*

Therefore, decolonisation is an ongoing process and calls to continuously challenge and transform how we engage with power resonates deeply throughout this thesis. The cartography presented in Part 2 critically maps the historical and ongoing power relations that have marginalised non-dominant knowledges and thinkers, aligning with Patel’s (2010, p61) call to dismantle the ‘long-standing deference to whiteness as intellect’. Through a deliberate commitment to citing marginalised and decolonial scholarship, this thesis exposes the structures and epistemic hierarchies that sustain dominant, western knowledge production in ECTeacher spaces (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). It maps out how knowledge is produced within these spaces and the spaces of doing research itself, serving to maintain its own authority and superiority (Mignolo, 2007; Prasad, 2003).

Taken together, CRT and decolonisation foreground the situated nature of knowledge. As Haraway (1988) argues, knowledge is never universal or neutral, but always produced within specific social, cultural, historical, and political contexts. These commitments underpin the analytical and methodological choices of this thesis and will be taken up in greater depth in Part 2 and Part 3. It is

through this, I foreground the way power circulates through educational spaces, shaping who is heard, seen or valued. This also illuminates the intra-actions of policy, institutional norms and affective atmospheres on the experiences of those in question and encourages the attentiveness to the voices that traditional methods and epistemologies might overlook, making central the racialised experiences as integral to understanding the complex assemblages that make up the educational spaces marginalised bodies are in.

### 1.7.8 Listening with a Feminist Ear

As mentioned earlier in [Part 1.4](#) and reflecting the title of this thesis, listening differently emerged as an important aspect of this work. What became particularly useful in this becoming-thesis, was Sara Ahmed's notion of 'feminist ears' (Ahmed, 2022). Ahmed uses the term to describe a mode of listening that attends to complaint and the way knowledge often circulates through affective and embodied forms rather than just words. Feminist ears do not simply attend to what is said, but to what struggles to be heard, to interruptions, to silences and moments of recognition between the one sharing and the one listening. As a conceptual orientation, listening with a feminist ear offered a way of thinking about who is able to hear and be heard and under what conditions. Ahmed (2022) tells us,

*... we hear what each other can hear.*

*...we hear each other hear how we are not heard.*

*...we are louder not only when we are heard together, but when we hear together.*

*So, when I say that my method in researching complaint was to become a feminist ear, this becoming was not mine alone. (Ahmed, feministkilljoys, 2022)*

In her blog, Ahmed further uses the metaphor of doors to show how and where complaints can be made, noting that complaints often take place 'behind closed doors', referring to stories being shared confidentially and to the practice of keeping stories secret and hidden from public. Drawing on this idea, listening with a feminist ear emerged as a practice to open the closed door and bring visibility to experiences that are kept hidden from normal everyday view.

## 1.8 Structure of Thesis

This thesis encapsulates the research journey which I have arrived at and worked within, through a post-qualitative way of thinking and doing research. The thesis is shaped by a research assemblage

comprised of a range of bodies such as myself, participants, supervisory team; spaces like university, schools, coffee shops; practices through policies, curricula and pedagogies as well as representations through culture, religion, histories and beliefs (Ferguson, 2023). These elements come together in relational ways to shape the research process and the thesis itself. As a result, different concepts emerge across the thesis because they surfaced steadily through doing the research itself, rather than through a predetermined or linear design or way of doing. While writing this, Haraway's (2017) exploration on the concept of decolonising time comes to mind, as she argues;

*'Decolonising time' involves the cultivation of the capacity to be still, to listen and not to self-certain. It is to understand that colonial time might be defined as Plantationocene time, as the time of simplification for the extraction of value, for its distribution in hierarchical ways, coupled with massive genocides of both people and other creatures – the kind of simplifications and displacements that go along with disappearing. (Haraway, 2017, n.p)*

In this sense, my research process echoes Haraway's call to decolonise time, as it privileges slowing down, listening and allowing concepts to emerge through the practice of doing research rather than forcing a structure to fit in the research process. What follows is an outline of the structure of thesis that embodies this slow, emergent research.

I have already, in Part 1, set out the crises that outlines the thesis. I have located the research within 6 crises in education and research, attending to the conditions that trouble the space for marginalised ECTeachers of Subject English. Part 1 provides the conceptual and ethical urgency for the research and foregrounds the theoretical perspectives.

Part 2 presents a post-qualitative-informed cartography of the situated space in which Subject English teaching and ECTeachers' professional becomings take shape. This is an entangled space, and rather than seeking to simplify or disentangle it, I explicitly embrace this complexity (Strom, 2020). In this part, I explore reading, writing, and speaking + listening as assemblages, exploring how schools' discourses promote normative, 'fixed' ways of understanding these practices. I also trace the policy landscapes that shape teacher becomings through a close examination of policy and practice and ideas about 'becoming' a teacher. I use the language of maps with 'terrains' and 'points' to trace how the space is complex and marginalising.

In Part 3, I focus on the processes of enquiry, attending to what I did, why I did it, and what emerged through a process of 'thinking without method' (Jackson, 2017). This part introduces the participants

and their stories. Here, listening with ‘feminist ears’ (Ahmed, 2022) emerges as an ethical, relational, and response-able practice that guided the research as it unfolded.

Part 4 offers a ‘reading of the data’ through a process I have coined ‘affraction’, which brings together Barad’s (2007) concept of diffraction and Ahmed’s (2014) work on affect. Through ‘affraction’, I diffract for affect the participants’ stories, employing agential cuts to attend to particular moments. Reading the ‘data’ in this way, through ‘affraction’ also becomes a methodological contribution of this thesis. Affractive readings are presented as ‘sticky moments’, through which I consider what lingers, sticks, and leaves residue.

Part 5 dwells with these sticky moments revealed by the ECTeachers, and it is here that I explicitly ‘stay with the trouble’ (Haraway, 2016, p18). This part of the thesis moves from tracing affective intensities that shape ECTeachers’ becomings to dwelling within the institutional textures that make those becomings both possible and painful. I discuss how the emergence of listening with ‘feminist ears’ (Ahmed, 2022) enabled ECTeachers to reveal granular exclusions that continue to shape their professional becomings. This section also considers the possibilities and potentials of working with post-qualitative approaches and reflects on what and how this thesis contributes to broader educational and research contexts.

I end this thesis with Part 6 leaving residual remarks, providing a space to think with what remains and to consider how we might move forward from this work.

### **#Killjoy Moment**

*I spent a lot of time writing and re-writing sections, trying to make the thesis neat, coherent, well-behaved. Each edit fixed one thing, but at the same time unsettled another. I realised this is research, messy and not straightforward. Much like life itself, always unfinished.*

## **Part 2 - Killjoy Cartography**

*I learn a way of looking at the world that is more accurate, complex, multilayered, multidimensioned, more truthful. To see the world of overlapping circles, like movement on the mill pond after a fish has jumped, instead of the courthouse square with me at the middle, even if I am on the ground. I feel the need to look differently because I've learned that what is presented to me as an accurate view of the world is frequently a lie. (Pratt, 1984, p17)*

This part of the thesis develops a post-qualitative informed cartography of the situated space in which Subject English teaching and ECTeachers' professional becoming take shape. Rather than offering a top-down review or linear account of what exists, which once written is fixed (Mycroft, 2020), a mapping is in constant flux. Braidotti (2018, p 33) suggests that a 'cartography is a theoretically based and politically informed account of the present that aims at tracking the production of knowledge and subjectivity'. Following Ulmer and Koro-Ljungberg (2015) and Segarra et al. (2023), cartographies attend to physical, emotional, and conceptual territories, objects, memories, and atmospheres, while tracing the social and political forces that animate them. This mapping builds upon what is already understood about the Subject English and ITE/ECTeaching spaces while remaining open to what has not yet come into view. Although it has taken its current form during becoming-thesis, the map does not begin here. It extends backwards through my own teaching experiences in Birmingham schools and forward into the ongoing entanglements of my identities as teacher, researcher, PGR representative, mother etc. This cartography does not simply represent different moments in time as it also traces how these moments are dynamically entangled with matter.

This temporal structure can be understood through Barad's (2013) concept of spacetime mattering, a neologism that refuses linear accounts of past, present and future. As Barad explains 'matter doesn't move in time...Matter does time. Matter materialises and enfolds in different temporalities' (Barad, 2013, p17). From this perspective, my own teaching experiences are not fixed experiences that sit behind doctoral work as they are continually reworked through the practices of mapping and readings. As Barad further argues,

*the past was never simply there to begin with and the future is not simply what will unfold; the 'past' and the 'future' are iteratively reworked and enfolded through the iterative practices of spacetime mattering... all are one phenomenon (Barad, 2013, p28).*

Attending to the spacetime mattering in this way allows the cartography to hold together multiple temporalities and identities without fixing them. The classroom experiences, policy structures and histories mapped are thickly layered. My own positionality is part of that layering: I am not outside the map but entangled deeply within it. My own positionality as a researcher, entangled with Subject English, ITE/ECF structures, and the Birmingham context, forms part of the terrain. The map is not neutral; it is material, lived, and always in motion (Braidotti, 2019).

**#Killjoy Moment**

*As I mapped, re-mapped, and continuously edited this part of the thesis, I found it very, very difficult to write linearly and separately about the different elements to this study. I think it is impossible to do, if we were to really absorb the complexities of this space, and the different layers that constitute this space.*

What follows, as mentioned earlier in [Part 1.6.6](#), are a series of ‘Terrains’ (Terrain 1, Terrain 2 etc), each marking a zone in which marginalisation is reproduced within the situated space of Subject English and ECTeacher policy contexts. With terrains, there are ‘points’ (Point 1a, Point 2 etc) which serve as sub-headings but more significantly as a point of intensity or moment of relational rupture, where the discourse and practices that shape experiences converge or diverge (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). From a PQ perspective these can also be seen as ‘agential cuts’ (Barad, 2007) where phenomena emerge through their entanglement with bodies, texts, policies and affective forces. I enact these agential cuts since my choices in what to highlight and examine actively shape which aspects of the phenomena come into view. Barad (2007, p 432) contends that it ‘is only through different enactments of agential cuts, different differences, that it can come to know different aspects of ‘itself’’. The terrains are then themselves spaces in which marginalisation is enacted.

I will take you through each ‘Terrain’ to illuminate Subject English as a tightly regulated school subject, mapping the practices of reading, writing, speaking and listening within Subject English as sites where dominant knowledge practices circulate and where bodies are further marginalised through audibility, legitimacy, and surveillance. While these elements can be distinguished for clarity, my focus is on their entangled relations how they make visible specific material-discursive violences and how the different forms of complaint, refusal, and *#Killjoy moments* emerge within them.

Within the ‘Terrains’, I trace the affective pressures, policy, socio-political that shape this landscape for ECTeachers, touching on key discourses of professional regulation that govern how teachers should be. These include the National Curriculum for English KS3 and KS4 (DfE, 2014b), Teachers’ Standards (DfE, 2011), The Golden Thread (DfE, 2022), ITTECF (DfE, 2024), Prevent (2015), Fundamental British Values (DfE, 2014). As I will go on to show, these policy documents foreground performativity, metrics, and accountability (Ball 2003, 2021); standardised pathways of teacher development and professionalism; surveillance, risk, and the shaping of ‘acceptable’ citizenship. I also consider the event known as ‘The Trojan Horse affair’ in [Terrain 11 - ‘Assemblages under Surveillance’](#). A local event which was significant and consequential in accelerating and shaping the national Prevent strategy that reconfigured Muslimness (racialisation), trust, legitimacy, and governance in schools (Vince, 2018; Iqbal and Abbas, 2024). These pressures are not analysed in full here; instead, they form layers within the cartography that Part 2 develops.

For marginalised ECTeachers, they generate specific affective demands around voice, visibility, and belonging. The mapping unsettles institutional smoothness, allowing discomfort, friction, and critique to emerge. These *#Killjoy moments* mark my own participation in the research assemblage and enable the affective and political intensities of Subject English to surface more fully.

### *#Killjoy moments*

*Racism is well documented. But pointing it out, mapping it, is complaining. Writing about it is a way of opening doors that were meant to stay closed, letting it creak and shift, even if only a little. Making sure that this space as it is does not feel normal.*

### *Subject English*

It is essential to provide a short description of Subject English in secondary schools which allows for the contextual mapping of terrains that follows to emerge. Subject English today sits at the intersection of a long and complex policy history, pedagogical traditions, and ideological struggles that continue to shape its purpose, content, and practices (Elliott, 2020; Elliott and Courtney, 2023; Elliott et al., 2021). As a compulsory subject taught in schools and one of the most scrutinised areas of the secondary curriculum, Subject English carries a dual burden: it is positioned as both an emancipatory space for personal, cultural, and creative expression (Morrell, 2005) and a tightly regulated domain governed by state-defined standards, assessments, and accountability measures (Davison and Daly, 2014; Goodwyn, 2020) and dominated by Whiteness (Picower, 2021). This duality is not new. The very foundations of Subject English, as established, for example, through historical reports such as Newbolt Report (1921), constructed English as a humanist endeavour, emphasising individual development, moral cultivation, and the humanising potential of literary study (Smith, 2019). But educational reforms that followed steered towards broader ideological and political aims. The reorganisation of schooling by the Education Reform Act (1988), introduced the National Curriculum and embedded Subject English within an outcomes-driven standardised model of education that followed (Ball, 2003; Ellis, 2023).

In contemporary secondary schools in England, Subject English is typically divided into English Language and English Literature, each accompanied by high-stakes GCSE examinations that significantly influence pedagogy, curriculum design, and teacher practice, as well as performative measures of schools themselves (Elliot and Davies, 2025). With the rise of neo-liberal educational reform, most notably under Michael Gove's tenure, as UK's Secretary of State for Education between 2010-2014, the subject has been further codified through a 'knowledge-rich' curriculum aligned with

E.D. Hirsch's (1987, 2007) advocacy for cultural literacy, discussed more in Part 2.3 (DfE, 2013; Olssen, 2016). This has resulted in an intensified focus on standardised knowledge, canonical texts, and measurable outcomes (Ball, 2017), often at the expense of creativity, student agency, and the broader sociocultural dimensions of language (Yandell, 2017; Cushing and Pye, 2021). The current National Curriculum (DfE, 2014) therefore sits in tension with its humanist inheritance: while it claims to introduce pupils to 'the best that has been thought and said,' (DfE, 2014, p 5), it simultaneously narrows what counts as legitimate knowledge and marginalises diverse linguistic and cultural practices (Elliot and Davies, 2025), which I will explore in the cartography that follows. Current literature reimagines Subject English and challenges the colonial roots and cultural hegemonic thinking that dominate this space (Elliot, 2021; Elliot and Davies, 2025, Bennett et al, 2022), although this is yet to be enacted in policy, showing a significant theory and practice gap.

Teachers and students experience these tensions daily. Standard English, linguistic 'correctness', and fluency as central pillars of policy discourse, carry affective and political weight, often reinforcing deficit framings of racialised and classed bodies (Cushing and Snell, 2022; Ahmed, 2004, 2010). As a result, Subject English becomes a site where identities are negotiated, sanctioned, or suppressed, and where the emotional labour of conforming to dominant language norms can leave 'traces' on bodies (Ahmed, 2010) such as how teaching grammar and some forms of assessment shapes students' experience of language as defined by rule and is constraining rather than expressive (Cushing and Helks, 2021), as well marginalising linguistic identities and tensions with how marginalised bodies are presented (Cushing, 2021).

Understanding this evolving assemblage, its policies, histories, affects, and epistemologies, is crucial when presenting the cartographic work that follows. It is within this entanglement of humanist legacies (Smith, 2018), neo-liberal reforms, competing knowledge claims, and the lived realities of teachers and students that Subject English operates today. Mapping this terrain requires attending to the policies, discourses and histories of Subject English but also the affective flows and constraints that shape the experiences of marginalised ECTeachers and the subject itself. In the next section, I illustrate the hierarchies that make up Subject English, reading, writing and speaking + listening. These compartmentalise Subject English into discrete hierarchical areas and reproduce normative assumptions about ability and legitimacy within the subject, as well as influencing the way bodies move in and out of these spaces. In the next section, I set out a journey through Terrain 1, where the normative practices of reading and writing are exemplars of racialised practices.

### ***#Killjoy Moment***

*Where to begin with mapping out this space, feels like I'm trying to put together a jigsaw puzzle with missing pieces, a blurred image and a constantly shifting frame... Difficult and yet nearly impossible, but I am hopeful that the complex and condemning picture is demonstrated. Everything matters.*

## Terrain 1: Reading and Writing as colonial assemblages

Reading and writing in Subject English are frequently presented as neutral and universal practices, stripped of their political histories. Yet through a FPNM lens, they are more accurately understood as assemblages; material-discursive-affective practice shaped by colonial histories that organise bodies, texts, affects, and expectations within contemporary education. Reading and writing are not simply cognitive skills; they carry racialised, historical, and affective residues that shape what counts as legitimate knowledge and who is imagined as a legitimate knower. These classroom practices have been conditioned by centuries of empire, linguistic hierarchy, and literary gatekeeping (Nasir, 2020) and continue to structure the terrain that marginalised ECTeachers find themselves in.

This thesis positions Subject English as an exemplar to foreground how othering and marginalisation become sedimented in everyday educational practices and how these dynamics shape the becoming of ECTeachers. There is a plethora of research suggesting that marginalised teachers and students alike experience racism (Crozier, 2012; Bolivier, 2013; Sveinsson, 2009; Bhopal, 2016; 2025). Joseph-Salisbury (2020, p3) further shows that racism continues to underpin 'key socio-political events and shape lives in profound ways', noting that the teaching workforce is overwhelmingly white.

Building on this, the killjoy cartography works by tracing how texts, policies, bodies, histories, and come together to shape teacher subjectivities and experiences. Subject English provides a particularly charged site for examining these entanglements. It is not simply a curriculum area but a historical, cultural project, rooted in colonial Britain, linguistic purity (Elliot and Davies, 2025; Cushing, 2020, 2023), and national identity formation. Reading, writing, speaking, and listening function as racialising, material-discursive practices rather than neutral skills (Rosa and Flores, 2017, Cushing, 2022, 2023). They carry normative expectations of correctness and compliance, creating affective atmospheres that regulate who can speak, who can be heard, and who is recognised as legitimate.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides a crucial lens for understanding these dynamics, offering a framework for understanding how race and racism are embedded within social structures and institutions how policies and practices that appear neutral often reproduce racial inequalities and hierarchies (Gillborn, 2008). Delgado and Stefancic (2000, p 151) posit that,

*racism is normal in society... racism is an ingrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture... It can do little about the business-as-usual forms of racism that people of colour confront every day and that account for much misery, alienation, and despair.*

In this sense, it becomes important to map these patterns as racism becomes an ordinary feature of the educational terrain and understanding it requires exploring how everyday structures reproduce inequality, particularly in the situated space of Subject English teaching and ECTeacher becomings. Sara Ahmed's work on affect helps us to extend this point by thinking about how racism is also felt in everyday life. Ahmed (2022) argues that emotions circulate socially, 'sticking' to bodies and shaping how they move through spaces. In this way, ongoing exclusion in the form of racism produces ongoing affective consequences that accumulate over time. Within Terrain 1, the section that follows, maps a series of points. These are points of intensity or moments where affective, material and discursive forces converge (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) through orienting the reader through the materiality of reading, the normalisation of whiteness, the canon, writing as a privileged practice, and reading and writing as knowledge rich.

### **#Killjoy moments**

*English is about feelings, connection, language, power, storytelling. I love the elegance of a well-crafted line. But English is also where frustration gathers, where I felt 'not good enough,' where access was conditional, where pleasure collided with pressure. It is an ambivalent space: beautiful and bruising in equal measure.*

### **Point 1a - Orientation and the Materiality of Reading**

***This point maps how reading operates as a material-discursive practice that orients bodies and texts within subject English, shaping how marginalised teachers navigate educational spaces.***

Ahmed's (2006) concept of orientation offers a powerful framing for understanding how reading practices in Subject English remain shaped by inherited colonial trajectories. Institutions 'take the shape of what they are orientated toward,' (Ahmed, 2006, p 54) and the Subject English curriculum has long been oriented towards white, Eurocentric, western traditions. These histories do not exist as a past history of the curriculum, but continue to structure what appears to be valuable, teachable and important in contemporary education. Examples within the curriculum and school space reveal how this type of orientation operates. School reading lists, derived from the expectations of the National Curriculum privilege canonical authors, which I discuss in the next section, exam texts and anthologies centred on English rooted material; displays in English classrooms exemplifying 'great writers' such as Shakespeare, Dickens etc, England flags and Union Jack motifs visually reinforce the message that British literature is the gravitational centre of the subject. Exam boards such as AQA, Edexcel and OCR circulate tightly curated texts that almost all reproduce the same British heritage texts.

The National Curriculum for English (DfE, 2014) solidifies this orientation. First introduced in 1988 as part of the Education Reform Act, it was designed to establish consistent standards, raise attainment and ensure that all students received a balanced and coherence programme of study. Several changes were made over the years with the current iteration of the National Curriculum (DfE, 2014, p 5) placing a strong emphasis on ‘knowledge-rich’ and ‘cultural literacy’ – discussed in [Terrain 4](#), as we move through the cartography. As of 2026, the DfE have announced a comprehensive overhaul of the National Curriculum since 2014, following the Curriculum and Assessment Review (DfE, 2025), which will bring further change but emphasis is still placed on the continuing privileging of canonical texts over diverse literary perspectives. Such emphasis or de-emphasis privileges a narrow conception of knowledge and culture rooted in hegemonic, Eurocentric traditions. It specifies that students must study ‘a Shakespeare play,’ ‘representative Romantic poetry,’ ‘a 19th-century novel,’ and ‘British fiction since 1914,’ (DfE, 2014, p12) the curriculum reproduces the inherited canon as compulsory cultural inheritance rather than one option among many, reinforcing a hierarchical notion of valuable knowledge. These texts form the central pillar of this assemblage. Students’ reading worlds repeatedly return to British landscapes centred around white protagonists, and Eurocentric content, values and morals. Within this assemblage, teachers are positioned as makers of these ‘reading worlds’, required to circulate texts and pedagogies that privilege certain histories and ways of being while marginalising others (Apple, 2004).

I argue that this orientation is more than an ideological one, it is also material. Ahmed (2006) emphasises that orientations are made through how things, such as objects, spaces, texts, accumulate around certain bodies and histories. When read alongside Deleuze’s (1990) understanding of the body, this becomes especially illuminating. For Deleuze, a body is not just a human body but an assemblage of different parts which are dynamic and heterogeneous. He says:

*however small it [body] may be, is composed of an infinite number of particles; it is the relations of motion and rest, of speeds and slowness between particles, that define a body, the individuality of a body. Secondly, a body affects other bodies or is affected by other bodies; it is this capacity for affecting and being affected that also defines a body in its individuality (Deleuze, 1990, p123).*

Here, bodies are ‘bodies without organs’ (BwO) (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) defined not by a fixed structure but by their capacities and intensities to be affected. In the context of Subject English, the curriculum, classroom displays, exam texts etc function as the particles and relations that compose the body of the subject. They gather around particular histories and, in doing so, orient Subject English toward whiteness as its habitual direction. Ahmed, although differing to Deleuze’s conceptualisation

of bodies, argues that bodies are oriented by the worlds they inhabit, and in turn, they shape those spaces (Ahmed, 2006). Certain forms of reading, literary traditions and certain student/teacher identities become more possible and more valued, while others are rendered less possible or even impossible. As Saldanha (2007, p13) notes, 'a body's capacities are always linked to its physical singularity' and the spaces it occupies, such as the 'school', 'circumscribe what is possible and what is not'. In this sense, the orientation of Subject English in the way it is currently practised is enacted through the very materiality of its curriculum, spaces and practices, structuring whose stories come to matter and whose capacities to engage or belong are enabled or restricted.

### **#Killjoy Moment**

*Sometime in 2015...*

*Today, I was introduced to the new texts for the National Curriculum 2014 English Language specification, and I have to admit, I felt a wave of uncertainty wash over me. As a young-ish English teacher (at 25), I wondered how I would engage my students with the works of 19th-century writers (The Sign of Four) and Romantic poets (Byron...), while also adapting to the new grading style of numbers. I'm not that interested in some of the writers myself! I have to counsel myself and think about my own resilience and determination of finding ways to make these texts come alive in the classroom, despite them being written by authors who seem worlds apart from our students' experiences. One step at a time, I guess...*

Viewed through an assemblage perspective (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Barad, 2007), this is an entanglement of policy, materiality, and affective orientations. The canon emerges as part of this assemblage because policies, exam structures, classroom pedagogies, and national agenda all work together to maintain the status quo. Subject English is part of this as the institutional pathways for delivering anything else are fragile, risky, or deemed 'inappropriate'.

The result is a Subject English curriculum oriented toward Whiteness. As bodies repeatedly encounter the same literary lineage, they inherit a narrative in which whiteness is ordinary, literary, and central, while other histories are peripheral, optional, or absent. This orientation shapes not only what students learn but how teachers, particularly marginalised ECTeachers, navigate the classroom, the curriculum, and the institution.

### **Point 1b - Whiteness as the Norm**

***This point maps how whiteness functions as an unmarked norm within Subject English, while rendering racialised difference hypervisible.***

Whiteness becomes the unmarked norm in Subject English, reproduced through habitual curricular orientation. Whiteness can be understood as a system of power and privilege that shape institutions,

knowledge and everyday life (Gillborn, 2008). Key to Critical Race Theory (CRT), Gillborn (2015) argues that whiteness operates as an embedded structural agent that organises educational policy and outcomes, sustaining racial advantage even when policies and practices appear racially neutral. Cushing (2021, 2022, 2023) shows how whiteness is reproduced through language and curriculum policies that privilege White norms of knowledge and other practices are deemed deficient. Elliot (2024, 2025) builds on the dominance of Whiteness and is the norm in English education, particularly within Subject English where canonical texts normalise white experiences and marginalise alternative perspectives. Scholarship in this area demonstrates that whiteness is a powerful, invisible framework that defines as legitimate knowledge. The dominance of western knowledge reveals how knowledge produced in and around the west is layered with colonial power, thereby generating, and maintaining the ideology and practice of western knowledge dominance (Mignolog, 2007; Prasad, 2003). Manheim (1936) argues that to understand the phenomenon of knowledge, we must study the circumstances in which the type of knowledge originated as well as the 'knowledge producers' themselves especially the context in which they have produced this. It is equally important to recognise that when 'knowledge is produced, considered legitimate, and imposed by dominant groups, the knowledge would tend to favour the producers at the expense of its recipients' (Akena, 2022 p 601). Knowledge production for any society by the dominant groups leads to authoritarian, oppressive and controlling rule. These groups of people, produce biased and often individualised knowledge, to produce more 'reliable' and 'effective' socioeconomic and political perspectives for whatever struggle they are engaged in. Haraway (1998) argues that knowledge production should be examined from the perspectives of struggles among different groups that make up society, making knowledge situated and relational as mentioned earlier.

### **#Killjoy Moment**

*My husband sends me a video one day with a caption of 'nothing's changed'. It was boxer Muhammed Ali being interviewed by Michael Parkinson. In it he says 'everything was white - Santa Claus was white - and everything bad was black; the little ugly duckling was a black duck, and the black cat was bad luck'.*

### **Point 1c - The Canon**

***This point maps the literary canon as a sedimented colonial foundation that preserves particular histories and voices, while delimiting others.***

Subject English in England, particularly through the literary canon, remains deeply intertwined with colonial knowledge. The literary canon has been compiled over time by literary critics, scholars and teachers in order to assert the works of literature which are deemed to be 'essential'. Eliot and Davies (2025) argue that this process is neither neutral or natural; it is historically sedimented practices that

privileges particular forms of cultural capital and prescribes what counts as legitimate literary knowledge. Despite frequent claims to timelessness and universality, the canon is a subjective and highly politicised collection. Critique centred around diversity, validity, relatability and who holds the powers to determine worthiness have shaped the debate on the canon over time (Brady, Majewska and Greateorex, 2025). Writers included in the literary canon, also regarded as the western canon, include the likes of Dickens, Chaucer and Shakespeare. The canon can also be categorised by time periods such as Romantic English poetry such as Blake, Wordsworth and Shelley which dominate the literary canon. Often critics have referred to the canon as literature written by dead, white men (Brady et al, 2025) and questioned their relevance to today's diverse population (Lit in Colour, 2021; Teach First, n.d).

The canon has also been widely criticised for ensuring writers from diverse backgrounds have been a 'footnote' in the curriculum (Boakye, 2022, p87) and usually 'pigeon-holed' into poetry anthologies like Agard's *Checking Out Me History* or Imtiaz Dharkar's *Tissue* (Saleh, 2023, p 342). This discussion will explore the impact of the imposed western canon in Subject English and the implications of this on students and teachers.

Although the western canon is not a new concept, Michael Gove, the then Secretary of State for Education from 2010-2014, reasserted its dominance through the introduction of an overtly English-focused syllabus in 2015. Gove believed that 'the great tradition of our literature' should be the main directive of school life, he also led the narrative of 'our literature being the 'best in the world' (Vaughn, 2014) and is perhaps largely based on his own experience of private education. Such ideas shows that the canon is still dangerously seen as fixed by others and asserts the narrative of the canon being the 'best of the best', therefore it must be taught. The introduction of new curriculum focused on works from Britain and excluded other forms of literature, moving towards a heightened sense of nationalism and what it means to be British, whilst ignoring important works from other bodies outside the dominant canon. The re-surfacing and affirmation of the canon by education policy is set against other policies centred around what it means to be British, (e.g. Fundamental British Values and Prevent Policy discussed in [Terrain 11](#)). These individual policies and then combined, creates a specific sense of what it means to be British and what it means to teach Subject English.

If we take the canon and its impact on Subject English through the FPNM lens, we uncover how deeply entrenched power dynamics shape what it is taught in Subject English. The canonical requirements laid out in the National Curriculum (DfE, 2014) which includes Shakespeare, Romantic poetry,

nineteenth century novel and British fiction or drama since 1914, exemplify a monocultural, Eurocentric and static approach. Such a combination, curated over centuries by privileged white men is damaging (Wintle, 2020) and as Okolosie (2014) argues the canon has always been an ideological entity. Despite efforts to diversify the curriculum (Elliot et al, 2024), the dominance of British and European authors persists, marginalising other literatures both globally and within Britain itself. This reflects and perpetuates historical power structures. Canonical texts often lack representation of diverse identities and experiences. This omission alienates students and teachers from varied ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. For instance, canonical works like Shakespeare's 'The Tempest' can perpetuate colonial ideologies by reinforcing notions of European superiority and justifying colonial dominance. This narrow representation limits students' critical thinking and engagement by discouraging them from questioning the selection and considering alternative perspectives.

Quijano (2000) further documents the coloniality of knowledge, defining it through the discrediting and eradicating of the knowledge forms of colonised communities. Quijano writes how European colonisers 'repressed as much as possible the colonised forms of knowledge production' and 'forced the colonised to learn the dominant culture in any way that would be useful to the reproduction of domination' (Quijano, 2000, p 541).

In this sense, 'schooled' ways of knowing, seeing and imagining are deeply rooted in this dominant form of knowing. There is a need to break free from these shackles and imagine *otherwise* to discover opportunities and possibilities for growth and accepting other knowledge forms, violent, hostile and often aggressive origins to knowledge making are not practiced. The discussion on coloniality, power and knowledge describe human and world development as a static and fixed paradigm. This can contradict the western knowledge system that poses this static paradigm, which values progress, and evolution (Doxtater, 2004). It communicates cultural assumptions that elevate western knowledge as legitimate knowledge while ignoring other pluralistic knowledges. It also places cognitive knowledge on a pedestal, privileging it over embodied knowledge (Page and Sidebottom, 2022). These western knowledge theorists (Wallerstein, 1995; Hobsbawm, 1999) popularise progress and evolution as Eurocentric but at the same time leave no room for knowledge to progress or evolve. The narrative of 'progress' offers a disguise designed to maintain the hegemony of the dominant group who largely benefit from it (Taylor, 2019).

It is within this context of epistemic reduction and ontological fixation that PQI thought, particularly through Karen Barad's (2007) theory of agential realism offers a purposeful rupture. Barad reconceptualises materiality itself as relational, emergent and entangled, disrupting representational understandings of knowledge that position matter as passive. In PQI, knowledge is not 'discovered' but produced through material-discursive intra-actions among bodies, concepts, histories and affects (Barad, 2007). Knowing is therefore inseparable from being and doing; epistemology is always ontological - discussed in greater detail in [Part 3](#). Knowledge emerges through the entanglements of materiality, discourse, temporality, affect, power and carries ethical implications. As such this ontological shift unsettles colonial knowledge paradigms that rely on hierarchy and linear development, opening up ways of understanding knowledge as dynamically produced through intra-actions rather than through fixed ways. The notion of entanglement and materiality is important. Barad tells us;

*The very nature of materiality is an entanglement. Matter itself is always already open to, or rather entangled with, the 'Other.' The intra-actively emergent 'parts' of phenomena are co-constituted. Not only subjects but also objects are permeated through and through with their entangled kin; the other is not just in one's skin, but in one's bones, in one's belly, in one's heart, in one's nucleus, in one's past and future. This is as true for electrons as it is for brittlestars as it is for the differentially constituted human [...]. What is on the other side of the agential cut is not separate from us— agential separability is not individuation. (Barad, 2007 p392)*

This ontological perspective can be applied to the content of canonical texts in education, particularly concerning the representation and engagement of diverse identities and experiences. This perspective is relevant to the critique of canonical texts, such as Shakespeare's 'The Tempest', which often lack diverse representation and can perpetuate colonial ideologies. If we think with Barad's conceptualisation of entanglement and materiality above, then no text, idea, or cultural artefact, can be argued to exist in a vacuum. By acknowledging the broader socio-historical context in which these texts exist, there is an opportunity to foster a more critical engagement with how literature affects the different bodies by paying attention to the entanglements and intra-actions.

Barad (2007) also argues for ethical inquiry, based on responsibility and accountability for the 'lively relationalities of becoming of which we are a part' (Barad, 2007, p393). In this research, it can be used to emphasise that individuals are implicated in the worlds they help to produce. Teachers come to matter in the spaces where they are ongoing and active participants in the production of meaning. For some teachers, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds, recognise and acknowledge the

limited representation and potentially harmful ideologies in canonical texts (Elliot et al, 2021). Drawing on Ahmed's analysis of institutional diversity work, the act of naming inequality often produces institutional resistance, arguing that 'when you expose a problem, you pose a problem' (Ahmed, 2012, p 39) and elsewhere writes that 'to name a problem is to become the problem' (Ahmed, 2017, p 37). In this framing, teachers who draw attention to racism, sexism or colonial violence risk being positioned as disruptive and overly political. The discomfort they introduce into the spaces they are in can be redispersed to them as an individual failing rather than recognised as systemic inequality.

This dynamic helps us to explain why many teachers may choose not to speak up. Research on teacher agency and school culture suggests that teachers' willingness to challenge dominant norms and practices is shaped by institutional climate, leadership support and potential professional status risk (Biesta et al, 2015; Santoro, 2018). Where schools privilege neutrality or a 'colour-blind' approach, raising concerns about the canon can be framed as divisive or inappropriate. Under such condition, teachers may internalise their discomfort. Ahmed (2012) describes this as the institutional 'wall' that diversity workers come up against, resistance is not always overt but sedimented in procedures, policies and cultures, that make certain conversation feel impossible or exhausting.

Such engagement reflects an understanding that curriculum, particularly the privileging of the literary canon, function as everyday pedagogical practice that materially shape students' and teachers' encounters with identity, power and belonging. Without critical thinking, these practices risk reproducing dominant narrative. As Sanghera (2021) reminds us, even the most familiar recognisable British habits, such as drinking 'sweetened tea' carries the imprint of Britain's colonial past – illustrating how the everyday can normalise and obscure historical power relations. Barad's framework can be empowering. It provides a theoretical basis for challenging the status quo and advocating for a more inclusive curriculum that better reflects the diverse identities and experiences of the growing diverse population. These divisive policies intensify the pressures faced by marginalised ECTeachers whose identities and pedagogies fall outside the sanctioned narrative.

#### *Point 1d - Writing as Privileged*

***This point considers writing as a privileged practice within Subject English exploring how dominant standards of language regulate legitimacy.***

Writing in Subject English is a privileged, historically and politically situated practice deeply entangled with colonial histories and western knowledge formations. Standard English presented as natural, correct and universally applicable, emerges from epistemic systems that centre whiteness, middle-

class norms and hierarchical notions of linguistic authority (Baker-Bell, 2020; Snell, 2013; Drummond, 2017; Cushing, 2021). It is framed as the standard of clarity, coherence, and academic rigor, yet this standard is both socially and politically constructed, reflecting centuries of colonial and racialised knowledge-making (Akena, 2012; Lal, 2005; Elliot and McLean Davies, 2025).

The National Curriculum (DfE, 2013; DfE, 2014) positions Standard English as the expected form of written and spoken language across Key Stages 1–5. It is framed as the benchmark for clarity, coherence, correctness, and academic rigour. Students are expected to: use accurate spelling, punctuation, and grammar; construct sentences with clarity and logical cohesion; apply appropriate vocabulary for the purpose, audience, and context; develop writing that meets formal standards in narrative, descriptive, persuasive, and discursive genres. Examination boards (AQA, OCR, Edexcel) reinforce Standard English by marking technical accuracy and linguistic conformity as central criteria. Marks are awarded for ‘correct grammar, punctuation and spelling’; ‘cohesive paragraph and sentence structure’ and embedding use of ‘formal register’ (AQA, 2022, p 5; OCR, 2024, p19). Through these institutional mechanisms, Standard English is authorised as legitimate knowledge, while other linguistic forms, non-standard dialects (explored in subsequent section in Part 2 and later in Part 4), or creative deviations, are rendered marginal or deficit. In this way, writing becomes a site where epistemic authority, policy, and affective power intra-act, shaping how teachers and students experience Subject English.

It is through these avenues which white, western linguistic norms are branded as universal and objective (Akena, 2012; Lal and Nandy, 2005) while other forms of writing (knowing) in Subject English are made invisible. Therefore, Subject English becomes a site for teaching writing where bodies are judged, corrected, and evaluated through linguistic norms anchored in whiteness and western speech. Teachers are instructed to model and reinforce Standard English consistently, creating a sense of affective tensions as competence is measured against a norm that reflects colonial, racialised and classed standards of ‘correctness’ (Elliot and Davies, 2025). The privileging of Standard English is inseparable from the dominance of western knowledge as a system of legitimate truth. Western epistemologies, rooted in Greek philosophy, Enlightenment rationality, and European scientific reasoning, have historically framed knowledge as objective, universal, and individualised (Manheim, 1936; Pritchard, 2005; Ichikawa and Steup, 2014). This conception of knowledge, when imposed through coloniality, delegitimises other forms of knowing as primitive, superstitious, or unscientific (Akena, 2022; Cushing, 2023). Education in England reproduces this hierarchy, embedding colonial residues into literacy and writing practices (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2007). Within such conditions,

writing pedagogy in classrooms can become narrow and procedural, emphasising formulaic structures and exam-oriented performance (Lambert, 2020).

The entanglement of policy, practice, and knowledge shapes this privileging. Curriculum prescriptions, examination specifications, and Ofsted inspections work alongside deeply ingrained epistemic hierarchies. These traditions entrench Standard English as the benchmark of literacy, discipline, and professionalism where the expected behaviour and standards are outlined for teachers within this space ([Terrain 5](#) and [6](#) expands this), ensuring that linguistic norms remain tied to western epistemologies while silencing other ways of knowing. Writing, therefore, is a site of epistemic and affective power. For marginalised ECTeachers, the enforcement of Standard English is experienced unevenly (Cushing, 2024). What is framed as adhering to subject expectations for some, becomes deficit, deviation, or failure for others, I explore this in greater detail in Part 4. Recognising these entanglements provides a critical lens for understanding how marginalised ECTeachers navigate, resist, and potentially transform the literacies they are tasked to teach.

#### **#Killjoy Moment**

*Why is it when students write descriptively or narratively; they use the names John and Mary – they might not even know a John or Mary in their own lives – yet they are ingrained to use their names in English classrooms.*

#### **Point 1e - Reading and Writing as ‘Knowledge-Rich’**

***This point interrogates the framing of reading and writing as ‘knowledge rich’, mapping how such discourse sustains hierarchies of culture under the guise of rigour and neutrality.***

#### **#Killjoy Moment**

*I found solace in realising the problem was not me. The blame is not the one who does not fit. The tension lives in the system, in who is allowed to know, speak and be heard. Feminist and decolonial thinking made that visible. So did living and watching others live. That was clarity and I stopped carrying the blame.*

Decolonial feminism (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Wynter, 2003; Manning, 2021) values all knowledge and lived experience equally, providing a framework to critique how western knowledge and linguistic norms function to maintain hierarchy. bell hooks (1989; 2004) and Audre Lorde (1982) emphasise the epistemic value of personal experience, emotion, and relational knowledge, challenging the assumption that ‘objective’ Standard English literacies (reading and writing) constitute superior truth. These approaches highlight how reading and writing practices are affectively and materially implicated, shaping not only what is read and written but who is authorised to write and be read, and

under what conditions. In England, the ‘preservation of whiteness and coloniality is increasingly in the form of knowledge-rich curricula’ (Cushing, 2023, p 4). As mentioned earlier, a knowledge-rich curriculum, as advocated by Michael Gove and supported by a growing body of academic literature (Hirsch, 2006; Young, 2013) is an approach to education that places explicit, carefully sequenced subject knowledge at the centre of teaching (Lemov, 2021) with emphasis on all students, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds, should have access to a broad, shared body of substantive knowledge that enables deep understanding, cultural literacy and social mobility.

Ofsted’s Education Inspection Framework (EIF) emphasise the centrality of a ‘knowledge-rich’ curriculum, where schools are expected to identify the ‘invaluable knowledge pupils need to know’ as a core part of curriculum intent. In practice, this model is closely aligned with the notion of ‘powerful knowledge’ articulated by Young (2014, p 8), which refers to the disciplinary concepts and cultural knowledge that enable students to ‘acquire knowledge that takes them beyond their own experiences’ (Young et al., 2014, p7). Such approaches emphasise that students need a deep understanding of subject content; vocabulary, facts, concepts and models, to produce coherent, analytical writing. Although Young, in Duobly (2022), later warns that policymakers have misappropriated his work into a rigid, information-heavy tradition that treats knowledge as fixed and politically neutral, as a knowledge-rich curriculum foregrounds dominant cultural capital and privileges white, western epistemologies at the expense of diverse histories and identities (Cushing, 2023).

Schools in England have been implementing this knowledge-rich curriculum approach across all subjects, but as this thesis uses Subject English as an exemplar for the exclusionary practices in education, the effects of knowledge-rich are more pronounced. In Subject English, the turn towards ‘powerful knowledge’ involved a shift towards the canon (discussed earlier), linearity of written assessments, elevation of ‘reading and writing’ in Standard English (Cushing, 2023). Writing is taught as knowledge-rich by foregrounding that high-quality depends on secure, explicitly taught disciplinary knowledge rather than skills.

This orientation, using Ahmed (2012)’s work discussed earlier, privileges cultural, linguistic and epistemic traditions (re)establishing the authority of white, Eurocentric ways of knowing, doing and being. This raises critical questions, especially from feminist and decolonial perspectives, about whose knowledge is being centred, whose experiences are legitimised and what forms of reading and writing are ‘acceptable’ to teach and to learn in the classroom. Ahmed’s (2010) theorisation of affective economies illuminates how reading and writing in Standard English generates specific affective

climates in the classroom. The demand to write in the 'correct' English produces atmospheres of discipline and properness. Words like 'accuracy', 'appreciate the depth of power of English literary heritage', 'precision', 'fluently' and 'standards' (DfE, 2014, p 5-9) circulate as markers of good practice, accumulating affective weight that constrains what reading and writing should look like and who is authorised to produce it. For marginalised ECTeachers, these atmospheres cling to the body in uneven ways. Complaint becomes consequential here (Ahmed, 2021). Complaint is not used a pejorative term here, it refers to the refusal to accept harm as inevitable. Complaints 'can be how you live with yourself because a complaint is an attempt to address what is wrong, not to cope with something, not to let it happen, not to let it keep happening. You refuse to adjust to what is unjust (Ahmed, 2021, p 163). To raise concerns about the colonial nature of the reading or writing curriculum, to question the dominance of white authors, the violence of linguistic assimilation, or the racial politics of what counts as articulate, but it is also to risk being marked as the problem (Ahmed, 2017, p 37), also see [Point 1c](#). The cost of such disruption is unevenly distributed: marginalised teachers, whose bodies are already read as potential deviations from the norm, carry the heavier load.

Taken together, reading and writing in Subject English are not neutral practices but sites of western, white, normative logics that privilege particular ways of knowing and being. They reproduce affect through anxiety, pressure, fear of deviation (Bradbury et al, 2023), history through ideas on empire (Akala, 2019; Andrews, 2021), canon, language standardisation (Cushing, 2024); materiality through policy, texts and assessment and orientating towards Whiteness, Britishness and correctness (Ahmed, 2010). These residues shape what feels possible in the classroom. They influence which texts are chosen, whose voices are centred, what counts as error.

For marginalised ECTeachers, these practices intensify the labour of becoming a Subject English teacher. Their textual choices, linguistic practices, and embodied identities are read through frames of suspicion or deviance, I discuss this in greater depth [Terrain 11](#) with reference to Prevent and the Trojan Horse affair. Understanding reading and writing as colonial assemblages is therefore vital for understanding the affective, material, and institutional pressures shaping the professional becomings of marginalised ECTeachers in contemporary Subject English classrooms.

In recent years, there has been a growing movement to decolonise the Subject English curriculum in England. This movement seeks to challenge the Eurocentric bias that has long dominated the subject, advocating for a more diverse and inclusive curriculum that reflects the experiences and perspectives of people from marginalised backgrounds. For example, the focus on canonical British literature often neglects the rich contributions of minority authors and perspectives, thereby maintaining the status

quo (Saleh, 2023). Calls to decolonise the curriculum are widespread, with calls from teachers signing up for a diverse and anti-racist curriculum (Batty et al, 2021) and organisations such as Runnymede Trust arguing for the development of a decolonised curriculum (Johnson and Mouthaan, 2021). Despite the rising interest in decolonising curriculum, opposition from politicians is rife (Weale, 2021, Balls, 2022). A report by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (CRED) describes the ‘negative calls for decolonising’ the curriculum (CRED, 2021, p8). While the Commission presents itself as an independent inquiry, the report has been widely criticised (Runnymede Trust, 2021; CRER, 2021), for its framing and interpretation of evidence. Critics argue that the report minimises the role of structural racism and adopts a sceptical stance towards decolonising initiatives. As the Commission was established by the UK Government, the report carries significant institutional authority and political influence, raising concerns around the dominant narratives on race. Consequently, this framing is seen by many as legitimising resistance to curriculum reform and limiting progress towards more inclusive educational practices. Akbar (2024) argues there is an ‘epistemic urgency’ to decolonise the curriculum in school level, arguing that addressing whose knowledge is valued and taught is essential for challenging entrenched inequalities and working towards more inclusive practices. However, drawing on Ahmed’s critique of institutional ‘diversity work’, some decolonial and EDI moves can be performative, serving more as symbolic commitments that make institutions appear responsive without bringing about substantive change (Ahmed, 2012) – unless they are tied to shifts in policy and practice. The National Education Union (NEU, 2023), argue that decolonising education involves critically examining the limitations and biases within existing curricula. This is the very work of the feminist killjoy, and this thesis itself, although uncomfortable to hear and resistance is felt, dominant narratives must be challenged. It is necessary work. Let us move to Terrain 2 now, where the elements of speaking + listening in Subject English are too shaped by ideas of correctness.

## Terrain 2: Politics of Speaking + Listening

Dominant discourses of speaking in education, and more widely, are also underpinned by white, western and Eurocentric knowledge systems that frame speaking + listening as neutral skills (Cushing, 2023), rather than as racialised and classed assemblages. Within these assemblages, voice is more-than a sound or form of expression, but forms a type of social capital, where bodies have to perform according to normative standards in order to be recognised as a legitimate speaker. I use ‘voice’ as a broad term encompassing all forms of oral communication, including tone, register and rhetorical style, which are embedded within the hierarchies of speaking + listening. Ahmed’s (2012) work on complaint illuminates how these dynamics operate within institutions. Ahmed shows that speaking does not guarantee being heard. Complaints made are often re-interpreted as a lack of confidence, inappropriate tone, or poor communication skills. The speaker becomes the problem.

Within the educational system, legitimate speaking + listening is made apparent through policy. The National Curriculum (DfE, 2014, p 19) for Subject English positions speaking + listening as standards tied to articulateness, confidence and ‘to speak audibly and fluently with an increasing command of Standard English’. While presented as universally attainable goals and the standard to reach to be legitimate, these terms operate as markers of whiteness and specific class subjectivity. As Cushing (2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)’s work demonstrates, policies Ofsted inspection frameworks, Teachers’ Standards, National Curriculum, actively produce hierarchies of speaking aligning legitimacy with particular linguistic forms, associated with white, educated speakers. Speaking is an assemblage shaped by institutional norms and racialised histories of language control.

Oracy initiatives in schools, such as Voice 21 oracy Schools programme (2022), oracy interventions (EEF, 2025), and the Oracy Education Commission, (2024) frame spoken language as a transferable skill that enables full participation and citizenship (Alexander, 2017). While often motivated by egalitarian aims, addressing inequality by broadening access to oracy education and accentuating its role in life chances and equitable participation, (Lampropoulou et al, 2024), these projects and initiatives also reproduce narrow models of ‘effective’ speech; clarity, confidence, turn-taking, emotional control, that reflect white, western communicative norms, potentially obscuring diverse ways of speaking and social interaction. Speaking and listening are treated as decontextualised techniques, rather than as practices embedded in power relations. As a result, those who do not embody these norms are positioned as lacking voice and ability, rather than as speaking differently within systems that refuse to listen. Baker-Bell’s (2020) work on linguistic justice exposes the racial violence embedded in these expectations. Black language and *other* racialised ways of speaking are routinely framed as obstacles to articulateness and confidence, rather than as legitimate knowledge systems. Students (and teachers) are encouraged, or required, to modify their speech towards Standard English in order to be heard and ‘validated’. Speaking is conditional, recognition and achievement is granted only when speakers align themselves with whiteness. Speaking is permitted only through dominant language practices.

### ***#Killjoy Moment***

*Policies meticulously govern speech, but apparently place no limits on the dreadful behaviour in the House of Commons.*

This dynamic also reveals that speaking + listening function together to provoke and police a sense of ‘English-ness’. Voice is about belonging. To speak ‘properly’ is to speak English in a particular way; calm, measured, grammatically standard, without accent. Those who speak differently are positioned

as outsiders, regardless of where they have been born or raised. Listening practices reinforce this boundary by rendering some voices familiar, trustworthy, while those who others are heard as disruptive, excessive or unintelligible.

These politics of voice are made explicit in public discourse around language. The growth of the far-right, with more recent comments by Nigel Farage claim that those who do not speak English are 'culturally smashing' (BBC, 2025) the nation, illustrates how language is mobilised as a proxy for racial and cultural exclusion. Here, the failure to speak English, or to speak it in an approved way, is framed as a moral and national threat. Voice becomes a site through which Englishness is defended and whiteness reasserted, revealing the deeply political nature of voice (refer to Point 1b). Some voices are heard as contributing to the nation, while others are heard as noise or damage. Within educational context, policy and practices shape oracy norms, and those who do not perform 'voice' correctly are more likely to be dismissed and their speech framed as unclear and deviant.

Understanding voice as an assemblage foregrounds how speaking + listening are co-produced through policy, practice, affect and national identity. Calls to develop voice through oracy or standardisation, risk reproducing inequality if they fail to interrogate the epistemologies that define what voice sounds like. A critical politics of voice troubles the dominant structures and recognises voice as a situated practice, one that is unevenly valued. Building on this discussion of voice as a discursive and situated practice, Terrain 3 explores how reading, writing, speaking + listening function as assemblages that shape and shaped by policy, practices and social structures.

### Terrain 3: Reading, Writing, Speaking + Listening as Assemblages

The different components of Subject English are rooted in developing core communication skills in reading, writing and speaking + listening (Goodwyn, 2019). Thinking about these components as neat, separate skills, which is the normative way, overlooks the entangled relationships between these entities, humans and other actants (Latour, 2004) such as texts and materiality, that co-produce meaning in spaces. We need to move beyond these individual areas, towards the components operating as assemblages, as dynamic gatherings of people, texts, technologies, histories, emotions, spaces and power relations (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). An assemblage is never fixed; it is always in the process of forming and reforming (Anderson and McFarlane, 2015). I draw on Deleuze's (1987, p 52) concept of assemblage as a temporary organisation of heterogeneous elements. As such, reading, writing, speaking + listening can be understood as practices that are never solely human, cognitive or linguistic. Instead, they are constituted through entanglements of bodies, texts, technologies, affects, discourses, histories and power relations. From this view, Subject English practices are sites where

matter and meaning co-produce, and where agency is distributed across human and non-human actants as Barad reminds us,

*‘intra-action’ signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. That is, in contrast to the usual ‘interaction’ which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognises that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action. It is important to note that the ‘distinct’ agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute, sense, that is, agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don’t exist as individual elements. (Barad, 2007, p 33).*

Extending this perspective, post-qualitative scholarship emphasises that knowledge practices are always situated and embodied (Haraway, 2007, Braidotti, 2013, Grosz, 1994). Reading, writing, speaking + listening as assemblages transmit meaning but they also enact it, discussed in greater detail in the subsequent sections. Koro-Ljunberg and Barko (2012, p 258) argue that assemblage thinking resists fixed and finite assumptions and unsettles the dominant, often western assumptions that position Subject English as neutral skills or an individual problem (refer to [Terrain 1](#) and [2](#)). Rather, these practices emerge as ongoing processes shaped by relations of difference. Importantly, this perspective highlights how marginalised bodies move through assemblages as access to recognition and legitimacy are often structured by race, gender and/or other points of difference. Viewing language and communication as assemblage provides a way to attend to how bodies, materials and affect intra-act to reproduce or disrupt dominant knowledge formations, showing what counts as legitimate is always socially and politically entangled. I now take you to Terrain 4 where a mapping of policy pressures within the ECTeaching, Subject English space is also rooted in specific ways of knowing and being – allowing a further layer to Killjoy Cartography on how marginalised ECTeacher move through this space.

#### Terrain 4: Mapping Policy Pressures

Having discussed reading, writing and speaking + listening within Subject English as colonial assemblages, I now extend the mapping of this space by discussing how professionalism itself is constituted through normative expectations; particularly through a standard agenda and curricula viewed as regimes of truth (Foucault, 1980) and how these normative expectations are too rooted in a specific way of knowing and being (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). As Gillborn (2005) argues, equity, particularly race equity, persistently struggles for legitimacy within education policy. Regardless of governments in power, policy making remains implicated in the maintenance of whiteness. This

insight is central to understanding how neoliberal educational policy works. The standard agenda and education policy work not only regulate professional bodies but also produce affective economies, that is, they circulate emotions between bodies in ways that shape social and political life, particularly for marginalised bodies within these spaces (Ahmed, 2010). The section that follows are points within this Terrain, bringing policy pressures within the landscape of Subject English and ideas about becoming a teacher to the forefront.

#### *Point 4a – Standard agenda*

***This point maps how the standard agenda prescribes the ways teachers are expected to be (Lambert, 2020), linking back to Whiteness presented in Point 1b.***

In England, the Teachers' Standards, initially introduced by the Labour government in 1997 and subsequently revised in 2002, 2007, with the unified statutory set in 2012 and amendments made in 2021, have played a crucial role in standardising and organising the curriculum of ITE and shaping the pedagogical approaches of teacher training programmes. The Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2011), are as follows:

1. Set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge pupils.
2. Promote good progress and outcomes by pupils.
3. Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge.
4. Plan and teach well-structured lessons.
5. Adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils.
6. Make accurate and productive use of assessment.
7. Manage behaviour effectively to ensure a good and safe learning environment.
8. Fulfil wider professional responsibilities. (DfE, 2011).

The standardisation agenda has broadened into ITE. The DfE, as part of the 'Golden Thread', has in place the Initial Teacher Training Early Career Framework (ITTECF; DfE, 2024), which stands as the current version having replaced two separate policies (Core Content Framework, DfE 2019; Early Career Framework, DfE 2019). Although 'new' in its introduction, there does not seem to be any significant change to framework, having been described as only been 'tweaked' (Brooks, 2024). The ITTECF becomes the standard for both ITE and Early Career Teacher Programme (ECTP) for new teachers in England, defining what they must learn. The ITTECF (DfE, 2025) is closely related to the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2011). They are as follows:

- High expectations (Standard 1 – Set high expectations)
- How pupils learn (Standard 2 – Promote good progress)
- Subject and curriculum (Standard 3 – Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge)
- Classroom Practice (Standard 4 – Plan and teach well-structured lessons)
- Adaptive teaching (Standard 5 – Adapt teaching)
- Assessment (Standard 6 – Make accurate and productive use of assessment)
- Managing behaviour (Standard 7 – Manage behaviour effectively)
- Professional Behaviours (Standard 8 – Fulfil wider professional responsibilities)

*Initial Teacher Training Early Career Framework (DfE, 2025).*

The standards mirror the Teachers' Standards, with the addition of a series of statements that describe what new teachers should know and be able to do ('Learn that ...' and 'Learn how to ...') and was assembled by a small 'expert group' and 'endorsed' by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), a charitable organisation focused on breaking links between economic disadvantage and educational attainment. The EEF receives funding from the DfE, with the remit to generate evidence reviews and evaluations of educational interventions, alongside supporting the use of evidence to bring about change in policy and practice in education. Ellis (2023) is deeply critical of the EEF, arguing that its production and promoting of evidence reviews reflects a broader ideological project that narrows what counts as legitimate knowledge in teacher education, privileging standardisation and evidence-based practice over professional judgement and critical inquiry.

Brooks (2024, 2005) critiques the ITTECF as she challenges the knowledge structures that the framework elevates and the ways these structures shape teacher professionalism. Brook and Hordern (2025) argue that the framework privileges a narrow, 'scientific' conception of educational knowledge, giving disproportionate authority to technical behaviour based research at the expense of broader intellectual traditions that have historically informed teacher education. This narrowing reflects an ideological shift by restricting what counts a legitimate knowledge.

The ITTECF (2025) reconstructs teaching as a technical activity governed by evidence – based routines rather than as a moral socially embedded and contextually sensitive profession (Brooks and Perryman, 2024; Brooks and Horden 2025). Thus, like Hordern and Brooks (2025), I argue the ITTECF is not simply a training tool but a mechanism that reshapes the very nature of teacher professionalism by narrowing the epistemic foundations upon which the profession rests. Smith (2012, p430) argues that the

standards agenda carry a ‘palpable and pernicious power’, exerting a strong influence over what counts as legitimate teaching. These standards, operate as a regulatory mechanism as they prescribe what teachers should know, but how they should teach as well as underscoring what pedagogical approaches are valued, and which forms of knowledge are considered credible. Their unprecedented importance means they govern teachers’ everyday practice and shape the design of ITE programmes. Standards actively produce practice.

When we consider whose practices and knowledge these standards privilege, the connection to Whiteness becomes clear. Teaching standards are often framed as neutral and universal, but critical scholarship centred around CRT, argue they reproduce white norms about behaviour, communication and appropriate-ness. Mirza’s long-standing research on race and education shows how professional norms often reflect the cultural assumptions of dominant groups, marginalising minoritised identities and forms of communication (Mirza, 1992; 1997; 2003). Meanwhile, Smith and Lander use a CRT-informed lens to show that teacher standards and ITE policy routinely ignore race and racism, reproducing white norms about ‘appropriate’ behaviour, communication and professionalism (Smith and Lander, 2022). When standards define what ‘good teaching’ or a ‘good teacher’ looks like, they frequently reflect historically dominant, often rooted in whiteness, educational values. The Standard Agenda can be read as the power of institutionalised whiteness to set the terms of professional legitimacy. Darling-Hammond argues that all professions must be vigilant against the ‘possibilities that practices could become constrained by the codification of knowledge that does not significantly acknowledge legitimate diversity of approaches in the field...’ (Darling-Hammond, 1999, p 39). This codification of knowledge can be considered an exclusionary practice, omitting other forms of knowing and valuing the dominant form. This violent and bureaucratic control through standardised practices is reminiscent of colonial rooted ideologies. Spivak (1988) reminds us of the ‘Other’, those excluded from dominant power structures due to social, political, or geographical factors. Their knowledge and experiences are frequently pushed out to the periphery; despite the potential they hold to enrich and influence our understanding of the world, in this case education. I argue that the Standard agenda is doing this. Spivak (1988) examines the limitations of western discourse in capturing the experiences of the marginalised and argues for the need for alternative epistemologies, arguing the need to listen to and amplify the voice of ‘others’. I draw on this in Part 3, but in the context of teacher education, teaching standards exemplify marginalisation. First, teaching standards codify pedagogies that align with white cultural expectations, framing these norms as neutral and universal rather than culturally situated. Secondly, ITE curricula are pressured to conform to these standards, marginalising culturally responsive pedagogies (Smith and Lander, 2020). Thirdly, teachers and students whose practices, identities, or ways of knowing do not align with these norms are

implicitly marked as deficient or 'unprofessional'. In this sense, the standards agenda not only governs practice but also reinforces racialised hierarchies of knowledge. It naturalises whiteness as the unmarked, 'common-sense' foundation of high-quality teaching, making alternative pedagogies appear risky, subversive, or less important.

My purpose here is not to analyse the details of both sets of standards but rather explore how they shape ECTeachers professional identities in narrow and prescriptive ways. Drawing on Ahmed (2012), I suggest that these professional standards, orient teachers toward fixed, static ways of being a teacher, using Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to think about how they are grounded in particular forms of sanctioned or 'State' knowledge. In doing so, professional standards are regulatory and bureaucratic tools that limit alternative, relational and evolving practices of teaching.

Education policymaking is an integral component of the State-apparatus, characterised by its internal structure ingrained into societal consciousness (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p410). State-apparatus refers to the structures through which the state exercises its power and control over society. Policymaking is not an isolated process but rather deeply rooted within the working of the state, guided hegemonic, over-coded and habitual, ways of thinking that Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p12) call arboreal, implying that certain dominant ideologies are influential as well as policies being heavily regulated and ingrained, making it rigid and inflexible, but also rooted in colonial ideologies. Notably, the standard agendas discussed above emerge as exemplars of this model.

The standards agenda illustrates a complex interplay of hegemonic forces, structural violence, and the reproduction of normalised subjectivities within the educational landscape. Educators are faced with a stark choice: conform to the prescribed standards or risk their professional status, or worse. This regulatory pressure extends to the shaping of collective subjectivity, influencing teaching practices and encouraging the normalisation of particular modes or practices (refer to [Terrain 1, 4](#) and [5](#)). The state enforces compliance through intensive surveillance and monitoring of educational courses, reminiscent of Foucault's panopticon (1977) explored in [Point 4b](#), creating systems of control that define boundaries and enforce adherence to standardised norms and expectations. Power and control is discussed in [Point 4b](#), but non-compliance is met with punitive measures such as failure to qualify as a teacher or sanctions for not meeting required standards (Smith, 2012; Wilkin, 1996), reinforcing fixed structures of power. This form of structural control limits the fluidity and openness of educational spaces, promoting surface-level engagement with standardised practices rather than genuine exploration or critical engagement (Towers et al, 2022). Rather than fostering authentic understanding, the enforcement of these regulations normalises a narrow conception of educational

equality, constraining alternative pedagogical interpretations and possibilities where teachers are 'ticking boxes'.

#### *Point 4b – Policy, policy and Panopticon*

***This point maps how educational policy function as material-discursive tools that shape knowledge, power, teacher professionalism and performative practices with school spaces.***

Ball's work on policy is useful here, where he discusses discursive and material policy (Ball, 2013). His exploration of the interplay between the discursive and material aspects of policy sheds light on how educational policies function as regimes of truth, a Foucauldian term (Foucault, 1980) referring to the discourse that holds certain things to be 'truths'. In policy terms, policymaking transforms knowledge into frameworks that define what counts as valid knowledge and establish 'regimes of truth' that reinforce a particular social order (Foucault, 1980). In essence, policy serves as a tool for governments to exert power, shaping both knowledge and social structures through the creation of dominant discourses. Ball (2013) distinguishes between 'Policy' (capital P) and 'policy' (lowercase p). 'Policy' refers to official documents like Acts and frameworks, which establish dominant discourses and shape the production of knowledge deemed legitimate. Whereas 'policy' (lowercase p) encompasses the ongoing implementation and enactment of these frameworks at the organisational or individual level. In this thesis, I am interested in both levels of policy, and the discussions will explicate this. If we consider an assemblage, these two dimensions are not separate or hierarchical but are entangled and co-constituted, forming part of the material-discursive assemblage mapped in this cartography. Together, 'Policy' and 'policy' actively shapes the conditions and relations through which teaching identities and ways of becoming are shaped within this space.

Ball (2003) characterises performativity as a regulatory culture that employs judgments, comparisons, and incentives for control and attrition. Bourke, Lidstone, and Ryan (2013) suggest that while some teachers embrace this performance oriented agenda as an opportunity for career advancement and growth, others perceive it as detrimental to morale, identity, and agency, emphasising excessive accountability, surveillance, and stifling of innovation. Given the pervasive influence of performative measures in education, particularly in the context of ECTeaching, it becomes pertinent to explore how marginalised ECTeachers navigate and respond to this performative discourse. With heightened surveillance culture in education, teachers perceive and negotiate their roles in light of these expectations, contributing to a deeper understanding of what it means to be a teacher 'under the gaze' (Foucault, 1977, p 202). In schools, teachers operate 'under the gaze' of a neoliberal framework

of education, internalising school expectations and regulate their practice in ways that reflect Foucault's (1977) ideas on surveillance and power discussed further along in this section.

Policy can also be conceptualised as a mechanism that structures society, creating distinctions and guiding what is expected of individuals (Fairchild, 2019 p158; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). In the context of teaching, policy defines what a new teacher should do to 'be' a teacher. The lower-case policy refers to the revisions and everyday implementations of these overarching policies. Deleuze (1992) suggests that power circulations have shifted as control moves from the State to the Corporation (the neoliberal market), reflecting the socio-economic dominance of neoliberalism, evident in market-led initiatives in education. While early-career teacher policies remain under government control, neoliberal influences shape the creation and reinforcement of rigid expectations. This is evident in the growing emphasis on teacher standards and performance measures, aligning teachers with the requirements of a 'global workforce.' In essence, policy and its associated expectations frame teachers as a workforce in need of constant professionalisation (Hargreaves, 2000). This resonates with Deleuze's (1992) idea of 'societies of control,' where power operates through subtle, indirect means, shaping behaviour through constant evaluation and monitoring.

#### **#Killjoy Moment**

*Struggled to put some order to the mapping – too many interferences and interruptions. Feels messy*

*Writing about policies in isolated and linear way is tricky – everything intra-acts.*

Applying a Foucauldian lens to the contemporary ECTeaching landscape helps us to see how teaching standards profoundly shapes a teacher's professional trajectory. Foucault's (1977) panopticon describes a form of power in which surveillance is internalised, so teachers regulate their own behaviour because they 'might' get observed or monitored, despite no one actively watching. In school spaces, this operate alongside explicit surveillance (such as observations, results etc) producing a dual regime in which teachers are both directly monitored and encouraged to self-discipline in anticipation of judgement.

Through adherence to the standard agenda ([Point 4a](#)), participation in continued professional development, and compliance with institutional monitoring systems, teachers effectively self-regulate their work, rendering themselves 'knowable' entities amenable to regulation (Foucault, 1995, p171). However, Foucault (1995, p200) posits that this apparent self-regulation is, in fact, a 'trap,' entangling teachers within a political terrain fraught with power dynamics. Bourke et al. (2014) further contend that teachers, influenced by prevailing performative norms, willingly subject themselves to regulation

and control (Osgood, 2006). This can lead to further stigmatisation of already marginalised bodies as they are positioned outside the hegemonic structures.

Teachers tend to 'police' their own behaviour to conform to standardised practices (Foucault, 1977). Foucault (1995, p 170) through his ideas on the panopticon, he argues the goal here is to induce a state of conscious visibility for people who are under control, enabling the automatic functioning of power. Therefore, today teachers perform as if surveillance is the most important factor and decisive factor in teaching and learning, internalising expectations and regulating their behaviour under the watchful eye of school policies inspections and professional standards (Foucault, 1977). This results in teachers' self-monitoring so that self-regulation occurs 'naturally'. Teachers can self-regulate their work by adhering to administration systems, audits of professional learning or assessment data and other performative and measurable controls. These systems ensure that teachers produce information so that they are 'knowable' (Foucault, 1995, p171) and they then could be regulated. Foucault (1995, p 200) suggests that this visibility is a 'trap' placing teachers within a political field structured by power relations. In this context, 'visibility' refers to the conditions in which teachers are always potentially observed, promoting them to regulate their own behaviour in accordance to normative expectations. When combined with teaching standards, this disciplinary gaze reinforces hierarchies in which bodies whose practices, identities or ways of knowing do not conform to dominant norms are marked different.

Through a Foucauldian lens (2004), the State's function was to foster and establish neo-liberal markets with the aim of enhancing economic prosperity. This resulted in the expansion of the corporate/private sector, facilitating competition and deregulation, ultimately fostering increased productivity and reduced costs. Neo-liberal theory has been criticised for benefiting the dominant groups, whilst contributing to rising income and social inequalities (Ball, 2013). Through Deleuze's (1992) ideas on 'societies of control' suggests a shift to more varying and pervasive forms of social control. In societies of control, power operates through a process of continuous change: regimes of decentralisation, surveillance, datafication and marketisation are some of the features of society of control. Within this evolving landscape, teacher development in the ECTeaching space reflects these trends and contributes to deeply structured space that operates within this broader context of control.

In education systems, power operates through ongoing processes of continuous change, shaped by decentralisation, surveillance, datafication, and marketisation. In the UK, these dynamics are reflected in policies such as the National Curriculum and the Early Career Framework (ECF), discussed in earlier terrains. The ECF, for example, represents a structured, evidence-based approach to teacher

development, emphasising mentorship, professional standards, and regular assessment, while also embedding mechanisms for accountability and monitoring through formal reporting and evaluation – I discuss this in more detail in [Terrain 6](#) and [7](#). Similarly, the increasing reliance on data-driven decision-making, through tools such as Progress 8, a performance measure of student achievement against national averages (DfE, 2025), and school inspection metrics (Ofsted, 2024), illustrate the pervasive role of surveillance and datafication in shaping teacher practice. Market oriented reforms, including the growth of academy trusts (Ofsted, 2023) and school autonomy (Pennington, et al, 2024), further influence the landscape in which ECTeachers develop fostering competition and emphasising measurable outcomes.

Within this evolving context, teacher development for ECTeachers both reflects and is shaped by these broader structural forces. Professional learning pathways are designed not only to support teaching effectiveness but also to ensure compliance with standards and accountability measures. The relationship between autonomy and accountability, professional growth and evaluation, illustrates how the development of ECTeachers is deeply embedded within the wider frameworks of governance, control, and reform in UK education.

#### **#Killjoy Moment**

*As I journey through the thesis forming process, I am continually reminded that racism is normalised through policy and practice. Just because I haven't been called a Paki or told to go back home, doesn't mean I'm not facing it. We aren't facing it and feeling it.*

#### **Point 4c - The Knowledge Economy**

***This point maps how Subject English policy, driven by neoliberal and political agendas, shapes knowledge, reinforces inequalities and shapes teachers' experiences.***

Subject English, as an avenue for fostering a knowledge economy, exemplifies the dynamic and often unstable nature of educational policy. Governments have consistently intervened in education, often under the guise of improvement, yet, as Levin (2010, p 740) cautions, these reforms frequently stem from political motivations rather than evidence-based practices. Subject English policy history showcases a pattern of fluctuating reforms with inconsistent effects on educational equity (Levelling Up, 2022; Closing the Achievement Gap, 2013; Subject Reforms, 2014).

Foucault's concept of power suggests that policy is not merely a set of directives but a mechanism through which power is distributed and exercised across various levels of society. In this light, policy in

Subject English can be seen as a means of defining educational goals, values, and the allocation of resources (Olssen et al, 2004 p 71), thereby shaping the knowledge economy by determining what knowledge is valued and who has access to it. If we take the discussion above on Subject English, it is clear that a particular way of viewing Subject English holds precedent. Deleuze's notion of a society of control further extends this by suggesting that contemporary governance operates through continuous change and regulation rather than through fixed institutions. Thus, in the context of Subject English, policies are not static but are continuously adjusted to maintain control over educational outcomes and access. This dynamic control ensures that power structures remain entrenched, perpetuating inequalities even as the policies themselves evolve.

Neo-liberalism, austerity measures and the cost of living crisis, have significantly shaped educational policy. As mentioned earlier through the 'crisis' outlined, neoliberal ideology has been influential in shaping educational policies today. Thatcher's market liberalisation and deregulation initiated a trend towards neoliberal governance in education. This shift emphasised individual achievement and economic utility as primary educational goals. Education became viewed as an investment in human capital, aligning with neoliberal ideals. Consequently, knowledge itself became a commodity, shifting focus from social welfare to economic productivity. The 'Knowledge Economy' is a much-used term in contemporary education and the term is derived from the increased influence of neoliberalism on education (Ball, 2021). Gove (2009) argued, in his speech at the Conservative Party Conference, the 'need for a model knowledge economy' and said that there is a need for a 'highly educated workforce to generate the breakthrough which will keep them competitive'. The language used in this very statement makes it clear that influential policymakers view knowledge and the economy simply as business products and that they are both interconnected. Knowledge in education is now a commodity (Ball, 2021) and there has been an increasing shift from the issue and concern that education is a matter of social welfare to it being a matter of the political economy. It is seen as a crucial factor in determining economic productivity. As such, the 'knowledge economy' emphasis has contributed to the outcomes of neoliberal ideology, including increased privatisation of public services and reduced government funding.

Deleuze's (1990) critique of power relations and control systems offers alternative insight to neoliberalism. He contrasts the rigid, hierarchical structures of neoliberal systems with the creative potential of 'smooth spaces'. The market-driven logic of neoliberalism imposes a structured, hierarchical and restrictive structure on education, reducing subjects like Subject English and teacher development to their economic value. This prioritisation of marketable skills over broader educational

goals undermines creativity and critical thinking. Austerity measures have exacerbated this trend, intensifying performance pressures on schools and teachers.

These policy shifts have implications for ECTeachers and particularly those from marginalised communities. The high attrition cannot be solely attributed to workload; a deeper understanding of how policies such as existing curriculum impact ECTeachers' sense of belonging and becomings are necessary to get a true insight in what is happening in these spaces, explored in Part 5. By examining the knowledge systems underpinning Subject English, we can expose the subject's restrictive nature. Building on this critique of knowledge systems, Terrain 5 shifts focus to teacher becomings, exploring how teachers move through such structures in their ongoing professional development.

## Terrain 5: Teacher Becomings

Earlier, I introduced *becoming* as a way of describing a site of multiplicities rather than a movement toward a fixed end point (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Drawing on this concept, I engage with scholarship on teacher becomings rather than teacher identity to emphasise a process that is never complete, never fully settled, and always in flux (Lambert, 2019; Strom, 2017). This aligns with the argument made in the introduction (Part 1): just as reading and writing are not neutral skills but practices shaped by colonial histories, hierarchies, and everyday forces, teachers too are shaped within those same assemblages. Their professionalism is not produced in isolation but emerges through entanglements with policies, histories, bodies, affects, and expectations.

In this part of the section, I map the terrain of teacher development to show why *becomings* offers a more generative way of understanding how teachers assemble their professionalism, an understanding that becomes increasingly important as the data unfolds in Part 4. Teacher identity has traditionally dominated educational discourse and tends to position the teacher as a fixed, coherent and fully achievable state of being (Lambert, 2021). Such framings mirror the homogenising narratives often attached to reading and writing: they obscure the political, historical, and racialised conditions that organise who teachers can be and how they are recognised within the profession. By contrast, teacher development is better understood as an ongoing series of becomings: always shifting and responsive. This perspective is especially important for marginalised ECTeachers, whose professional experiences unfold within terrains already structured by colonial and institutional residues discussed in detail in Part 5. I also find becoming a term that I resonate with, where my sense of who I am as a teacher and researcher feels less like an endpoint and more like an unfolding shaped by everyday encounters, constraints and possibilities.

The concept of becoming allows us to attend to the multiple forces that shape teachers beyond the individual human subject. As Jones and Ellis (2019, p5) note, this includes ‘intersections of multiple agents - the personal, psycho-socio-cultural...’ but also non-human forces such as materials, technologies, institutional structures and spatial conditions. Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) emphasis on assemblage helps illuminate this further as (teacher) becoming emerges through the contingent coming-together of bodies, ideas, tools, policies, emotions and environments. It is a dynamic process of affect and relation, where teachers continually negotiate what they can do and who they can become within shifting conditions. In this view, becoming is not about progressing toward a predetermined professional identity but about continuously forming and reforming in relation to the world.

This framing also highlights how ambiguous the boundaries of ‘the teacher’ really are. As Bright (2015, p 97) observes, it is not always clear ‘when, where and how the teacher begin(s) and end(s)’. teaching itself is characterised by instability and change, always in a state of process (Hall, 1997). Seeing teachers as becomings enables us to view teaching not as the achievement of a stable status but as something fluid, relational, contextual and non-linear. This perspective directly contrasts with dominant discourses in contemporary education, where teachers are often constructed through standards frameworks and linear professional development pathways that imply a fixed and measurable identity set out by standard agenda earlier and ECTeacher policy frameworks.

Policy within the ECTeaching space has and still dictates and defines what it takes to be a teacher and then remain as a teacher. These are usually prescribed through DfE’s Golden Thread (2019) of policies ([Terrain 6](#)). These current policies (ITTECF, Teachers’ Standards) as well as historical ones such as the Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) programmes are framed as a means of measuring and defining the professional work of teachers. Defining professionalism and then teacher identity is difficult, and many have not been able to pinpoint it to an exact description (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). Most do agree though developing a ‘teacher’ identity is complicated (Adams, 2021). These pre-defined and bounded aspects of what makes a teacher can be considered problematic (Hall and McGinity, 2015), linking back to the cultures of performativity and managerialism (Ball, 2021) instilled in education today. Ontologically, it may be more productive to approach teacher identity as a process of becoming that privileges difference (discussed in Part 1) rather than sameness, emphasising the unique, evolving practices and perspectives each teacher brings to their professional role.

Although, a comprehensive policy mapping can encompass a wider timeframe, this part of the cartography will focus on developments from 1999 onwards. I choose to focus on this moment

onwards as it marks a major turning point in education policy under the New Labour government of the time. In the years leading up to this point, reforms reflecting Blair's priority on 'education, education, education' (MacLeod, 2007) reshaped the systems, introducing new accountability measures, standards and performative targets, alongside increased investment in schools, teacher development and curriculum reform. From 1999 onward, these changes accelerated, with the expansion of specialist schools, new approaches to teaching and assessment, and policies to widen access to higher education, creating frameworks that would influence subsequent governments. By beginning the mapping here, it is possible to trace how these foundational reforms shaped later policy developments, both in terms of continuity and reactions by governments past and present.

### **#Killjoy Moment**

*I was old enough to follow the news in the mid-90s. Blair had won the election, and everywhere I looked, on the street, on TV, people were smiling and celebrating. There was a sense that something truly significant had happened. And then came that infamous refrain 'Education, education, education'. As a child, it sounded like a promise. Those in power actually cared about school, about learning, about our futures. I believed it. for a long time, I thought great things were coming.*

*But now, looking back, the cracks are impossible to ignore. Who was that promise really for? Tuition fees arrived, schools were ranked and scrutinised, Ofsted inspections became a source of anxiety, academisation spread, and wars raged on. The hope I once felt now seems like a carefully crafted illusion, one that masked, and perhaps even worsened, the inequalities it claimed to confront.*

Under the New Labour government of 1997, a series of mandatory national specifications were introduced and closely inspected, which Furlong (2000) and Mahony and Hextall (2000) argue marginalised both educationalists and those in the public. Central to these reforms were the National Curriculum, already discussed earlier, reinforced by standardised assessments and heavily influenced by Ofsted inspections. These reforms, centralised control over education, reducing professional discretion and the narrowing down of the curriculum. Here, both Foucault's (1977) and Deleuze's (1992) perspectives on power, discussed in [Point 4b](#), can help us understand the government or policymakers' power to define and control educational practices. Foucault's concept of disciplinary power explains how mandatory national specifications act as a form of surveillance, monitoring practices and enforcing a particular standard. By defining the 'correct' way to be a teacher, the governments assert its authority and shapes what legitimate knowledge, shaped by white, Eurocentric viewpoints, is in this space, by excluding valued voices and expertise from this process reinforces the

power to define and impose practices. The next part outlines the historical landscape to teacher development.

Since 1999, a mandatory induction period had played a pivotal role in providing support and training to new teachers in England. The purpose of this induction was to 'consolidate and extend the skills learned during their initial training' (Williams et al, 2001, p253) and successful completion of the induction period, whilst being a NQT resulted in being awarded QTS. Though framed as support, the mandatory induction period for new teachers in England embodied neo-liberal tendencies that prioritised measurable outcomes over other educational goals. The binary framing of successful completion versus failure, disregards the ongoing nature of teacher development. Furthermore, Gilroy (1998, p223) argues the standardised, linear progression from training to induction to QTS overlooks the need for differentiated support based on individual teachers' contexts and needs. In essence, this policy prioritised a one size fits all approach aligned with neo-liberal principles, potentially neglecting the complexities of fostering a well-rounded teaching profession (Ellis, 2007).

Presented as significant reforms by the Conservative government of 2021, the transitions from the NQT programme to 'The Golden Thread' encompassing the ITTECF (2025), has imposed a more controlled and codified structure on the ECTeaching space, shaping fixed patterns of thinking, being and practice. I discuss 'The Golden Thread' in [Terrain 6](#), but the key point here is that these iterations of teacher development have been built upon existing structures and approaches, focusing on refining and strengthening existing neo-liberal influenced standards (Maguire, 2014 p 782). Various routes to QTS, including PGCE and SCITT programmes, from which my participants were recruited from, are now aligned to new standard frameworks. The emphasis on competency-based assessment also remains a central feature of the current framework increasing modes of standardisation, bureaucratic control and reducing professional autonomy. My concern now widens to what such bureaucratic control means for marginalised bodies working as ECTeachers. Standardised assessment and performance metrics often reinforce dominant norms and therefore people from marginalised backgrounds may face greater scrutiny or pressure to conform to institutional expectations that do not take in account their lived experience. This type of top-down control allows less room for diverse perspectives or challenge to the dominant narratives in education. Such policies are presented as neutral and objective, they reflect and reproduce power structures making it difficult for marginalised bodies to be themselves (Morris 2012, p 94), contributing to their 'otherness' explain in Part 4 and 5.

The Black feminist thinker, Patricia Collins argues 'oppressed groups are frequently placed in the situation of being listened to only if we frame our ideas in the language that is familiar to and

comfortable for a dominant group.’ (Collins, 2002, p 7). This speaks directly to how bureaucratic control in teacher education demands conformity to dominant norms. Marginalised teachers - especially those from racialised, working-class, or other underrepresented backgrounds often find that their ways of teaching, knowing, and engaging with students must fit within institutional frameworks designed by and for the dominant group. The requirement to meet rigid standards, adhere to pre-defined notions of ‘good teaching,’ and move in and through complex accreditation processes often forces them to suppress their own lived experiences and alternative pedagogies (Cushing, 2025). Collins’ insight highlights how bureaucratic structures function not just as systems of control but as mechanisms that shape whose knowledge is valued and whose is dismissed.

### *Point 5a - Discursive Teacher Development*

***This point explores how policies, language and power relations shape teachers’ professionalism in the situated space of Subject English and ECTeacher development.***

I return now to the when the Conservative and Liberal Democratic party formed a coalition government in 2011. The Conservative Party hails itself as the ‘party of the teacher’ (Education Secretary, Michael Gove, in his speech to the Tories’ annual conference (BBC News 2010). Benn (2023 in Ellis, p 27) argues that we cannot make sense of the happenings within this teacher education landscape without referring to the ‘Godfather’ of its reforms, Michael Gove, a leading figure in what shaped this space to be. He placed emphasis on a ‘rigorous and traditional’ approach (Walker, 2012) suggesting a linear, binary and colonial view of teacher development, also discussed earlier. The words ‘rigorous’ and ‘traditional’ here implies a view of a dominant, preferred, a more valuable approach which renders others forms of knowledge and approaches null and void. Gove uses the word ‘traditional’ here to mean western tradition, namely British knowledge and approaches (or similar since he was heavily influenced by an American) to teacher development; changes to curriculum imposing this knowledge form were implemented (Smith et al, 2025). But in terms of teacher development, there was a gradual trend towards evidence-based teaching following a review into ITE in the UK – the Carter Review (DfE, 2015). Some of the recommendations included development of a framework of an ITT Core Content Framework and the Teachers’ Standards should be amended to be more explicit about the taking an evidence-based approach (DfE, 2015). Carpenter (2016) proposes that the call for evidence-based teaching is not well defined and reducing teaching to a specific set of behaviours is deeply problematic and moves to a ‘more restrictive technical rationalist’ model of professionalism (Carpenter, 2016, p4), which I explained earlier in Terrain 4.

### *#Killjoy moment*

Messy work. Back and forth. Entangled and deeply problematic structures and ideas sit on the foundations of becoming a Subject English teacher!

This call for evidence-based teaching potentially stifled innovation and overlooked the importance of ongoing learning and becoming. Similarly, the focus on swift dismissal of underperforming teachers (Shepherd, 2011) created a binary system of 'good' versus 'bad' with limited room for nuance or support. The Teachers' Standards (2012) and then the 'Golden thread' (DfE, 2022), was a level of control being exerted on how teachers should behave at all stages of their career and the standard agenda determined who teachers could be (Lambert, 2020).

The Conservatives continued to cut funding for education, exacerbating pressures faced by schools and teachers. They also persisted with academisation (Academies Act, 2010) and introduced the English baccalaureate (EBacc, DfE, 2019), a specific set of subjects that schools are required to deliver. This narrow curriculum fosters a performative approach to education, where measurable outcomes take precedence over broader educational aims. These policies stratify the educational landscape and align with neoliberal principles of efficiency and performance (Ball, 2012). Consequently, they create a competitive environment among schools, emphasising quantifiable metrics such as Progress 8 (DfE, 2018). These lines of control (Deleuze, 1992) and underlying neoliberal policies divide the ECTeaching space into distinct, measurable and competitive elements; creating boundaries, hierarchies and pressures that mark the space as restricted and limiting.

But these physical divisions are not just what contributes to the structured space, as it is also the divisions that shape bodies and emotions. If I apply an affective lens to this mapping, then the divisions create an affective state whether it is pressure, anxiety, fear, competitiveness or other emotive responses. These are shaped by the structures of this space. As Lorde reminds us, 'If we don't define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others, for their use and for our detriment.' (Lorde, 1984, p 45). Her words resonate here, in such structured spaces, the boundaries and expectations imposed on teachers and students work to define them in ways that serve institutional logics rather than their own flourishing. Franklin-Phipps' (2020) work foregrounds how affective experiences are tied to ongoing racialised formations within educational spaces. She highlights that discussions of race in teacher education require attention to emotion and embodiment because 'the multidimensional qualities of affects are flattened when the behaviours they influence are interpreted....as emotional resistance to critical inquiry about race, racism and white supremacy' (Ohito, 2016, p 457), underscoring how affect is produced through racialised pedagogical encounters rather than occurring independently of them. For example, a Muslim teacher might feel anxious when discussing systemic

racism because the curriculum, school norms and values implicitly marginalised or challenge their perspective. I provide further examples of this in Part 4. The affective climate of anxiety, pressure or another affect, shapes how bodies move, feel, and become within these regulated terrains.

### **#Killjoy Moment**

*As I experience the mapping of policy – can't help but think something is missing.*

*Is it intentional or do they forget us.*

*Absence of acknowledgement is felt.*

Policy within these areas that have contributed to these structured, restricted spaces, have also been framed under what could be argued 'a colour-blind' approach and this can perpetuate systemic inequalities for particular bodies (Aldana and Vazquez, 2020). By not explicitly addressing race and other aspects of difference, these policies fail to acknowledge the specific challenges and barriers faced by teachers from marginalised backgrounds. I draw upon some of this in Part 4. Smith (2021, p73) has called out the absence of race in public policy:

*'Absences in social policy also betray and authorise symbolic value regarding what is and is not important. The lack of attention to racism in initial teacher education (ITE) policy for example, tells student teachers that understanding racism is not as important as learning about say, behaviour management, even in cases when understanding an individual's behaviour requires an understanding of racism in all of its forms.'* (Smith, 2021, p.73)

Smith (2021) argues that education policy in England over the years has undergone 'de-racialisation', meaning race as a factor in educational inequality is obscured or diluted. Policies are designed and implemented in ways that avoid directly addressing it. As racism is not explicitly acknowledged, policies do not address the root causes of the problem. Instead, focus is surface level and challenge to the underlying power structures are absent, which means systemic change is avoided. ITT/ECTeaching policy exemplifies this de-racialisation, as neither the Golden Thread (DfE, 2022) or current Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2021) explicitly reference racism. Smith and Lander (2023) develop an Anti-Racism Framework for ITE/T by drawing on a substantial body of global scholarship on race, racism, and anti-racist pedagogies in teacher education, alongside a national survey of ITE providers in England. Their literature review highlights long-standing critiques of mainstream teacher-training policy. They build on studies showing that anti-racist preparation is most effective when it is embedded throughout the curriculum rather than delivered as one-off interventions and draw on research documenting systemic racial inequalities in teacher recruitment, progression, and the experience of Black, Asian and other racially minoritised trainee teachers. Together, this literature

suggests that current ITE structures in England are not only inadequate but actively reproduce forms of institutional whiteness that shape the dispositions, knowledge, and professional identities of ECTeachers.

Based on these findings, Smith and Lander (2023) propose an Anti-Racism Framework designed to support ITE providers in embedding anti-racist principles across the whole system, from curriculum design to placement experiences, mentoring, institutional culture, and leadership. As it is not a statutory framework, it is yet to be embedded in all ITE policy.

### **#Killjoy Moment**

In the teaching provision I have access to, I have not seen this embedded in practice. I've tried to put my ideas across and I get some head shaking and silence.

Informed by concepts such as racial literacy, structural racism, and critical reflexivity, the framework offers themes, reflective questions, and practical examples to help providers move beyond tokenistic approaches and towards sustained, systemic change. Smith and Lander (2023) therefore position anti-racist ITE not as optional enhancement but as a structural necessity, one that aims to transform how teachers are prepared, how they understand inequality, and how they participate in the wider educational landscape. It is yet to be embedded in policy from a statutory viewpoint and made 'common-knowledge' in practice.

### **#Killjoy Moment**

When I mention this framework in spaces, I either get blank looks of 'never heard of this!' or some type of eye rolling.

The discussions of whether teachers are 'trained' or 'educated' may appear to be nonsensical, but it really is significant in understanding how we understand teaching as a profession. I have already mentioned my decision to use ITE instead of ITT in Part 1, but the distinction speaks to deeper assumptions about what teaching is for and what kinds of knowledge, judgement and autonomy teachers are expected to exercise. When teachers are framed as 'trained', the implication is that teaching is a technical activity governed by prescribed routines, an understanding consistent with what Schon (1983) describes as a 'technical-rational' model of practice. In this view, teachers are implementers of externally designed methods, and effectiveness is measured through compliance, efficiency and standardised outcomes. A 'technical rationalist' professional encourages 'routines and prescriptions, sees knowledge as permanent, theory is applied to practice, standards are fixed and measurable and controlled (Carpenter, 2016, p 6).

By contrast, describing teachers as 'educated' highlights the intellectual, ethical and relational dimensions of their work, aligning to teacher becoming as a temporal, dynamic and emergent process in which knowledge emerges entangled with practice. Knowing is an intra-active process where teachers do not simply apply knowledge but are continually co-constituted with it in practice. Thinking about knowledge as such, challenges linear models of professional skills acquisition and instead foregrounds the fluid, situated nature of teaching. This aligns with Haraway's (2016) accounts of subjectivity, which could emphasise that teachers are relational bodies whose becomings are shaped by ongoing entanglements with students, environments, histories and power structures. Teaching is not a technique to be mastered but is an ethical and political practice.

Black Feminist thinkers further deepen this understanding. Ahmed's (2012, 2017) work on affect, diversity and institutional life reminds us that teachers' labour is shaped by the emotional, embodied and institutional pressures that circulate within educational spaces. Her emphasis on 'affective economies' highlights how teachers must constantly interpret, negotiate and respond to these forces, an activity far removed from the notion of training as the acquisition of neutral, technical skills. Black Feminist scholarship more broadly through hooks, (1994) and Lorde (1984) foregrounds the lived, embodied, and relational dimensions of teaching, viewing it as a site of resistance, creativity and care rather than a technical exercise. Taken together, these perspectives reveal that understanding teachers as 'educated' rather than merely 'trained' positions teaching as a complex, relational and ethically charged form of professional becoming.

Braidotti (2013) positions difference and otherness as central mechanisms through which power marks, classifies, and regulates bodies. Difference, for her, is a politically charged process that constructs certain groups as the 'sexualised other,' the 'racialised other,' or the 'naturalised other,' thereby determining how they are valued, recognised, or constrained within particular contexts. Iris Marion Young's (1990) work similarly highlights how structurally embedded norms shape the social positioning of individuals through mechanisms such as marginalisation, cultural imperialism, and powerlessness. The dominant discourse in teacher education suppresses differences as it continues to order and compartmentalise teachers and their development. Lambert (2020) proposes to counter the hegemonic and singular construction of teacher 'identity' we see through England's educational policy as described earlier, by considering the concept of difference. Taken together with Braidotti (2013) and Young (1990) insights, difference is materialised through institutional practices and cultural expectations. In educational settings, these dynamics directly shape teacher becomings, as teachers' identities, possibilities for action, and professional recognition emerge within these same power structures. How teachers come to be perceived, as caring, authoritative, competent, foreign,

excessive, or insufficient, is deeply entangled with the processes of othering described by Braidotti (2013) and Young (1990), making teacher becoming a relational and politically situated process rather than a neutral professional practice. In the next Terrain, I explore how current policy promotes the idea of a neutral professional practice through the 'Golden Thread'.

## Terrain 6: The Golden Thread and the 'Golden' Teacher

Earlier in Point 4a, I mapped the standards agenda that prescribes the way teachers should be. In this section, the 'Golden Thread' is mapped out in more detail, focusing around how such policies are technologies for maintaining institutional 'happiness' (Ahmed, 2010). I discussed Ahmed's use of 'happiness' in Part 1, but to recall this concept, she uses this to point to what kinds of bodies and actions are considered 'good', 'valuable' and is seen as a cultural measure. The 'Golden Thread' was introduced in response to the challenges of recruitment and retention of teachers in England. The Recruitment and Retention Strategy (DfE, 2019), had four priorities; to reduce workload; to transform support for ECTeachers; to develop more varied career paths and to make application to becoming teacher easier (Rowe, 2023 in Ellis). Through this policy enforcement, the figure of the 'Golden Teacher', which I have coined, is produced; a docile, agreeable and non-complaining ECTeacher whose professionalism is measured through compliance. Any attempt to highlight issues – whether it is about equity concerns, workloads or policy demands, is reframed as a deviation from 'what works' and therefore complaint is treated as inefficiency.

### **#Killjoy Moment**

*When working in schools, I never stayed silent when something felt off. I spoke up, raised concerns, and called out what others chose to ignore. But instead of being heard, I got the eye-rolls, the dismissal, the quiet push outwards. I thought I was the 'complainer', when really I was just paying attention.*

In this way, ECTeachers learn that 'teaching' should be risk-managed or politically conscious, and that discomfort, conflict or trouble should be avoided rather than engaged with. The notion of the 'Golden Teacher' carries multiple policy and institutional connotations that illuminate how the 'Golden Thread' shapes teacher professionalism. The language of 'golden' evokes ideals of perfection and 'gold standard' quality, positioning the desirable teacher as one who is compliant and 'does not make a fuss'. Ahmed (2010, p 21) might refer the 'Golden Teacher' as the institution's 'happy object', prioritises harmony and suppress any critique, mentioned above. In this sense, the 'Golden Teacher' becomes an instrumentally valuable product of the system; measurable against the Standards set out and easily aligned with performance indicators. Importantly, the metaphor 'Golden Teacher'; also, subtly sides with normative ideas shaped by whiteness, where those who do not disrupt cultural

expectations are more readily seen as professionally fit. The ‘Golden Teacher’ thus functions as a disciplinary figure, one that invites ECTeachers to embody institutional happiness while learning to avoid the trouble that complaint might otherwise reveal.

When I began this thesis in mid-2022, the ‘golden thread’ was at the heart of the government’s Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy (DfE, 2019) and had already led to a cohesive set of policies. These included the implementation of the Early Career Framework (ECF), designed to support teachers through their initial two years of teaching and replacing the previous NQT status and induction programme discussed in 1.1 The second strand of the ‘golden thread’ involved the introduction of a new suite of National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) and a comprehensive review of the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) market (DfE, 2019a). In the months that followed, the ITT Core Content Framework (CCF) was unveiled (DfE, 2019), establishing the fundamental content that ITT providers were required to embed in their curricula (Rowe in Ellis, 2023), thereby marking the formal beginning of the ‘golden thread’.

#### *Point 6a – ITTECF*

***This point maps the specific policy centred around ECTeacher development, exemplifying state control of teacher development, aligned to specific ways of knowing and being.***

In 2024, the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF) was ‘(re)introduced’ as it combined and replaced the previously separate ITT CCF and ECF following a review (DfE, 2021), providing a unified framework for teacher development from initial training through the early career phase. This initiative forms part of the Department for Education’s vision to establish a ‘world-class teacher development system’ (DfE, 2022, p.4), addressing concerning attrition rates, which currently stand at 12.5% after the first year and rise to 23% by the third year of teaching (DfE, 2022). The ITTECF embeds a continuous, evidence-informed ‘golden thread’ (see Figure 1) of professional learning, designed to enhance both recruitment and retention by ensuring that high-quality training and support underpin the entirety of a teacher’s early career. I will focus this part of the mapping on how the ITTECF aspect of the Golden Thread both sustains and structures the connection between ideas, values, and professional practices in teacher development (Ahmed, 2010, p.34) and simultaneously frames critiques of whiteness, surveillance, or policy demands, as individual failures of professionalism. In doing so, it reproduces what Ahmed (2012) terms the ‘non-performative’ commitment to diversity, where institutional declarations of equality or inclusion exist symbolically but fail to translate into meaningful change. By standardising early career training and embedding a prescriptive set of professional behaviours, the ITTECF reinforces a particular vision of what constitutes competent, professional teaching, potentially marginalising alternative perspectives or

critical reflection on systemic inequities (Ball, 2003; Fenwick, 2010). In this sense, the Golden Thread, while aiming to unify and elevate teacher development, also functions as a regulatory mechanism that aligns professional identity with state-sanctioned norms, rather than actively challenging underlying inequalities.

**[Figure 1: The golden thread (Ambition Institute, 2024)]**



The ITTECF (2024) structure divides the content into eight sections, aligning with the competencies outlined in the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2011) discussed earlier in Point 4a. Each section of the ITTECF delineates two types of content: 'Learn that' and 'Learn how to,' with detailed statements specifying the content mandated for all ECTeachers (See Figure 3). The providers of the ITTECF design the content for the delivery of the framework to ECTeachers, ensuring the content aligns with the 'Learn that' and 'Learn how to' statements.

**[Figure 2: Early Career Framework - DfE, 2024 p 11]**

## High Expectations (Standard 1 – Set high expectations)

| Learn that...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Learn how to...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teachers have the ability to affect and improve the wellbeing, motivation and behaviour of their pupils.</li> <li>2. Teachers are key role models, who can influence the attitudes, values and behaviours of their pupils.</li> <li>3. Teacher expectations can affect pupil outcomes; setting goals that challenge and stretch pupils from their starting points is essential.</li> <li>4. Setting clear expectations can help communicate shared values that improve classroom and school culture.</li> <li>5. A culture of mutual trust and respect supports effective relationships.</li> <li>6. High quality teaching has a long-term positive effect on pupils' life chances, particularly for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.</li> <li>7. High quality teaching is underpinned by positive interactions between pupils, their teachers and their peers.</li> </ol> | <p><b>Communicate a belief in the academic potential of all pupils, by:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Using intentional and consistent language that promotes challenge and aspiration.</li> <li>b) Setting tasks that stretch pupils, but which are achievable, within a challenging curriculum.</li> <li>c) Creating a positive environment where making mistakes and learning from them and the need for effort and perseverance are part of the daily routine.</li> <li>d) Seeking opportunities to engage parents and carers in the education of their children (e.g. proactively highlighting successes) and consider how this engagement changes depending on the age and development stage of the pupil.</li> </ol> <p><b>Demonstrate consistently high behavioural expectations, by:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>e) Creating a culture of inclusion, respect and trust in the classroom that supports all pupils to succeed (e.g. by modelling the types of courteous behaviour expected of pupils).</li> <li>f) Teaching and rigorously maintaining clear behavioural expectations (e.g. for contributions, volume level and concentration).</li> <li>g) Applying rules, sanctions and rewards consistently in line with school policy, including where individual pupils have an agreed tailored approach, escalating behaviour incidents as appropriate.</li> </ol> |

### #Killjoy Moment

*It's gone mad on X – my feed is bombarded with frustration on the new ITTECF – nothing new introduced. As if the array of acronyms were not already plentiful already.*

The ITTECF represents a crucial initial move towards heightened state control over teacher education and early career development post 2010. The implications of centralising control over teacher knowledge with content primarily shaped by a few, received little attention at the time. Spendlove (2019) asserts that even before its implementation or evaluation, the ECF was regarded as a 'gamechanger'. Despite concerns being raised by the ITE sector that the ECF may be forcing teachers into unnecessary training (Rowe, 2023), the ECF undeniably served as a significant precursor to subsequent 'golden thread' initiatives. Research on successful professional development says it must be relevant, context specific and a process than an event (Harwell, 2003).

As a facilitator on the ECF programme at a Higher Education Institution (HEI), I have first-hand experience of being part of such a narrowed, knowledge specific and linear professional package that also forms part of my killjoy moments. The next two killjoy moments are those that recall my observations and frustrations in the hope of exemplifying the exclusionary practices of the ECF.

### #Killjoy Moment

*First in person all day conference for the new ECTeachers completing the ECF programme. They keynote speaker, a white, seemingly authoritative and experienced woman, embedded in the*

*PowerPoint presentation, emphasised the importance of prioritising evidence-based teaching and data over personal thoughts and feelings.*

*I was uncomfortable. Teachers are being told their own thoughts and feelings are not important and need to look more towards an evidence based. What is this evidence? Where does it come from? Why is it so important? The idea that a teacher is considered an 'agent of transformation' was brought up. Can they really be these superhero types changing lives, when they are constantly battling against everything working against them. The speaker switched gears and started talking about Generation C, characterised by creativity, courage, and change. Ironical - the speaker delivers an emotive talk to the ECTeachers highlighting the potential impact they could have. Emotions are important when trying to push an idea/agenda...*

Booth (2022) reported damning results in response to a teacher survey, with half of the respondents claiming that the ECF does not meet individual needs. Murtagh, Dawes, Rushton and Ball-Smith (in BERA, 2022) suggest this is due to the generic and repetitive nature of the ITTECF training, failing to appreciate the value of learning through and from experience. They also argue:

*'ECF training's one-size-fits-all approach fails to take into account the biographies, histories and experiences within specific training environments that would typically blend evidence-based knowledge with socially constructed practical learning.'* (Murtagh, Dawes, Rushton and Ball-Smith (in BERA, October 2022)).

### **#Killjoy Moment**

*Later in the afternoon, I co delivered a session, using a PowerPoint presentation provided. Unfortunately, it turned out to be a classic case of 'Death by PPT', accompanied by a painfully dull video that left everyone zoning out. It was a struggle to keep up, and I could sense the boredom and distraction among the ECTeachers. Both colleague and I tried to keep the teachers engaged as best as we could, and they appreciated our efforts. The PPT, given to us by a lead provider, followed a one-size-fits-all approach, providing a very packaged form of professional development that I assume also goes out to all the delivery partners across the country. Arrgh..*

Here, the homogenous, one-size-fits-all approach is restricting the ECTeaching space, creating a hierarchical like structure of professional development. Power and authority flow from the top down and this is often associated with centralised and authoritarian systems that dictate and enforce what goes on in this space. By segmenting this space, there is a lack (or absence of) paying attention to the diverse and interconnected elements, where there is an importance of recognising the multiplicity and complexity of experiences. The current packaged ITTECF model neglects the complexities and

nuanced aspects involved in supporting the development ECTeachers' practical wisdom. It views the learning journey of ECTeachers as a linear and sequential process, delivering training in strands without consideration for individual needs and experiences (Murtagh et al., 2024).

The critique of ITTECF training implies that a more effective approach should acknowledge and incorporate the diversity of biographies, histories, and experiences within specific training environments suggested above (Murtagh et al, 2022), organising and fixing this space as it fails to recognise the varied and interconnected nature of individuals and their learning contexts. Using Deleuze's concept of division (Deleuze and Guattari's, 1987) as a lens to critique the shortcomings of a standardised, one-size-fits-all approach in ECF training, allows for a more nuanced understanding that considers the diverse realities and experiences of individuals within specific training environments.

Murtagh et al (2022; 2023) also researched the mentors' experiences of the ITTECF and found the mentors expressed a notable challenge in utilising their own practical knowledge and experience to offer personalised and contextualised experiences for the ECTeachers under their guidance within the confines of the framework. They characterised the ITTECF as 'regimented' expressing frustration at the mandatory attendance of modules and feeling compelled to complete them all. Concerns and significant workload demand from mentors are particularly alarming, with some mentors finding themselves providing additional, context specific support for ECTeachers beyond the framework's requirements. This is a concern, since the ITTECF sets to counter high rates of attrition in the industry. The mentors elaborated that the lack of context and linear progression within the framework necessitates them to offer extra, unfunded school-based training tailored to their specific settings, forcing them to become an invisible labour. This additional support is provided to address the ECTeachers' individual needs at times, aiming to compensate for the perceived deficiencies of the ECF (Murtagh et al, 2022; 2023). A recent study of ECTeacher mentoring in England argues that practices of homogenised mentoring curriculum and practices can be challenged by '*thinking outside the box*' when navigating the provision of nationally mandated training provision for ECTeachers (Murtagh et al, 2024 p10).

Rowe (in Ellis, 2023) argues the so called 'golden thread' has been wound so tightly around the sector that there is very little space left to breathe. The agency of ITE providers has been removed; being dictated to what to do. Likewise, ITTECF facilitators who are usually teacher educators and from professional educational backgrounds, are also losing their teacher agency as they are being told what

to deliver and how to deliver the professional development to ECTeachers. I argue this is yet another example of a ubiquitous and pervasive system of control, ensuring that teachers are being exposed to a specific way of being teacher, one that serves the interest of the dominant power structures. Ahmed (2010, p50) reminds us that exposing unhappiness becomes the work of the 'feminist killjoy' and she insists that such moments of exposure are not an endpoint but 'might get us somewhere'.

Using CRT and thinking about knowledge as ontologically flat in post-qualitative paradigms (St Pierre, 2011), it can be argued that the ITTECF perpetuates racial inequality by embedding it as the invisible standard against which all teachers are measured. The privileging of 'neutral standards' within these policies, obscures racialised assumptions about professionalism and pedagogical competence that align with white cultural norms, often marginalising other bodies. Positioning this, within the reading, writing, speaking + listening assemblage, Subject English teachers are situated in, reproduces dominant cultural norms while positioning others, those racialised or marginalised, as deficit (Tereshchenko, et al 2025). They also demonstrate how racial microaggressions experienced during ITE and in the early years contribute to the retention issues of racially marginalised bodies, illustrating how racism operates at a systemic level, crucially, by failing to explicitly recognise whiteness as a structural issue that shapes professional practices. The ITTECF functions as an unmarked normative framework that privileges whiteness and hierarchical forms of knowledge, embedding them within England's teacher education system. This regulatory framework therefore reproduces, rather than disrupts, racialised inequities across teacher recruitment, retention and professional development (Tereshchenko, et al, 2022; NFER, 2025). As Velle and Newman (2025, p 935) argue, such policies operate as disciplinary regimes that constrain teacher agency and professional autonomy, contributing to systemic 'disempowerment' and contributes to the 'teacher supply crisis' outlined in Part 1.

## Terrain 7: ITE/ECF and the Standardisation of Speaking

Policies within the space of early career teachers play a significant role in regulating what counts as legitimate professional speech in education. I use the ITTECF (2024) as an example to demonstrate this, and whilst framed as support for teacher development, this policy operates as a technology of standardisation, shaping not only pedagogical practice but also how teachers are expected to sound, speak, and communicate. In doing so, they contribute to a narrowing of acceptable teacher oracy and the production of a particular professional voice.

The ITTECF (2024) places considerable emphasis on 'teacher talk' particularly in relation to explicit instruction, clarity of explanation, and behaviour management (GOV.UK, n.d) Teacher speech is

constructed as a technical skill that can be refined, monitored, and evaluated, often through observation frameworks and mentoring conversations. This framing aligns with a transmission model of teaching in which talk is primarily a vehicle for efficient knowledge delivery. As Alexander (2018) argues, such approaches risk marginalising dialogic pedagogy by prioritising control, pace, and certainty over exploratory talk, uncertainty, and co-construction of meaning. Consequently, the dialogic space available to both teachers and pupils is reduced.

Within this policy context, teachers are frequently trained to monitor and police their own speech in the name of professionalism. Expectations concerning tone, clarity, accent, and linguistic presentation are rarely made explicit in policy texts, yet they are embedded in enactments of the framework through mentoring, assessment, and informal feedback. These implicit expectations are made actionable through deliberate practice, a practice which is a ‘highly structured activity, the explicit goal of which is to improve performance (Ericsson et al, 1993, p 368) and teachers engage in goal focused rehearsal with feedback. Precise target setting, embedded in teacher development, supports this process by translating professional practice into specific, measurable goals that teachers can practice and refine, and such targets are regularly reviewed and linked to observable criteria through the Standards’ agenda (Sherrington, 2021). These expectations of professionalism are not neutral. Research on raciolinguistics demonstrates that dominant notions of ‘clear’, ‘neutral’, or ‘professional’ speech are deeply entangled with whiteness and middle-class norms, positioning Standard English and particular accents as inherently more legitimate (Cushing, 2022; Flores and Rosa, 2015; Alim, Rickford, and Ball, 2016). As a result, teachers whose speech does not align with these norms may be subtly or overtly positioned as less authoritative or less professional.

Turvey (2023) explicates that the ECF (at that time) gives precedence to specific knowledge bases, most notably evidence-informed pedagogies grounded in cognitive science, while placing other forms of professional knowledge out of sight. Horden and Brooks (2025) show that the newest version ITTECF (2025), include an expanded set of additional research-based references that are evidence informed, while omitting other forms of research. This includes relational, affective, and culturally situated knowledge about language use in classrooms. By defining a set of essential or fundamental knowledge that teachers should possess, the ITTECF narrows the professional landscape and marginalises alternative pedagogical traditions, including those that foreground dialogic, culturally sustaining, or pluralistic approaches to classroom talk (Horden and Brooks, 2025). In this way, teacher talk becomes something to be standardised rather than contextually negotiated.

This narrowing reflects a long standing policy construction of teachers as technicians, explained earlier in my choice to use ITE instead of ITT. The Department for Education (2010) conceptualises teaching primarily as the deployment of technical skills, privileging observable practices over broader educational philosophies or critical engagement with issues of power, language, and identity. Such a view supports what Ball (2003 p 216) describes as the ‘terrors of performativity’, in which professional worth is judged through compliance with externally defined standards. Within this performative regime, speech is disciplined through surveillance and evaluation, encouraging early career teachers to self-regulate their voices to align with institutional norms.

The ITTECF (2024) therefore, contributes to a tightly regulated conception of professional speech that reinforces normative whiteness in what counts as ‘good’ or effective oracy. This framework is also widely criticised for its lack of relevance and repetition as well as the ‘burden’ it places on school staff (HoCEC, 2024, p 39). By privileging controlled teacher talk and explicit instruction, these frameworks limit dialogic possibilities and risk silencing diversity among the teaching workforce (Refer to [Terrain 2](#)). Rather than recognising teacher speech as a socially, culturally, and politically situated practice, current policy positions it as a technical competency to be mastered, refined, and then standardised, often at the expense of equity, authenticity, and dialogic engagement.

## Terrain 8: Speaking Under Policy Pressures

Classroom talk is increasingly organised through overlapping policy technologies that shape who can speak, how they should speak, and what speaking is formally allowed to achieve. School behaviour systems, particularly those influenced by no-excuses and zero-tolerance models, regulate voice by conditioning speech through compliance routines and sanctions (Gillborn et al. 2017; Graham, 2018). These systems produce hierarchies of participation, where certain students are authorised as ‘good speakers’ and others are positioned as disruptive or deficient, often along lines of classed and racialised expectations (Gillborn and Youdell 2000), further creating hierarchies and binaries in belonging.

Speaking also becomes a form of policy performativity during observed lessons. Teachers must generate visible evidence of progress for Ofsted and internal accountability processes, as well as the ITE/ECF policy; performance management observations, ‘professional’ conversations, push talk towards display rather than exploration (Ball 2003; Perryman 2009). As a result, classroom dialogue is less a shared inquiry and more a staged demonstration of technique, with teachers performing particular identities of control, pace, and productivity. The ITTECF adds another layer of constraint

through scripted questioning routines and tightly structured pedagogical sequences. These frameworks privilege closed questioning or cold-calling and measurable participation, narrowing the possibilities of open-ended dialogue and improvisation (DfE 2019; Mutton and Burn, 2024). The pressure to follow predetermined interaction patterns reduces teacher autonomy, while framing silence or student hesitation as evidence of weak instructional practice.

Techniques such as SLANT (sit up, listen, ask and answer questions, nod, track the speaker) further discipline classroom bodies and voices. Originally developed within U.S. charter school cultures (Lemov 2010), SLANT has been adopted in UK behaviour policies as a visual marker of attentiveness. Research shows that such techniques prioritise surface compliance over relational pedagogy, rewarding stillness and uniformity rather than curiosity or critical thought (Thornton et al. 2024; Watson 2024). Taken together, these policy pressures produce speech that is highly regulated, monitored, and scripted. Rather than a democratic space where bodies explore knowledge collaboratively, voice becomes a measurable performance shaped by institutional surveillance and policy expectations (Ball 2016; Gillborn 2008).

## Terrain 9: The Materiality of ECTeachers

The materiality of teachers is central to understanding how they come to matter within educational contexts. More importantly, it is the material-discursive conditions that shape what teachers can do, say, or become (Barad, 2007). The mapping of the ECTeaching using Subject English as an example illustrates how discursive conditions encompass the narratives, norms, and institutional logics that define what counts as a ‘proper’ Subject English or a ‘proper’ teacher. These include Eurocentric conceptions of English curriculum, normative expectations about professionalism, and assumptions shaped by race, class, and gender regarding who belongs as a teacher (Takayama et al, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1998). They are also enacted through accountability frameworks, such as Ofsted inspection language, school policies, and broader institutional logics that delineate acceptable behaviours and practices (Lingard, 2010; Ball, 2003).

These conditions are not merely abstract ideas as they actively shape how teachers develop and enact their roles. Material conditions, the physical and spatial arrangements of classrooms, the availability of resources, and the embodied experiences of teachers and students, intra-act with discursive norms to negotiate power, belonging, and professional identity. Policies and curricula function as institutional forms, structuring what counts as ‘good,’ ‘correct,’ or ‘acceptable’ teaching and Subject English practice (Ball, 2015).

Bodies, both of teachers and students, are material actors carrying histories, affective states, and cultural inscriptions; they record and reproduce institutional norms while simultaneously being shaped by them (Ahmed, 2006; Wetherell, 2012). Similarly, classroom spaces, assessment practices, and teaching routines act as nonhuman actants within assemblages, co-producing what is legible as professional, safe, or legitimate teaching. Policies and institutional practices operate as archives in Ahmed's sense, storing histories, expectations, and affective norms that delineate who teachers are allowed to be, and who may be positioned as a 'troublemaker' or 'killjoy' (Ahmed, 2006).

Materialities are thus entangled; texts, bodies, affects, and spaces continuously intra-act, producing racialised subjectivities, emotional labour, and compliance (Barad, 2007). Teachers' embodied histories and personal experiences are inseparable from the institutional, textual, and policy forces that shape them. Affect circulates through these materialities - fear, anxiety, self-monitoring, and caution are not solely internal states but effects of these material-discursive assemblages, influencing teacher behaviour and constraining possibilities for critical or dialogic approaches to literacy (Ringrose, 2013; Biesta, 2010). In this way, teacher development is always co-constituted by the entanglement of material, discursive, and affective forces which I draw upon in Part 4 and 5.

## Terrain 10: Reading, Writing, Speaking + Listening as Fixing Marginalised Bodies

Reading, writing, speaking + listening are often imagined as the neutral, foundational components of Subject English, as discussed throughout. They are discrete and measurable categories, which if 'done well' guarantee academic development and progression (Davies and Pearse, 2000). Teachers are not only teaching these categories but living through them. Their voices, accents, written styles and reading practices become sites of institutional evaluation. To speak differently, to write differently, to read differently is to risk becoming hypervisible and pose a problem (Ahmed, 2024). In policy discourse, reading, writing, speaking + listening are presented as if they exist outside history and outside bodies, grounded in skill acquisition and in power. Yet, ECTeachers entering these spaces are entering them as already defined and shaped by neoliberal ideology, performative measures, racialised histories and the continuing dominance of Standard English. Reading, writing, speaking + listening function as affective and institutional assemblages that produce judgment on how bodies should be and develop in order to be recognised as legitimate.

In the current climate of a teacher recruitment and retention crisis, as outlined in Part 1.2, the assemblages are entangled with a system of performativity grounded in accountability and individual responsibility. Meeting professional standards and targets operate as disciplinary forces (Deleuze, 1990) pressing upon bodies to demonstrate progress. This operates unevenly; marginalised

ECTeachers are forced to embody the expectations of being a teacher of Subject English, which if they comply, then their professional identity is recognised. If they do not, then there is a possibility it is denied and they experience many challenges as documented by Tereshchenko et al (2025). It is here that the politics of deficit operates most intensely, shaping narratives about what a good teacher looks like.

As Ahmed (2021) illuminates in her work on complaint, the very act of making visible these uneven structures becomes in itself a refusal of institutional happiness, referring to the demands that individuals should not disrupt the smooth story of progress. Institutional happiness relies upon the suppression of discomfort; it requires silence around racism and discomfort around hierarchies. In Subject English, the silence is achieved through the reading, writing, speaking +listening assemblage operating as neutral components. To insist that they are ideological, affective and rooted in one dominant way of thinking is therefore a killjoy gesture; an interruption and refusal to keep the surface smooth.

Teachers working within these assemblages cannot escape that the assemblage of reading, writing, speaking + listening is weaponised through policy. They become data points and evidence, determining a teachers' performance. Targets produce anxiety and narrow assessment structures that they teach and experience in their teacher becomings, demand accuracy, clarity and crucially adherence to Standard English. In this way, the assemblage privileges the cultural norms of the dominant group, posing universal standards as if they are historically neutral rather than colonial and ideological (Baker-Bell, 2020). Thus, in these assemblages, deficiency is produced. Students who do not demonstrate proficiency in these standards are described as lacking cultural capital or educational aspirations (Cushing, 2024). Teachers who question this framing risk appearing unprofessional or resistant. The education system sees that problems lie with the individual, rather than on systemic matters. As Gillborn (2015) argues, this form of racialisation operates precisely by presenting whiteness as invisible and becomes naturalised within reading, writing, speaking + listening practices as well as teacher development.

### **#Killjoy Moment**

*Khoshto (Bangla: an endured struggle; a pain that is carried) is what I go through when I write. This process is such a Khoshto; I stop, pause, go back and forth. Not because I am stuck but because the work demands patience. This is not the Khoshto that promises resolution or reward. It is the quiet labour of staying with the difficulty, just like Haraway reminds us. Writing is willingness to sit with discomfort and call that work.*

The speaking + listening components of Subject English reveal another layer of ideological force, governing who is heard and who must remain quiet, whose voices are accepted and whose are deemed as disruptive or a problem. Listening then becomes an institutional judgement and some bodies are listening, producing hierarchies of belonging. As discussed earlier, the curriculum states that students should speak clearly and confidently using Standard English (DfE, 2013). Embedded in this requirement is an assumption that Standard English represents linguistic correctness, while other forms of speech are represented as incorrect (Leftsein and Snell, 2014; Drummond, 2017). The implication is that Standard English is a marker of cultural belonging and legitimacy. Standard English, in this elevated position, deems other dialects, accents as inferior particularly racialised and regional voices (Cushing, 2021; Cushing and Snell 2023).

### **#Killjoy Moment**

*In April 2016, I recall a job interview I had for English teacher post at a school with a predominately Muslim, South Asian student population in inner-city Birmingham. After a typical interview process, I was offered the job, which I accepted. The Head of Department said to me I would be a good role-model for students at the school since I sound really Brummie, and speak properly - the kids needed more of that...I wondered what she meant by that...Were the children lacking something? I certainly didn't get that impression during the micro-teach I just engaged in...But the comment stayed with me*

Although framed as a compliment, the remark troubled me. Even though a decade has passed, it has stuck to my body (Ahmed, 2014). It implied that the linguistic identities of the students were deficient and in need of correction and that my accent – recognisable and ‘proper’ might help them. The comment, made casually and with institutional ease, revealed that speaking + listening are saturated with racialised assumptions about whose voices belong in spaces. Such encounters exemplify the subtle ways deficit thinking circulates through educational spaces. Speaking + listening are deeply affective practices; they shape how teachers feel about themselves. Teachers quickly learn that certain accents sound ‘professional’ while others must be softened (Cushing, 2020). They learn that they must speak with confidence, clarity and enthusiasm, reflecting the wider neoliberal expectation that emotional display needs to be controlled (Keddie, 2016). At the same time, listening involves careful conformity; listening to feedback without complaint; listening to advice without interruption, listening without displaying discomfort (Butterwick, 2012) and so speaking and listening become political acts of survival in educational spaces.

Moreover, these assemblages discussed are deeply connected to national anxieties about identity and belonging. Current debates about immigration and integration, alongside Subject English policies discussed in this mapping, outline a need to maintain a cohesive national culture. Speaking ‘properly’

and in 'English' intra-acts with being recognisably British and being recognisable as British becomes linked to safety and citizenship. Bodies that are positioned outside this framework are implicitly positioned as threats or as others (Abbas, et al, 2017). The school becomes a site where the nation is produced and being an ECTeacher of Subject English becomes a key landscape upon which these ideologies are enforced, often silently.

The affective consequences are profound and Ahmed (2010) argues that shame circulates where bodies fail to meet institutional happiness. Those who do not meet the standards set out in the reading, writing, speaking + listening assemblage are made to feel they have failed and are inadequate (references) , rather than recognising that the institution had failed them (Gillborn, 2015).

## Terrain 11: Assemblages Under Surveillance: Prevent and Trojan Horse Scandal

Building on the previous mapping of policy ([Terrain 4](#)) and teacher development ([Terrains 6, 7, 8](#)), it becomes necessary to consider how these affective and structural forces consolidate into what Foucault (1980, p 131) refers to as 'regimes of truth'; frameworks that legitimises knowledge but also renders others deficient or risky. When curriculum and policy operate as mechanisms of truth production, it extends the pressures described above that marginalised bodies are not only compelled to align with dominant norms but also positioned under heightened scrutiny when they do not. This dynamic becomes especially visible within policy assemblages where racialised narratives of threat, and deviance are mobilised to justify intensified forms of monitoring and control. It is within the landscape that Prevent policy and the controversies such as the Trojan Horse affair emerge as powerful examples of how surveillance becomes entangled with educational practice, which I will now take you through.

The introduction of the Prevent Duty (Home Office, 2015, 2023) and promotion of British Values (DfE, 2014) in schools present significant challenges for marginalised bodies in education, particularly in Subject English. The Prevent Duty, originally introduced in 2015 as part of the UK governments' counter terrorism strategy, places a statutory duty on educators to identify and report signs of radicalisation. This has often led to policy being interpreted within Islamophobic discourses and the emergence of Britishness as a key feature of fundamental British Values (Jermone, Elwick and Kazim, 2019). The Prevent Duty has also led to increased scrutiny and surveillance of Muslims in education, fostering a climate of distrust and fear (Busher et al, 2019).

The following section examines these surveillance assemblages, tracing how they shape, discipline and delegitimise the possibilities for racialised bodies within the Birmingham context, where my study is

located. Under these conditions, being a professional becomes additionally tricky and a site where some bodies, in particular Muslim bodies, must continually prove themselves to be non-risky, not extreme and compliant; echoing Ahmed's (2010) argument that institutions assess whether bodies 'fit' the institutional frame. The Trojan Horse affair intensifies this affective landscape, producing ongoing atmospheres of fear and distrust in which Muslim bodies are positioned as 'affect aliens'. Ahmed (2024, p 1) describes 'affect aliens are those who experience 'alien affects', describing bodies as not conforming to the dominant practices. As such, this positioning marks Muslim bodies out of sync with the dominant, normative expectations, and so are seen as 'alien' in the ongoing maintenance of hierarchies. Within this climate, teachers who attempt to call out any racialising effects of Muslim 'aliens', are recast as complainers, or feminist killjoys, whose discomfort is treated as the problem, rather than the effects of surveillance.

The Trojan Horse affair functions as an affective event within this context, generating ongoing atmospheres of distrust around Muslim bodies. The scandal, widely reported as evidence of an extremist plot despite later evidence revealing its fraudulent origins (The Trojan Horse Affair, 2022), had long-lasting consequences for schools, which I explain in detail further along on this page, has continued to structure public feeling and policy direction long after the official investigations closed (Holmwood and O'Toole 2017). It transformed Muslim educators and students into figures of suspicion, constructing them as potential threats to 'British values' and legitimising intensified surveillance in schools (Kundnani, 2014; Andrews, 2020). This affective legacy circulates through Prevent guidance and media narratives, producing what Ahmed (2014) calls 'affective economies,' where emotions such as fear and distrust stick to particular bodies and communities, shaping how they are understood within the national story.

### ***#Killjoy Moment***

*Early one morning, I received an email from the Headteacher of the academy where I worked, asking to meet during breaktime in his office. The email was sent to a selected few, and when I looked at the names, it was clear: all the Muslim staff members. With only six of us in a predominantly white populated school, we spent the morning wondering why we were being summoned. As we gathered nervously in the office, the Headteacher appeared just as anxious. He sat us down, and as we exchanged uneasy glances, he informed us about a new mandatory training that all staff would undertake the next day after school. He stressed that this government-directed training, which he did not name at this point, was about keeping everyone safe and was not intended to make us feel singled out or uncomfortable. Too late mate! I feel singled out! 'You' have made 'me' and 'us' in the room a problem. What's worse is the next day, during the training, the session covered not only extremist*

*Muslims but also the Far Right white ideology, leaving me puzzled as to why the Headteacher felt the need to specifically 'warn' us Muslims. The school was predominantly white! While his intentions might have been good, his approach only deepened my sense of alienation. In moments like these, I'm always acutely aware of my body and how I am perceived, no matter where I am.*

Examining policies focused on the Prevent duty is pertinent for this thesis. Without going into the origins of how and why the Prevent policy came into place in education, let us consider 2014 as a key moment. In early 2014, anonymous allegations surfaced, claiming that Birmingham schools were 'being taken over by a hard-line group of Muslim extremists' (Arthur, 2015, p 317). This led to a government-commissioned investigation and a series of emergency Ofsted re-inspections, an event known as 'The Trojan Horse Affair'. Despite the intense public scrutiny, no evidence of terrorism, radicalisation, or violent extremism was found. In November 2014, the DfE issued non-statutory advice on promoting Fundamental British Values FBVs as a new component of Social, Moral, Spiritual, and Cultural (SMSC) development in schools (DfE, 2014). The DfE provided further Prevent policy guidance, encouraging schools to consider how they can protect children from the risk of radicalisation (DfE, 2015, p 4) and to use the curriculum to build pupils' resilience to radicalisation.

Over a decade, the implementation of the Prevent policy has meant that it has moved from non-statutory advice to a legal duty which teachers must comply with, alongside the FBVs. The FBVs are now incorporated into the definition of teacher professionalism and the school inspection framework ensures that teachers will comply to the guidance (Elwick and Jerome, 2019). If we consider Subject English, there is an increased endorsement of the FBV policy through the content and a directive of what constitutes acceptable values and beliefs. Before I explore such policies, in the context of Subject English, it is helpful to explore what these policies mean in the broader context of education.

There has been extensive research that specific bodies, namely with young Muslim people and staff, in which they feel the impact of such policies disproportionately than others, with Muslims in education feeling 'stigmatised' (Busher et al, 2019 p 6). Research has also shown these problems are difficult to resolve in practice. Panjwani (2016) argued that policies have failed to address that Muslims were becoming a suspect community. Revell and Bryan (2018, p 55) argue that FBV function as proxy concepts, meaning that although they appear to be neutral statement, they signal a hostility to difference. If we use new materialism philosophy and consider the perspective of how materiality and more-than human forces come together to influence social dynamics, such as FBVs, we can see that power relations and differences are not just socially constructed but also materially enacted, through

various forms of embodiment and infrastructure that reproduce and reinforce these values, creating an environment where differences are marginalised.

Vincent (2018, p 238) argues that the 'signifier of 'Muslim' has become a potential hazard, a warning of possible, perhaps even probable, illiberality'. Research into this area thus far, suggests that the Prevent duty and FBVs tend to be fuelling the stigmatisation of Muslims regardless of their willingness to endorse them. As such, many Muslims feel the Prevent duty is problematic (Zempi and Tripli, 2023), either due to their own interpretation of the policy itself or could be a result of the policy they experience as it is enacted by the majority of non-Muslim professionals within schools. Sometimes, the Prevent duty is interpreted within the dominant discourses connecting terrorism, extremism and Islam, (Busher et al, 2019, p 26), alienating and marginalising the Muslim bodies in education.

If we return to the killjoy moment stated earlier, the Headteacher made such connections unconsciously and perhaps with the best of intentions, however they can be potentially harmful since I am still living with the repercussions of what seemed to be a harmless gesture. When we apply a PQI lens to the example of my experience it illuminates how more-than human factors and interconnected networks shape the experiences of certain bodies in education. The email from the Headteacher can be seen as a material agent that catalyses a series of anxious thoughts and feelings among the Muslim staff, demonstrating how policies and communication exert force and influence human bodies and emotions. The material presence of the email, the setting of the predominantly white school, the social and political discourses that exists, and the upcoming PREVENT training session collectively co-produce a sense of unease and alienation. From a PQI, the Headteacher's actions are not isolated but part of a broader network that includes government policies, training materials, institutional practices, and societal discourses about terrorism and extremism. These elements work together to shape subjectivities and perceptions, illustrating the distributed agency within this network. The Headteacher's attempt to reassure the Muslim staff inadvertently reinforces their marginalisation by positioning them within a context that connects their identities to extremism. This interaction highlights how material practices, such as the delivery of government-mandated training, performatively constitute Muslim identities as 'Other', thus perpetuating stigma and discomfort. This irruption exemplifies the complex entanglements of human and more-than human actors that produce and sustain feelings of being singled out and monitored, despite well-intentioned efforts.

The promotion of FBVs like Democracy, Rule of Law, Respect and Tolerance, and Individual Liberty in schools is a significant aspect of the British educational landscape. Ofsted inspections ensure that schools are actively promoting these values (Jerome et al, 2019) However, academics from UCL and

the University of Bristol argue that this focus on national values is an extension of state power aimed at managing diversity, feeding into narratives of Britishness that often generate suspicion towards the 'Other', particularly Muslims (Starkey, 2017, Hunter-Henin, 2018). This dynamic is evident in the classroom, where such policies can lead to the stigmatisation of Muslim students and staff, as discussed above.

The broader context of education shows that these policies create an environment where difference is marginalised, and the experiences of those from marginalised backgrounds, including Muslims, are shaped by a network of material-affective practices that position them as 'Other'. This highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding and implementation of educational policies that truly promote ethics and respect, without fostering suspicion, stereotyping and stigmatisation.

### **Killjoy Moment**

*What an absolute violent and abrupt way to ruin peoples' lives – and then thinking about the ripple effect it has on the public. How it escalated from a hoax anonymous letter to people feeling scared of Muslims taking over... I was wary of how I came across in a very white school I worked at. Will they think that I'm an extremist Muslim with radical views – I am visibly Muslim.*

I was aware of the Trojan Horse affair since not only did I follow the national news on it but I was located in Birmingham. I even had friends and family who were both working and studying in the schools identified. However, it was only spending time mapping policy, that it became apparent how this has not only influenced the policies (PREVENT AND FBV discussed earlier) following the scandal but shaped the affective landscape of marginalised bodies working in education. Not only did the scandal lead to political ramifications through policy, but the great level of injustice to communities has been damaging. Holmwood (2024) states:

*The affair represents a serious injustice upon teachers and governors, as well as parents and pupils linked with the schools. It has also had a profound effect on public policies that have created anxieties about the integration of British Muslims (Holmwood 2024, p 5)*

Here, Holmwood refers to the creation of anxieties about the integration of British Muslims in society. I am interested in what this might mean for marginalised ECTeachers in developing a teacher becoming, working in an 'atmosphere of acute Islamophobia and political interference' (Abbas, 2017, p 437), that may contribute to the already wider anxieties of structural and cultural racism. This links back to research by Smith (2021) on how race is neutralised in policy (see [Point 5a](#)).

Abbas (2017) explores the impact of social and political events in relation to the Trojan Horse on British Muslims and their ongoing and increasing levels of Islamophobia. He argues that the Trojan Horse scandal uncovered deeply 'entrenched anti-Muslim sentiments in British politics. It also appears to validate the perspective that the nature of perception of the 'other' held by the dominant groups remain sources of anxiety, whilst also revealing that the driving force of the government's approach to anti-radicalisation was underpinned by a clear White agenda (Isiorho, 2016), reinforcing concepts of other which I discuss in Part 4. I argue that these happenings in British society have shaped affective materialities of marginalised ECTeachers in Birmingham.

Problems such as the affective landscape following Trojan Horse remain and continue to grow despite changes in leadership and political parties. Policy frameworks such as PREVENT, FBV, National Curriculum, ECF have intensified the regulation of teacher identities, embedding a securitised logic into everyday educational practices (DfE, 2011; Vincent, 2019). The legacy of the so called Trojan Horse affair exemplifies this dynamic, revealing how discourses of professionalism have been mobilised to reassert particular norms while rendering other bodies hyper visible and as potential threats (Busher et al. 2019).

## Terrain 12: What sticks

To think about what emerges when reading, writing, speaking + listening are mapped together as a single assemblage is to think about what sticks to bodies. Ahmed (2014, 2017) argues that histories stick to the surfaces of bodies, attaching meanings to them before they act, speak or even enter a room. These attachments are traces of sedimented events through policy legacies, colonial knowledge hierarchies, institutional affective economies, that structure how bodies are recognised, and how they are not recognised. What sticks is never random. What sticks is the institutional aspects of racism and coloniality, materialised in the everyday practices of teachers navigating subject English and wider educational spaces.

Bringing the map together reveals that the reading, writing, speaking + listening determine how bodies are read and understood. The mapping reveals that what sticks to bodies is institutional judgement which is embedded and reproduced through material-discursive practices. Policies, histories, materials and teacher training co-produce racialised subjectivities long before bodies enter the educational spaces. Policies reinforce deficit ways of thinking and being a teacher. Teachers are positioned within a system where western knowledge practices appear neutral. Western knowledge is frequently positioned as legitimate because it claims universality and objectivity. Akena (2012) argues that western ways of knowing have constructed the world as static and fixed, with Europeans

authorised as those who understand and organise it, while other knowledges are dismissed as inferior or irrelevant. Teaching Subject English within this frame means that legitimacy sticks unevenly while other traditions of knowledge become objects of suspicion (Refer to [Terrain 1](#) and [11](#)). Mannheim's work (1936) supports this view, arguing that knowledge must be understood through the social and political circumstances in which it is produced. Knowledge does not float above the world; it emerges from the bodies and institutions that create it. When dominant groups produce the curriculum, they produce a world in their own image. As Akena (2022) reminds us, knowledge that is produced and authorised by dominant groups inevitably protects their interests, structuring education around the needs, values and linguistic patterns of those who already hold institutional power. This means that Subject English, though framed as universal, is shaped by socioeconomic struggles, colonial power, and the political priorities of the nation. It is not neutral and never has been.

Haraway (1988) pushes this argument further, insisting that knowledge systems must be understood as situated rather than universal, constructed through particular standpoints and power relations. Knowledge cannot be separated from the politics of location. This is crucial for understanding what sticks to racialised ECTeachers. When a teacher enters an English classroom, they do so within a space defined by histories; curricular histories grounded in empire and whiteness; histories that define some voices as articulate and others as deviant; pedagogic evidence that present 'good teaching' as 'best practice' ([Terrain 1](#), [8](#) and [11](#)). The marginalised teacher becomes sticky before they speak.

Sylvia Wynter's (2003) critique of western epistemology helps explain why the English subject is such a potent site for this stickiness. Wynter reveals that western knowledge systems are built upon racialised classifications of humanity, naturalising white, European knowledge as universal while rendering other forms of knowledge illegible. These patterns reappear in education through canon formation and hierarchical notions of language as discussed earlier. The mapping highlights how this space continues to centre epistemologies that privilege whiteness as the rational norm, producing exclusion through the very definition of knowledge itself.

Black and postcolonial feminists have long demonstrated how these structures silence marginalised speakers. Mirza's body of work (1992; 2012; 2019) shows that Black women in education are frequently required to speak as representatives rather than as individuals; their speech is tightly policed, their professionalism constantly evaluated, and their success understood as exceptional rather than ordinary. bell hooks' naming of the 'imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy' (hooks, 2004, p17) exposes how educational policy sits within broader structures that continually deny the value of knowledge created by those outside western intellectual traditions. English education

does not merely teach literature or language; it reproduces an imagined national identity rooted in whiteness and capitalist productivity.

Audre Lorde (1982) adds another layer to the question of what sticks by returning us to the body and the importance of affective knowledge. She regards feelings as knowledge and emotion as epistemology. Lorde reminds us that our deepest understandings come from affective experience. If western knowledge attaches shame, doubt and deficiency to racialised bodies, then those feelings themselves become knowledge, and therefore sites of resistance. To attend to the discomfort, to the humiliation of correction, to the exhaustion of surveillance, is to uncover what institutional literacy practices do to people.

Lorde (1982, p 91) further articulates so beautifully,

*‘..our real power comes from the personal; our real insights from living come from the deep knowledge within us that arises from our feelings...Our feelings are our most genuine paths to knowledge. They are chaotic, sometimes painful, sometime contradictory, but they come from deep within us. And we must key into those feelings and begin to extrapolate from them, examine them for new ways of understanding our experiences. This is how new visions begin, how we begin to posit a new future nourished by the past’.*

Understanding what sticks to bodies, and why, shifts the focus of this research away from identifying surface exclusions towards analysing the deeper ideological structures that produce them. If complaint makes what is smoothed over visible, then tracing what sticks to bodies reveals why such smoothing over keeps recurring. It shows that Subject English is more than a curriculum space, it is a space where colonial knowledge and national identity remain alive.

This is how the thesis unfolds, through speaking, writing, mapping and becoming, knowledge is produced through relationality and through feeling. In Part 3 that follows, I discuss how this research unfolded with the participants in greater detail through the processes of inquiry.

## Part 3 - Processes of Inquiry

### **#Killjoy Moment**

*Throughout the process of writing this thesis, particularly certain sections, I was very much aware of the possibility of my own writing being judged as too assertive, too moany and even at times too much. But like Ahmed (2014) concedes, some bodies must push harder than other bodies to proceed.*

*Writing for me has not always been easy or neutral. It has involved speaking in ways that may not always feel comfortable or welcomed. I have chosen to speak honestly, even when that risks discomfort. Writing has involved embracing vulnerability and resistance, where dis(comfort) becomes part of the process and it is something to stay with.*

This part of the thesis explores how the research process unfolded and the ways in which modes of inquiry that paid attention to relationality, affect and materiality, shaped the generation and reconfiguration of data. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) write that researchers in the post-qualitative paradigm often find themselves ‘in spaces which we no longer know how to describe’ (Deleuze, 1998, p6). This encapsulates my own experiences with the research journey, and I aim to articulate this through this section. Rather than positioning data as something collected and later analysed, this part approaches data as an active participant in the research process (St Pierre, 2011), something that emerged with inquiry rather than being extracted from it (Lather, 2013). To ground this discussion, I begin by restating the central guiding question of this thesis:

**What becomes possible to notice about the marginalised experiences of ECTeachers of Subject English in Birmingham, UK, through a post-qualitative inquiry?**

Even though questions and enquiries about the experiences of teachers from marginalised communities are not new, in this research they are framed from renewed ethical, ontological, and epistemological standpoints which I will discuss below in relation to Barad’s (2007, p 90) notion of ‘ethic-onto-epistemology’. I will explore the ways I have used killjoy and post-qualitative inquiry as an ethic-onto-epistemological methodology and as the research emerged and unfolded, how I also became a ‘feminist ear’ (Ahmed, 2017, p 37), paying attention even when uncomfortable, listening to the voices that want to and yearn to be heard and responding by listening without interruption. I discuss the critical and disruptive approach to research that centres marginalised voices, challenging dominant narratives and embracing the discomfort and uncertainty that comes with addressing complex issues through my continuous killjoy-ing highlighting my own ‘researcher becoming’ (Lambert, 2019).

I also explain the challenges I have faced arriving to this theoretical approach whilst also striving towards the practical and expected nature of doing a written thesis. I found it difficult to write linearly about what is a back and forth process of thinking, reading and writing, all which is entangled with the rhythms and demands of everyday life (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012). In line with post-qualitative commitment to reflexivity and situated ethics (St Pierre, 2011; Lather and St Pierre, 2013), this

research embraces a transparent and accountable research process. By foregrounding the complexities of doing research itself, I aim to enact an ethically responsive and honest engagement with the research assemblage, recognising that knowledge is always relational, situated and in the making. The killjoy calls out the 'pretence' or 'putting on an expected response' that we see enacted institutionally. In this spirit, I position myself, and my writing, as killjoy to disrupt, but more importantly as a way to evoke feeling; feel the struggle, the pain and the resistance marginalised bodies endure.

### **#Killjoy Moment**

*We cannot fully comprehend the reality of our senses and intellect. The teachings of the Quran remind me and encourages me with the humility and wonder in seeking knowledge. We need to be curious. We need to embrace and appreciate life. We need to respect life and understand that we are part of the larger whole.*

I have really tried to take a considered approach to this research, striving to do what feels right at any given time. Making choices and pausing to think and re-think over the reading, writing and the intra-actions with the data. During the process, I became more and more attuned to my own feelings, whilst continuously thinking about the heart of the research, which for me, was always listening and paying attention to the voices of marginalised bodies working in complex spaces during a politically charged and turbulent socio-economic era, explained earlier in Part 1 – Crises. It also becomes clear why having a feminist ear is so crucial as it cultivates a sense of attentiveness to voice. Listening with 'a feminist ear' (Ahmed, 2022) allowed for the recognition of what might be overlooked and shaped a form of response-ability discussed in Part 3.1 and 3.2

In this regard, this type of slow research - which took place between 2022-2026- was a deliberate and mindful approach to not oversee anything that could ethically impact the research and my responsibility. This type of slow research prioritised building relationships with the people involved in this research, namely the participants. I was, and continue to be, engaged in a process of reflective practice as I think carefully about the often invisible aspects of research that extend beyond the written thesis itself. These include the affective, ethical and relational dimensions of research that are difficult to capture or fully represent within traditional academic outputs. Drawing on feminist ethics of care (Mountz et al, 2015) which I discuss later in this part, I view this reflective practice as a form of resistance to the fast-paced, output driven nature of research. It is also a demonstration of my commitment to doing research differently, through care, attentiveness and being responsive.

### 3.1 Feminist Ear

In this research, I initially imagined myself as a collector of voices, someone who would capture voices through gathering stories, recording perspectives, and assembling them as data. Yet, what unfolded was something less about capturing and more about listening. Listening itself became an additional mode of inquiry, one that I did not anticipate to this degree. Drawing on Ahmed's work on complaint (2021, 2025), I came to understand my practice as developing what Ahmed calls a 'feminist ear'. A feminist ear is not about receiving information or an account of things happening but about cultivating a particular way of listening through attuning to refusal, to complaint, and to the subtle forms of resistance that can so easily be dismissed or silenced within institutional spaces.

I did not anticipate this orientation towards becoming a feminist ear. It was the data itself; the voices, pauses, frustrations, and resistances, that directed me towards this mode of listening. I became something else as participants saw me differently; as a sympathetic, understanding ear that could register complaints in a way that others, often those with more authority or higher institutional positions, could not or would not. Participants frequently located me as someone who was 'there', someone who 'knew this stuff, perhaps had even 'gone through it' and thus able to hear them differently.

In this sense, my role shifted. I had thought I would be a somewhat conventional researcher, but instead something unexpected emerged through thinking, writing and doing this research. I became, to borrow from Ahmed (2025, p 319), both a complaint collector and a feminist listener. This positionality mattered. Unlike the hegemonic, traditional figure of the detached, objective researcher, my presence and situated knowledge shaped the conditions under which participants' stories could be heard aligning with the ethic-onto-epistemological (discussed in [3.3](#)) standpoint of this research. My inquiry, then, was not about extracting data, but about holding space for complaint, about allowing refusal to be heard as knowledge that emerged.

#### *#Killjoy moment*

*I was listening to what was not supposed to be said, or what has been said and no one really listened. Or cared enough*

### 3.2 Post-qualitative Inquiry

Post-qualitative inquiry challenges traditional qualitative research by questioning fixed methods and emphasising knowledge as emergent rather than predetermined (Lather, 2013; St Pierre, 2011). I draw upon FPNM standpoints highlighting the entanglement of human and non-human actants, language, materiality and disrupting conventional distinctions between the subject and object (Barad, 2007; Lenz Taguchi, 2010). Unlike standard qualitative approaches, PQI often foregrounds concepts and theory over predefined methodological steps, encouraging creative, responsive and experimental engagements with phenomena (St Pierre and Jackson, 2014). It attends to affect and materiality, recognising that knowledge emerges through intra-actions (Barad, 2007). Ultimately, PQI is less about following strict, mechanical processes and more about cultivating attention to how research thinks and does, embracing all the complexity and uncertainty that comes with that (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012).

### 3.3 Killjoy and PQI as Ethic-Onto-Epistemology

Working within a post-qualitative paradigm, (St Pierre, 2011; Lather, 2013; Maclure, 2013), I understand the process of 'methodology' differently as opposed to the traditional blueprint often found in humanist research (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012). I think of a methodology that is emergent and relational and is entangled with ontology, epistemology and ethics. I did not apply pre-given method, which I discuss in the following section in 3.4), instead I approached research as a series of encounters with people, texts and materials, where concepts and practices intra-act to generate possibilities for thinking and doing research.

Barad (2007) and Lenz Taguchi (2010) discuss ethic-onto-epistemology as a way of aiding our knowing, being and doing in this world which are all deeply interconnected and not separate from each other. Barad (2007, p 90) refers 'ethic-onto-epistemology' to point out the connection and entanglements of ethics, ontology and epistemology when engaging in knowledge production, with the world itself and its inhabitants. It also seeks to challenge binary ways of thinking such as nature/culture, matter/meaning, theory/practice, good teacher/bad teacher that limit our ways of knowing and understanding life experiences (Garcia-Gonzalez et al, 2019) and that I explored in the context of schools in Part 2. Barad's agential realism (2007) posits a world of entangled relationships where knowledge is not passively observed but actively co-constituted. This perspective radically destabilises the notion of a neutral, objective observer, central to Western scientific inquiry.

This perspective also suggests that because we are part of the world, we can no longer be seen as observing the world from a free-standing position and we must avoid such a false neutral point of view or 'god's-trick' (Haraway, 1988, p 581). We are not omniscient beings; but are entangled in the same space we are researching. These entanglements often require greater attention to the intertwined and sometimes 'invisible connections across relational bodies' (Young-Song, 2020, p 231).

### #Killjoy Moment

Something bothered me. I'm not searching for truths, or an answer. As a person, and then in this case as a researcher, I don't know everything, but I do know I can help to provide an insight into the happenings. I'll leave the rest to God, who is all seeing (Al-Basir) and all knowing (Al-Aleem).

The above killjoy moment can be seen as resistance. Resistance to produce explanations and the closure of knowledge. It is a line of flight (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), disrupting established norms, through the assemblage of researcher participants, research context and ethical responsibility, opening up spaces for insight and relationality beyond what can be fully known. In doing so, I challenge the epistemic norms that often underpin western research – those that value certainty and objectivity. My positionality as a Muslim researcher situates the human as an emergent configuration within a FPNM ontology. From this stance, human experience is understood as continually constituted through its entanglements with the more-than human world. As Ahmed (2010, p 65) reminds us that the killjoy is someone 'who exposes the bad feelings that get hidden, displayed or negated under public signs of joy'. In this moment, my discomfort is not an obstacle to research but part of the 'method', as a way of attending to the affective moments and ethical tensions embedded in knowledge production. It centres relationality, humility and situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988, Smith, 2012). I am entangled within this research and use killjoy moments to show this. Ahmed (2007) sees fixed truths as often being socially constructed, politically motivated and dependent on power. The killjoy lens integrated in this thesis offers a way of disrupting those ideas that 'things are the way they are'. Ahmed (2007) discusses how these truths can often be a site of comfort for those in power and how such emotions can 'stick' certain truths in place.

By focusing on the ethic-onto-epistemologies of marginalised ECTeachers of Subject English, there is the opportunity to think differently about their experiences. Previous research has focused on issues related to the identities of marginalised teachers (Bradbury, Tereshchenko and Mill, 2022; Basit et al, 2006; Bhopal and Jackson, 2013; Brown 2014; Callender, 2020; Haque and Elliot, 2017) but research

has rarely focused on what is produced when you pay attention to the entanglements and intra-actions and particularly what is produced by difference.

Deleuze (1994, p 222 ) posits that:

*Difference is not diversity. Diversity is given, but difference is that by which the given is given...Difference is not phenomenon but the nuomenon closest to the phenomenon...Every phenomenon refers to an inequality by which it is conditioned...Everything which happens and everything which appears is correlated with orders of differences: differences of level, temperature, pressure, tension, potential, difference of intensity.*

Here, using Deleuze's (1987) concept of difference, it challenges us to think about how difference itself is structured and produced, through historical, social and existential agents, that then shape ECTeachers realities in the Subject English classroom. The focus on matter and materiality of the world within the PQI framework unsettles the way in which the research is carried out (Coole and Frost, 2010). St Pierre (2016) argues this is fundamental to acknowledge as we seek to work with and in a world of complexity and entanglements.

### **#Killjoy moment**

*I feel the tension in the room. I glance around and I catch people making awkward eye contact or raised eyebrows as I go on to talk about western epistemology as exclusionary practice in conferences. When questions are asked, it's never about the white spaces but other aspects of my research. Disruption is necessary, even if it is uncomfortable. Silence sustains power.*

Through this process of becoming-with research, I have become increasingly drawn to new ways of thinking about 'doing' research particularly through critiquing dominant practices in education. Engaging with the approaches outlined in PQI as well as decolonial thinkers, which welcomes the disruption and messiness of research, was fundamental in shaping what I did in this research. St Pierre (1997, p 176) tells us that:

*We must learn to live in the middle of things, in the tension of conflict and confusion and possibility; and we must become adept at making do with the messiness of that condition and at finding agency within.*

As St Pierre (1997) explains, thinking, working with theory and then carrying out the research may start in the middle, but this is advantageous since it allows space to grow. I embraced this ‘messiness’ and it became a familiar feeling. One that did not cause undue anxiety but allowed for the carefully informed and considered decisions I made regarding the relational enactments of inquiry which I discuss in this section.

This approach is also a deliberate choice moving away from the positivist paradigm that continues to dominate educational research, particularly with an increased focus on evidence-based teaching, discussed in Part 2 that seeks generalisable ‘truths’ (Ball, 2016). Such approaches have been critiqued for marginalising difference and overlooking the complexities of lived experiences (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2021). PQI methodologies allow ways of thinking that make it possible to think of research as constant folding, unfolding and folding again, from theory, data, researchers, texts etc (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012, p 266). It allows for the possibility of re-viewing data to see what is produced by the foldings rather than what is understood by the phenomena, opening the possibility of ethically responsive mode of knowledge production. What drew me to FPNM perspective was the recognition that many marginalised groups are still fighting to gain equal status and opportunities to the dominant group (western and Euro-centric). This research is not wanting to dismiss or replace positivist, humanist research, rather offer an approach to think differently about the experiences of marginalised ECTeachers.

There is a growing body of research that uses PQI, particularly feminist, posthuman, new materialist ways of thinking, to explore teaching, marginalised bodies and, all demonstrating growing examples of the value of PQI work (Zarabadi, 2021; Taylor, 2013; Ringrose et al, 2018; Lewis, 2022; Franklin-Phipps, 2018). Such examples offer compelling potential of this paradigm. In alignment with this way of thinking, St Pierre challenges researchers to ‘think with’ Deleuze and Guattari, while admitting that this ‘might be too hard to think’ (2021, p 15). She adds,

*What might we do, we researchers? How might we inquire? What kinds of inquiry might be thinkable in different modes of being, different ontologies? Would we inquire? Is inquiry thinkable without the knowing subject? (2021, p15)*

In this regard, St Pierre is inviting us to embrace the challenge of thinking with complex ideas and consider how research could be different, when we apply different ways of being and knowing allowing for uncertainty.

Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010) argue for a methodology that pays close attention to materiality. They argue that language and discourse have been the main drivers of knowledge production, and other ways of being and knowing have been excluded, including material and non-human forces (Murris, 2018). Barad (2007, p 801) writes that 'the only thing that does not matter anymore is matter itself as language, discourse and culture are drivers of knowledge production and matter is treated as the backdrop of human activity'.

Therefore, plugging in PQI which emphasises materiality and affect, unsettles dominant ways of knowing and being as well as methodological approaches to research has been key in this research (Coole and Frost, 2010). The concept of ethic-onto-epistemology is fundamental to PQI research, demonstrating that 'axiology (ethics) cannot be separated from ontology (reality) or epistemology (knowledge)' (Kuby and Zhao, 2021, p 64). It also refers to understanding how the world comes to be, rather than applying and then taking off a lens usually seen in humanist research.

### *#Killjoy moment*

*The process has demanded honesty that sometimes unsettles rather than soothes. The constant questioning involved in doing research has disrupted my own assumptions I once held. I've had to be transparent with the process as a necessary form of resistance. Choices made have been deliberate and political.*

## 3.4 Thinking without method

As I immersed myself in PQI framework, I became more disillusioned by the structured, traditional ways of collecting data (e.g. interviewing, coding etc). I was at loggerheads with struggling to *think with method*. As I sat and wrote about it, I now realised the process I went through was *thinking without method*. Jackson (2017, p 666) coins this term to describe a form of inquiry that is free from conventional procedure, where concepts emerge from relational forces and movement rather than fixed structures. I did not know in advance of doing this thesis what strategy I was going to employ, and the ones I did think about using such as structured interviews, questionnaires etc, just did not feel right. The process of arriving at a method was one that was emergent over time and experience of being with the thesis and theories involved. Jackson (2017, p 667) states 'a strategy (because it forms the outside) is not a plan or a starting point but is emergent and revealed in fragments along the way'. Deleuze (2007) describes strategy this way:

[The spider] does not know it at the beginning, he learns it by following different rhythms, on very different occasions, and this method, literally, is the spider strategy. (Deleuze, 2007 p 45)

Deleuze (2007, p 86) insists that strategies reveal themselves in scraps, bits and pieces along the way that function to produce the work. In other words, nothing is set at the beginning of the work; whatever strategy is followed functions here and there, with mistakes as an integral part of the work and even when it has worked, it must be taken up in another mode. This has also been part of the fragmentary killjoy irruptions embedded throughout, since the bitty-ness of killjoy-ing has worked for me in productive ways to shape the thesis.

My engagement with 'thinking without method' was marked more by a response to what emerged along the way, unfolding in fragments, that went on to produce a piece of the whole thesis. I began with a simple intent of knowing I wanted to talk to people about their experiences. That desire of having close, dialogic and open interaction at first seemed to demand some structure. I planned one, but almost immediately, the realities of time, and the unpredictable nature of becoming a participant, made it difficult. Making time for 'structured' conversations proved tricky and what emerged was something more responsive to the situation. The 'structured' intention was shaped by not only lived experiences and the temporal dimensions of the study but with my own entanglement with PQI.

Furthermore, Koro-Ljunberg (2016) elaborates on the restrictions of using existing methods. She explains how seeking methods or templates from existing methodologies can be limiting, since qualitative research is about the lived experiences that are unique and subjective to the one living it. Therefore, copying and pasting an existing method can be restricting in what is possible – in the doing and the finding of their unique lived experiences. I resisted this practice of using an existing method – it just did not feel right for this research because as Reason and Marshall (1987, p 113) suggest research should be a personal process in relation to others;

*Research is for me, for us and for them. It is enquiry with people, rather than research on people, a personal process pursued in relation to others. It must be for me as well as for us and for them.*

### **#Killjoy moment**

*My position, my experience, my thinking and my survival shape the knowledge we make.*

As I continued to grapple with thinking about data differently, alongside the support and guidance of my supervisors, it became apparent that I was becoming more and more comfortable with the unknown and challenging the traditional ways of knowing. It started to become familiar and the 'right thing to do'.

### *#Killjoy moment*

*Just because it is a method – doesn't mean it is right for me. Or for this.*

## 3.5 Relationality and (re)positionality

I occupied a privileged yet complex position throughout this research, moving through the shifting and relational boundaries of being connected with the research context. As a staff member, I shared university and subject knowledge and familiarity with many of the participants, which enabled relational access and trust. But more significantly, I looked a lot like the participants in the groups I taught in. I am visibly Muslim, and from a Bangladeshi background, born and still living in similar parts of Birmingham to the participants. This visual representation mattered as it shaped how I was perceived and how participants related to me.

At the same time, my staff position and someone who had already achieved academic success, I carried a sense of symbolic privilege that could have shaped the way I was also perceived. Using Ahmed's notion of how emotions 'stick to bodies', my staff role may have stuck to me as a form of authority, even though I intended to remain as neutral as can be. Yet my role differed from other staff who were closely involved in participants' assessment and progression. I was not part of the formal structures of assessment on the course, which allowed a different kind of relationship to emerge. I did not 'observe' them nor did I assess their written assignments or reviews. It felt like the participants could be more open with me, not having to worry about speaking about 'things' because they knew I had no influence over their outcomes. This distance, almost felt like an alternative space was created for more honest and nuanced conversations to occur naturally.

Thus, my positionality was not fixed, but emergent, relational and entangled in this research. I was an embodied insider through my visibility, cultural and religious background, whilst also being an outsider in this research as I occupied a space of material and symbolic privilege. Rather than seeing this as a limitation, I approached it as a methodological strength as it allowed me to maintain critical distance and think carefully and honestly throughout. This relational positionality helped me resist adopting a fixed method and continuously shaped the research process.

### **#Killjoy moment**

*It felt good to be in and then out – felt like I was them but also I'm able to be a researcher – tapping into valuable knowledge production.*

My presence in the research became a site through which knowledge was co-constructed, rather than extracted. Collins (2022) theorises how positionality is central to how knowledge is made and who gets to be seen. She uses the phrase 'outsider-within' to describe people who are marginalised within a dominant group. As a Muslim, Bangladeshi woman researching in and working with very dominant systems, it feels like I am in certain spaces of privilege but also excluded because of who I am. I see this as a source of insight as it allows me to see and talk about things other may not. It is within this that listening with a feminist ear emerged. Participants recognised me, which allowed them to approach me, expressing their interest in being part of this research although this was not immediate. Participants often described a sense of urgency, responsibility and eagerness in taking part in this research, often expressing they need to be spoken about because they are unable to share them in institutional spaces, echoing Lorde's assertion that 'when we speak, we are afraid our words will not be heard or welcomed, but when we are silent, we are still afraid. So, it is better to speak' (Lorde, 1984, p40).

I am reminded of Lorde's (1979) position on the 'master's tools will never dismantle the master's house', as I think through, enact and write about the research process. Prejudice and inequality are deeply embedded in structures and systems, and the same conventional methods that have long been used to study these problems cannot, on their own, unsettle or transform them. What is required are approaches that are *different* and transformative, opening up possibilities for thinking and doing research otherwise. By striving to be response-able and transparent throughout this process, I aim to resist reproducing fixed structures that contribute to exclusionary spaces and instead create opening for more inclusive and generative forms of inquiry. Dennis et al (2023, p 365) describe a nomadic becoming as emphasising fluidity and mobility and an attempt to 'operationalise intellectually mobile concepts that enable unlikely encounters, drawing on unpredictable sources, foster unexpected interactions, experiences and knowledge'. This resonates with the Deleuzian understanding that the dynamic intensities and inequalities from which new ways of knowing, being and relating to continually emerge.

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

Following the ethical framework set out by BERA (2024), this research is grounded in an ethic of respect for people, knowledge and the quality of educational inquiry. At the same time, it interrogates the humanist assumptions that underpin such frameworks, particularly in relation to practices of anonymisation. While dominant ethical conventions such as blurring and pixelation are often framed as protective, this research argues that such practices do not simply safeguard racially marginalised participants but can also participate in their ongoing erasure. As Nutbrown (2010, p5) suggests through the notion of ‘symbolic pixilation’, these techniques may obscure presence, agency, and lived realities, particularly for those whose identities are already shaped by histories of marginalisation. In such cases, anonymisation operates as a routine, procedural response that risks reinscribing absence under the guise of ethical care.

At the same time, this research does not reject practices of obscuring outright. Rather, it distinguishes between standardised anonymisation and more situated forms of ethical intervention. The issue, then, is not obscuring information, but the conditions under which it is utilised and the forms of visibility or erasure it produces. In this research, strategic acts of omitting and obscuring were employed as context specific responses to the ethical demands of the research rather than procedural decisions. For example, this included omitting identifiable contextual details and selectively blurring aspects of the research setting where visibility might compromise participant anonymity. This also included the deliberate occlusion of relational and observational dimensions that resist neat incorporation into formal reporting structures. Following Markham (2012), these practices are understood as ethical manoeuvres that both protect participants and expose the limits of institutionalised ethical frameworks. In this sense, strategic obscuring functions as an ethical and relational practice that acknowledges the partiality of representation and the ethical constraints of making others visible.

These tensions are further complicated in this thesis by questions of when this research began. Rather than locating this solely at the point of formal consent, this research recognises that participation is often preceded by informal, affective encounters that shape the conditions of possibility for research. As Pink (2009) argues, such moments often shape research in meaningful ways, challenging linear models of ethical clearance and highlighting how racially marginalised participants may already be implicated through processes of being seen and relationally positioned within institutional spaces before formal consent is secured. As such, encounters with participants in this research that preceded formal consent are not approached as data in themselves but are selectively referenced to

contextualise how participation emerged and how relationships formed. The methodological choices outlined here are attuned to the limits of what can and should be made present within academic research.

Alternative strategies, such as fictionalisation, have been taken up within qualitative and arts-based research traditions. Drawing on Yalom's (1989) notion of 'symbolic equivalents' and Clough's (2010) 'veil of verisimilitude', participants may be reconfigured as composite or metaphorical figures. While this can create space to engage sensitive and politically charged issues, particularly those structured by race, inequality, and exclusion, I suggest that such approaches risk displacing, rather than resolving, ethical tensions. In distancing research from the material and embodied realities of racially marginalised lives, fictionalisation raises further questions about authenticity, accountability, and whose realities are rendered visible or obscured.

Navigating these ethical dilemmas in this doctoral research, therefore, involved translating complex, relational, and emergent ethical commitments into the procedural expectations of ethical governance. Ethical decision making had to align with frameworks shaped by organisations such as BERA (2024) and University Research Ethics Committee, which prioritised principles including informed consent, minimisation of harm, and confidentiality. While this study is informed by post-qualitative approaches, these must be articulated through the human-centred logic of such review and approval processes. Full approval for this research was granted by the University Research Ethics Committee (Appendix: A1 and A2), and all procedures adhered to the BERA (2024) ethical guidelines. This ensured that, despite the tensions between relational ethics and procedural requirements, the research maintained institutional legitimacy while foregrounding the interests and protection of racially marginalised participants.

Ethical practice therefore emerged as both an ongoing moral negotiation and an administrative part of the research itself. It required balancing institutional accountability with the recognition that ethical relations exceed what can be fully codified. Ethical responsibility extends beyond procedural compliance and persists across the lifespan of the research and what follows it. As Nutbrown (2010) reminds us, researchers are never 'done' but always on duty, requiring creative, situated responses and a willingness to take 'good risks' while keeping participants' interests central. As Schulz et al. (1997) observe, a caring ethic is not the norm within dominant methodological traditions, and ethical compromise is often normalised. Ethical dilemmas, particularly those shaped by race and representation, cannot be resolved through procedural adherence alone but must be continually negotiated. The task becomes one of ongoing accountability: how to care for participants, how to

represent their lives, and how to do so in ways that remain attentive to justice, relationality, and the enduring effects of research beyond its formal boundaries.

Drawing on Barad's (2007) concept of response-ability, ethics is approached here as a continual and relational practice rather than a singular stage of approval. This involved close attention to the intra-actions between myself as researcher, participants, and the material conditions shaping the research context. I remained responsive to participants' availability rather than imposing rigid time slots, prioritising the creation of space for participants to share their stories in ways that felt comfortable to them. Such attentiveness reflects an ethics of care, where relationality and responsiveness are prioritised over efficiency.

Throughout the research, *#killjoy moments* were deliberately engaged as opportunities to pause, reflect, and carefully consider the ethical implications of the research process. These moments slowed decision making and foregrounded relational responsibilities. This ethical stance extends beyond the point of the conversations themselves. I maintained relationships with participants following these interactions, respecting their contributions and ensuring they felt valued within the research process. Many expressed eagerness to read the completed thesis, affirming the importance of their involvement and making visible their lived experiences. In this way, ethical practice remains embedded across all stages of the research, attentive to the relational and affective dimensions of research encounters (Barad, 2007).

### *3.6.1 Ethics in Practice*

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to engaging in confabulative conversations with them, either digitally or by hand. Participants were made aware of the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw without consequence. The elisions made in this research included blurring and obscuring details such as the ITE course participants were enrolled on, the dates of their participation, their ages, cultural backgrounds, previous careers and educational histories. Careful attention was also paid to the pseudonyms assigned to the participants, in line with the anonymity discussion outlined above. For example, in one particular case (Annie, 4.4), to protect her anonymity, specific identifying details, including her real name and particularly her country of origin were deliberately omitted. Furthermore, I intentionally avoided assigning a pseudonym that was culturally similar to her actual name as this could compromise her identity. I also blurred my own teaching experiences to ensure comprehensive ethical protection. These decisions exemplify an ethically entangled and response-able approach to research (Barad, 2007), in which care,

accountability and the potential consequences of representation are treated as ongoing considerations.

### 3.7 Research Settings

Earlier in this research, in Part 1, I explained briefly, this research in situ, outlining the key part of the research being carried out between the years 2022-2026, located in Birmingham, UK and exploring marginalised ECTeachers of Subject English. This section will provide more detail regarding the research setting and 'data' that emerged from an ethic-onto- epistemological standpoint. The guiding question of this thesis was directly concerned with the experiences of Subject English teachers and so it was imperative that I purposely selected those who were involved in this space. Working part-time in a Birmingham University, I was able to have access to various teacher education courses from which my participants were recruited. I taught on these courses, little but often, which allowed ease of access and familiarity. These courses were taught and/or delivered through a Birmingham based university, and all of the ECTeachers were either undertaking a placement or working within a Birmingham based school. Participants engaged in one or more confabulative conversations in the time period of this thesis, and I will discuss what these confabulative conversations entailed in part 3.9.

### 3.8 Participants

8 participants came to be part of this research. Their involvement was never a straightforward process of recruitment but slowly unfolded through entanglements of time, place, relationality and institutional structures within which we encountered one another. Rather, than a one way process of 'recruiting', participation emerged through the cultivation of trust and my sustained presence. While initial engagement with the research varied across the teaching courses that I had access to, it also raised questions about how participation was shaped by perceptions of confidence, availability, and alignment with the research process. I use Part 4 of this thesis to discuss in detail each participant's lived experience.

Encounters often happened through proximity and familiarity. I spent most university teaching days with those undertaking the teacher education courses. Being situated in these assemblages afforded access to participants but made space for the important work of slow, accumulative building of rapport. At first, I presented my research to the various teacher education courses through a short presentation and disseminated my research and call for participants through email and research poster (Appendix: A4) shared with the groups but it was in the informal folds of these spaces that relationship and curiosity grew.

Interestingly, participants often approached me. In several cases, it was months into the course before they reached out. One participant even scribbled her contact details on a scrap piece of paper and handed it to me just before the end of the day and urged me to make contact<sup>6</sup>. Such gestures, though minor, mattered. They signalled a readiness to share, to be witnessed and to connect their experiences with this research. It seemed that time within schools and placements was necessary before they could articulate what needed to be said. Most of the participants made comments such as ‘You’ll understand’ (Asiya), ‘You know...(Asiya, Ilham)’ I want to talk to you about something (Faheemah)...’, ‘I’ve got time for you (Shila)’, ‘people need to know (Asad)’ were made, making it apparent the urgency of their experiences and the elusive spaces where such voices are legitimised. I became acutely aware of the politics of representation; perhaps my visibility as a Muslim, brown, woman, seemed to resonate to their own cultural, religious and lived experiences or perhaps it was the simplicity of being present, listening and not insisting. In either of these cases, participation was co-constituted from the intra-actions of representation and relationality. Meaning emerged from the entanglements between bodies, space and affects which become active in shaping what is possible (Haraway, 2016). This generating of ease and comfort does something, it opens up new spaces to talk in, freely without prejudice (Manning, 2016; Osgood and Robinson, 2019). It is through these connections, participants’ stories emerged organically, I illustrate this in Part 4 with each of the participants’ encounters.

Initially, I misjudged the availability of ECTeachers. The temporal demands they faced, settling into placements, negotiating institutional expectations, managing workloads, exceeded what I had anticipated. Their participation was shaped by both access and availability. Although participants were keen to talk, the encounters had to be fitted into the fragmented rhythms of their working and personal lives. I found that after my initial ‘call’ for participants at the start of the academic year, I had many express their interest but due to the overwhelming commitments, it was difficult to meet. It emerged that as participants engaged with their placements and schools, they remembered me and my research and approached me with readiness to share their experiences. Recognising the time pressures ECTeachers faced, I had to rethink how I gathered their experiences in ways that remained ethical and respectful of their realities, what I have come to think of as being response-able in my research practice. I engaged in confabulative conversations with them, which became more than I anticipated and theorised (more in section [3.9](#)). These spaces became an almost ‘vent’, ‘therapy-type’, ‘release’ sessions where participants were able to relieve some of the tensions they held and how

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<sup>6</sup> This information was handled with care and sensitively in line with GDPR regulations as well as institutional ethics of care.

they felt a weight had been lifted off them from just being able to talk. Some used the space to complain, to voice what had been kept silent. As Ahmed (2025) reminds us, complaints often have to be repeated to different people because the first listener rarely acts. The relief of being heard coexisted with the frustration of knowing the burden of complaint is ongoing work, where it must be kept alive, passed on, so it does not disappear into silence again.

The value of simply ‘talking’ and being present, listening attentively and attuning to what was being said, created the conditions for conversations to unfold organically. Between 2022 and 2025, I spoke with 8 participants: four on multiple occasions across different stages of becoming a teacher, and four one-off conversations (see table below). These conversations, which ranged from 25-90 minutes took place, according to what each moment afforded. The timing and rhythm of the research were not entirely within my control but co-constituted through the shifting temporalities of participants’ lives.

The following table provides a brief introduction to the participants. I made some ethical and deliberate choices on how to present participant information, discussed earlier in 3.6 and included this in more detail in Part 4 where I felt it was important to.

**[Figure 3: Table of Participant Information]**

| <b>Name</b> | <b>Background Info</b>                                                                                              | <b>Stage of professional training at time of conversation</b> | <b>Frequency and Duration (approx.) of conversation in total</b> |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Asiyah      | Mature student, dual heritage background (half Palestinian), mother of 4, Muslim, previous career in another sector | Mid and towards end of teacher education course               | 2 = 210 minutes                                                  |
| Shila       | British-born Bangladeshi female residing in inner Birmingham. Second generation daughter of                         | End of teacher education course, ECT1, mid-ECT2               | 3 = 120 minutes                                                  |

|          |                                                                                                                      |                                                       |                 |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
|          | immigrant parents, early 20s, Muslim                                                                                 |                                                       |                 |
| Kareena  | International student, female, middle-class family of educators, mid 20s, previous career in another sector          | End of teacher education , course mid ECT1            | 2 = 140 minutes |
| Annie    | International student, female, no previous career, academic aspirations                                              | Beginning, middle and end of teacher education course | 3 = 150 minutes |
| Iqraa    | Second generation Pakistani Muslim, wears hijab and jilbab                                                           | End of teacher education course                       | 1 = 75 minutes  |
| Ilham    | British-born Somali, Muslim, female, from Birmingham, wears hijab and occasionally niqab (face veil)                 | Middle of teacher education course                    | 1 = 40 minutes  |
| Faheemah | Second generation Pakistani, Muslim, mature, born and raised in Birmingham. Previously completed postgraduate course | Middle of teacher education course                    | 1= 25 minutes   |
| Asad     | British-born Pakistani, male, Muslim, lives in Birmingham                                                            | End of teacher education course                       | 1 = 70 minutes  |

### 3.9 Confabulative Conversations

At the beginning stages of this study, I knew that my research would not take the form of structured interviews. The formality of question/answer structures felt mismatched with the kinds of interactions

I had with ECTeachers. Instead, I anticipated more informal, relational encounters. Whilst reading around PQI research, I came across the concept of confabulative conversations (Johansson, 2015), which immediately resonated with both my orientation to research and my practice in the field.

Johansson (2015) develops this idea of confabulative conversation as an alternative to the rigid logics of conventional interviews, which often assume stable subjects, linear time, and coherent accounts. In contrast, confabulative conversations are understood as speculative and generative as they create space for speculation, invention, and the collective imagining of what is not yet fully visible. Johansson (2015) and this study's understanding of confabulative conversation extends beyond the conventional psychological terminology 'confabulate' which typically refers to the filling of memory gaps. We use the term more broadly to describe instead how false or distorted memories can actively shape how people talk to and understand one another (Coltheart, 2017). This orientation closely aligns with Haraway's (2016, p 230) notion of 'speculative fabulation' describing a 'a mode of attention, a theory of history and a practice of worlding'. In this way, refusing representational and fixed accounts of experience and instead attending to how participants' encounters shape their participation in the spaces they are situated in. From this perspective, conversations do not document what has happened, it does more by contributing to what become possible. Although speculative fabulations are fabulations, Subramaniam (2014, p 72) argues that we need speculative thought to help 'imagine other configurations of knowledge-making'.

For my work with ECTeachers, this methodological shift was important. Confabulative conversations offered a way of entering shared, exploratory spaces where meaning could be made in the moment, often unpredictably. These encounters did not aim for polished answers to pre-set questions but instead welcomed the emergent stories that they stumbled through, acknowledging the hesitations and tentative speculations allowing the creation of new meanings and insights (Johansson, 2015). By having these conversations, I also wanted to create what Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p 420) regard as a space that blurs out what is real and possible, acknowledging dreams, imaginations, and hopes as real. In practice, this took silence, laughter and pauses as meaningful parts of the conversations, not gaps to be filled. 'Things' such as clothing and roles and responsibilities in life were brought into conversations by participants and these were validating hopes, dreams and speculative thoughts as equally important to be considered. By attending to this, new understandings of experience emerge though intra-actions of knowing and being (Barad, 2007).

Participants were reassured that there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers and talking and listening about their experience is what I was interested in. Many described these conversations as offering an 'alternative breathing space', where they could release, reflect and openly share their experiences as discussed earlier. My role was to minimise influence, allowing participants to lead and guide the conversation. This reduced potential hierarchies and hindrances, enabling a conversational flow with ordinary characteristics (Johansson, 2015). Unlike traditional unstructured interviews, this approach emphasised participants' emergent narratives and relational agency, allowing the conversation to unfold in a co-constructed, entangled manner.

### *#Killjoy moment*

*They wanted to talk and I wanted to listen. Refusing to follow a set of questions and going with the flow of conversation was different and it felt like care. It felt ethical.*

These temporalities were always entangled with spatialities and materialities. Conversations unfolded in neutral, 'safe' spaces that participants chose, cafes in city centre and local shopping centres and quiet corners of university social spaces. The participants I met more than once chose to meet again in the same place. Here, participants felt comfortable and able to speak openly. Materialities also shaped the encounters. Laptops, documents, hijab and phones oriented how bodies were positioned and how dialogue flowed. The list of materialities was important and possibly limitless especially 'as the enactment of listening implies not to focus on what you expect' (Garcia-Gonzales et al, 2019, p7). These material details were not incidental but part of the unfolding atmosphere of the conversation. Rather than treating time, space, and material as separate categories, I understand them as intra-acting dimensions of the research process. For instance, the limited temporal availability of participants often shaped where we met, such as in between university sessions, after school and during the school holidays. At the same time, material objects within those spaces provided unexpected prompts or anchors for dialogue.

## 3.10 Jottings and Transcripts

In an effort to remain true to my research intentions and to be fully present in the conversations, I chose not to use audio recording or attempt to capture the conversation word for word. Recording can sometimes introduce a sense of surveillance or formality, which risks disrupting the openness of the confabulative conversations. By choosing not to audio-record the conversations, I embraced a 'wilful' act (Ahmed, 2014, p20), an intentional steering away from the normative path that frames recording as the most 'accurate' or 'professional' method. Recording through a device, for me, risked conversations feeling and becoming structured and fixed. I wanted to remain present, to *feel* the

conversation rather than extract data from it. Listening attentively, through a kind of ‘wilful’ hearing (Ahmed, 2014) became an ethical and affective practice. Instead, I kept a notebook and pen to hand, jotting down key phrases, themes and moments that the participants raised. This allowed me to remain attentive to the flow of dialogue and to the affective qualities of the encounter, rather than becoming pre-occupied with data capture (Jackson and Mazzei, 2019). I was able to feel and respond, rather than listen and write in that moment.

As the research unfolded and I spoke with more participants, I steadily grew stronger in my ‘note taking’, always making sure I was very present in the conversations. Following the end of the conversations, I stayed back in the same location and expanded my notes into detailed transcripts, capturing what was said and the atmosphere in which it was said. This was a practical decision but also a methodological one. In transcribing immediately afterwards, while the conversation was still alive in my body, I slowed down, thought back, and engaged with what was said and sometimes unsaid. This approach was not intended as a verbatim record of every utterance; rather, it allowed me to capture the essence of the conversation and provide as much recalled detail as possible without formalising the data collection in a way that would have constrained its natural flow. Richardson and St Pierre (2005) talk about writing as a method of inquiry and it is more-than just recording, it is part of knowledge-making. This process allowed me to value affective stickiness (discussed later in 3.13) over clean data. It was an ethical commitment to listening in this way that could be said that troubles dominant research norms.

In keeping with my commitment to research as relational and response-able (Haraway, 2016), I sent these transcripts back to the participants, inviting them to review, correct or add to what I have written. All participants confirmed the accuracy of the accounts and one remarked ‘wow, it sounds like someone else’ (Iqraa) highlighting unfamiliarity and the reflective potential of seeing their own words reframed in this way. This process became part of the inquiry itself, rather than treating the transcripts as neutral representations, they were understood as collaborative, generative texts shaped between researcher and participant (Barad, 2007). This also served as an additional layer of consent that participants provided following the reading of their own affective encounters and an example of ethics in practice as outlined previously in 3.6.1.

### ***#Killjoy moment***

*I just listened, didn’t record through a device. A kind of demand for proof I didn’t want to give. By refusing, the conversation changed, listening became its own kind of politics.*

### 3.11 Power

This research, throughout, paid attention to how power operated particularly in the research encounter with participants. As mentioned earlier, I embodied a fluid positionality within and beyond the university context. In Foucauldian terms, power was relational and circulating through the micro-practices of the research encounter (Foucault, 1978). Power was exercised through everyday interactions, shaping what could be said, by whom, and how it could be heard. Power was dispersed and productive, shaping the very possibilities of knowledge and subjectivity within the research assemblage.

Additionally, Deleuze and Guattari (1997) state that '*The nomad distributes himself in a smooth space, he occupies, inhabits, holds that space; that is his territorial principle*' (translated by Massumi p381), suggesting power is a force of becoming, opening up new lines of flight, new possibilities of connection and rupture. Situating this dynamic is important (Haraway, 1988) because the role I inhabited within these spaces shaped access, rapport, what was said in the confabulative conversations and how those accounts were read. Consistent with the ethic of being response-able (Barad, 2007), I thought about power and positionality as practical, relational matters that shaped meaning. FPNM reconfigures power as something that is emergent and entangled in the research assemblage (St Pierre, 2011) that shapes possibilities of knowing and being in the research encounter. I was not a fixed point in the research but shifted according to the situated intra-actions with participants and our material world.

At different moments, my proximity to participants facilitated trust and richer contextual understanding as I understood shared school/university references, similar embodied experiences and building rapport made it easier for participants to speak openly. At other moments, my differences in educational background and researcher role created a necessary distance to preserve interpretation. Both positions involved risks; insider positionality could lead to assumptions, or participants tailoring their experiences to expectations, whilst outsider positionality risked reading their experiences differently. I attended to both risks, through careful thought and consideration throughout the process as Foucault (1995) reminds us that power is inseparable from knowledge and both are enacted through the everyday encounters of doing research.

### 3.12 Hanging out with 'sticky' data

Engaging with the data was not a linear process. As mentioned earlier, I came to sit comfortably with the uncomfortable. Not following a traditional and fixed way of doing research (e.g. coding, thematic analysis) was new but the more I sat with it, the more it became a reality of research itself. I spent periods of time simply 'hanging out with the data' as Haraway implies (in Hultman and Lenz Taguchi, 2010). This speaks to the slow research mentioned earlier, where I allowed the time for the data to become familiar, to shift and to speak to me in different ways. This was not about extracting meaning quickly and the nature of writing a thesis, but thinking slowly, allowing the process to unfold itself.

I began with reading the transcriptions. Slowly, immersing myself in the words spoken. I made notes in the margin by jotting down my immediate reactions, paying attention to the affective nature of this, and whether questions emerge, allowing ideas to surface. I returned to the same conversations over weeks and even months which allowed me to work with and rework the 'data' to produce new encounters with the material (Millei and Rautio, 2017). As I worked on other aspects of the research and thinking of my killjoy moments, I read and re-read the transcriptions. Although this occurred over a period (12 months or so), I found this useful as it enabled me to think very carefully on what I wanted to do yet thinking closely about the entanglements and relationality of what may occur.

### 3.13 What the heck am I doing with sticky data

At times I felt nervous as I found myself thinking, 'what the heck am I doing now'. This nervousness, I came to realise, this feeling of unease was not incidental but part of the affective encounter with data. My own body became entangled within the research assemblage where feelings of uncertainty, vulnerability but also anticipation circulated. Jackson and Mazzei (2012, p 262) tell us the challenging aspect of thinking with theory is the act of 'putting it to work to make something new'. As I engaged with the data, I was also simultaneously thinking with theory and applying the concepts. The slow process of 'reading the data while thinking the theory' (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012, p 264) became a way of analysing which generated difference, creating new possibilities and speaks to the ongoing process of becoming.

#### *#Killjoy moment*

*I did not hurry to make sense of the data. I stayed with it, and letting feeling become the method.*

I was also very aware of Ahmed's (2004) affective encounters where emotions are not simply internal experiences but external forces that shape knowledge. Emotions can become attached or 'stick' to

bodies and spaces and influence how we perceive and experience them over time. I started to think of the 'data' as being 'sticky data'. The data that came to me had already come to me with affective force. They were stories charged through personal narratives and feelings. The 'sticky data' also seemed to 'glow' (Maclure, 2013) since they produced this affective intensity. It is not always obvious what these sticky data are and how and where they emerge, but they allow for wonder, marking data that matters; symbolically, affectively and materially. What I was noticing was not just what the participants shared with me, but how they said it and what they had said *did to me*. What glowed, what stuck and what was the 'data' were all enacted through my own involvement, shaped by theory and affect of this research (Dennis et al, 2023).

The next part of the thesis (Part 4) will explain the reading of the data, through a process of diffracting for affect.

## Part 4 - Affractive Readings: Diffracting for Affect

This section does not present the confabulative conversations as a fixed body of findings, instead it offers a reading of the data that is attentive to how meanings emerge through relations, encounters and entanglements. This approach foregrounds process over representation, and attends to how different moments, voices, materials and affects intra-act to produce possibilities of knowing and becoming. As Barad explains;

*Reading insights through one another diffractively is about experimenting with different patterns of relationality, opening things up, turning them over and over again, to see how the patterns shift. This is not about solving paradoxes or synthesising different points of view from the outside...but rather about the material intra-implication of putting 'oneself' at risk, troubling 'oneself,' one's ideas, one's dreams, all the different ways of touching and being in touch, and sensing the differences and entanglements from within (Barad in Kleinmann, 2012, p 77).*

In this sense, reading the data does not seek to resolve tensions and fix any problems that may arise, rather it involves staying with the trouble (Haraway, 2016), allowing the data to trouble existing discourse and to think about how the research inquiry can be fully appreciated. Therefore, diffractive methodology is a way of reading insights through one another, and it allows 'patterns of difference' to emerge (Barad, 2007, p.29). Barad explains that

*diffraction does not fix what is the object and what is the subject in advance, and so, unlike methods of reading one text or set of ideas against another where one set serves as a fixed frame of reference, diffraction involves reading insights through one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge. (Barad, 2007 p30)*

I take up diffraction as a methodological stance that foregrounds relations of difference rather than linear cause-effect logics. Diffractive methodology invites a recognition that knowledge emerges through entanglements of practice, affect and embodiment. As Dennis et al (2023) explain, diffraction is a method and practice that attends to relational ontologies. It acknowledges that time, space, matter and meaning intra-act to create knowledge. But importantly for this research, the positionality of me as a researcher, through my own history, experience, emotions and embodied response, becomes part of this diffractive process, shaping the knowledge that emerges (Dennis et al, 2023).

This diffractive approach resists the urge to seek definitive interpretations or fixed meanings. As such, 'we should not rush for solid meaning and definitive interpretation of data' (Ringrose and Reynold, 2014, p 2). Therefore, matter is not a passive aspect waiting to be interpreted. Instead, Fairchild and Taylor (2019) argue, what comes to matter emerges through entangled material-discursive processes. Reality is co-created through ongoing intra-actions in which patterns of mattering take shape. Dennis et al (2023, p 365) posit 'diffraction provides a theoretical position for 'new' knowledge to emerge'. They also shed light on the positional perspective of the researcher contributing to enacting new configurations of thought through their own history, experience, memories and emotions.

Affective moments are moments of difference. Unlike thematic analysis, diffractive analysis engages with the differences that emerge and maps the effects of these differences in exploring entanglements of agency and vulnerability. It focuses on what narratives do instead of what they mean. Diffractive analysis moves beyond human-centred reflection and examines how data, theory, and materialities shape each other. Unlike reflexive thematic analysis, which focuses on identifying patterns within data, diffraction looks at how knowledge is produced through interactions. Ahmed (2010, p4) asks, 'what do emotions do?' and this question guided my attention toward how affect circulates, adheres, and moves between bodies, shaping lived experience. These moments, often marked by discomfort, wonder, or tension, signal points where something important is happening, where matter and meaning entangle. Maclure (2013) refers to such instances as *hot spots* in data; moments that *glow*, demanding analytic and affective attention.

Engaging in what I call Affract or affractive readings, which is diffracting for affect, I employed Barad's concept of agential cuts to think about 'sticky moments', which I read through theory, policy, and my own affective positioning as a researcher. Agential cuts are practices through which boundaries between 'things' are created, and knowledge emerges through intra-actions. Each affractive reading became a site of intra-action between data, concepts, and embodied response. This process resonates with Barad's (2007, p30) description of diffraction as reading insights through one another without fixing object or subject in advance. It resists the urge for definitive interpretation, acknowledging, as Ringrose and Reynold (2014, p2) caution, that we 'should not rush for solid meaning'. Matter, as Fairchild and Taylor (2019) argue, is not passive but actively participates in the co-creation of meaning, what comes to matter emerges through material-discursive processes of entanglement.

In practice, diffracting for affect required lingering with moments that felt uncomfortable or unresolved, allowing the data to do something rather than forcing it to mean something. My analysis attended to the assemblages that make up participants' identities as fluid, shifting dynamics of elements such as Asiyah–Muslim–mother–mature-ECTeacher or Shila–British Bangladeshi–Muslim–family–hijab-ECTeacher. These assemblages reconfigure in response to the sticky moments participants encounter in their professional and personal lives. Mapping these assemblages both descriptively and analytically highlights that identity is not fixed but continuously produced through relations of difference and affective entanglement.

### **#Killjoy moment**

*I'm here to do justice to the participants' stories. I listened carefully, and I owe it to them to write in a way that stays true to their experiences. This isn't just writing, it is a responsibility.*

The presentation of the 'data' that follows reflects my own deliberate choices of what matters in the narratives. It is also important to acknowledge that participant's encounters frequently moved beyond Subject English towards affective experiences. Participants wanted, and in many cases, needed to talk about what mattered most to them, even when these concerns were peripheral to Subject English. I allowed these conversations to unfold organically and, in presenting them, have made conscious and significant affective cuttings, carefully attending to which voices are foregrounded and how participant's experiences are represented. Rather than inserting killjoy moments as disruptions, as I have previously done so, I embrace the entangled nature of own position in the research, allowing myself to fold and unfold with the data. This approach sustains the flow of complex and messy intra-actions.

Thus, to mark the end of each affractive reading, I have chosen the word 'residue' to conclude each affractive reading. I contemplated using the conventional word 'conclusion' but it felt rather abrupt and too final. Instead, 'residue' here alludes towards what clings, what lingers after the encounter, whilst conclusion feels like the end. These sticky moments are not isolated events, they continue to circulate the lives of ECTeachers as they experience the entanglements of teaching and becoming. Residue marks the traces of experience that continue to move, unsettle and shape how they continue to move in these educational spaces, but the residue section also shares what these sticky encounters leave for me as a researcher as I am too entangled into this space.

## **4.1 Asiyah**

Asiyah returned to education as a mature student, embarking on teacher education and then securing a role as an ECTeacher. She is journey-ing through motherhood and comes from a complex, yet rich cultural upbringing. Asiyah is British and identifies as an Arab, though she has dual heritage background; her mother is Irish and father is Palestinian. Her identities as a Muslim, Arab mother of young children shaped her experiences in education were particularly interesting. Asiyah brought a wealth of experience to the classroom from a previous career in another sector, and as such her contributions offer a novel and under-represented voice in educational literature and research.

Her narratives speak to the sacrifices she finds herself making, as well as the critical stance she has of the 'systems' she found herself navigating through. She journeys through the training programme with difficulties and with a unique set of challenges that shape her own teacher becomings and perspectives in education. We met twice, both times in neutral coffee shops, and the meetings lasted more than an hour each time. At the time of the final conversation, Asiyah was intending to stay in the teaching profession as she secured an ECT1 post at a local school, but since then Asiyah made contact to inform me that she had quit.

### **4.1.1 Sticky Moments– Sacrifices, Time and Silence**

It was surprising for me to have Asiyah approach me wanting to be part of this research. I originally promoted my research in September, at the start of the term, but at the time she was not interested. She did not write her name down on the paper list that was sent round the room. But as the year went on, and we interacted further, she remembered my work and approached me, wanting to share her experience. We met end of January for the first conversation, once Asiyah had settled into the course and expectations and developed her experience in teacher education. Perhaps it was enough time to

live through something and to feel what was happening around her, that allowed the conversation to unfold. Things, at that particular stage in her journey, had now become sticky enough to talk about it.

We chose to meet in a coffee shop in the city centre, a distant space to the teaching and learning environments we have previously met in. Something about being in a neutral space allowed for unapologetic conversations to take place, where there was no worry or concern who was listening in. We were not confined by thinking about time; meetings, teaching sessions, or lessons to attend to. With the comfort of no other place to be, or no one listening in, Asiyah was really open and chatty about her experiences. She reiterated many times the following:

*'I just wanted to talk to you Salya, I think it is interesting what I'm going through and think it would benefit myself and you to talk about it....'*

*'We're alike, you said you have kids too, so I think you will know'*

Asiyah's identification with me, had 'stuck' and was anchored throughout shared experience of being mothers, women, Muslim and in the similarity in how we presented ourselves. It was not just a personal connection, but one that was materially and affectively produced through our entangled subjectivities. Our first meeting lasted nearly two hours – though temporally it felt much shorter. This temporal distortion gestures towards the affective intensities of the moment. FPNM thinking would argue that such moments cannot be reduced to linear time but they emerge from an assemblage of bodies, emotions, memories, places, histories etc (Braidotti, 2013). Conversations flowed not just because of what was said, but because of the affective and material knowledge we co-produced. Our conversation became a site of embodied knowledge production (Haraway, 2013) through Asiyah's comfort and sense of representation. I was also conscious about not interrupting this time to talk, to cut short the flow or limit the conversation.

Asiyah's journey into teaching is deeply rooted in her emotional world and the relationships that have sustained her. She was drawn to working with children, speaking passionately about the importance of nurturing young minds and building strong, relational connections which became more meaningful when she became a mother herself, igniting not just a personal desire, but a moral and emotional duty to inspire her own children through hard work and meaningful contribution.

What becomes clear in her story is the centrality of affective assemblages in her life. Asiyah does not pursue teaching in isolation. Her development as an ECTeacher is embedded in a network of emotional

and practical support, particularly from her mother and husband. These relationships form a vital *affective assemblage*, a collection of people, emotions, and shared intentions, that enable her to step into journey through her teacher becoming (Buchanan, 2015).

*My mother is my rock. I can't do this without her. I speak to her every day, sometimes multiple times.*

Her mother's presence, both emotionally and practically, is a stabilising force not just in this moment but through all the moments that encompass her professional and personal journey of becoming. She reflects on the immense challenges her mother overcame: relocating a young family to a country where she did not speak the language and yet managing to create a secure and loving home. It was her mother who encouraged her to pursue her teaching course in the UK, shaping the conditions under which Asiyah forms her teacher becoming. Her husband, too, forms part of this intimate assemblage, providing encouragement and sharing responsibilities. These relationships are not simply background support, they are constitutive of her ability to teach. These relationships make teaching possible for her. At one point in her training year, the fragility and instability of these affective assemblages became acutely felt. Asiyah was forced to make significant sacrifices in order to continue her course, most painfully a temporary separation period from her young children.

At the time, Asiyah had four young children, all of which were under the age of five. Motivated by a desire to build a better future for herself and her family, she chose to do her teacher education course with the support of her family. Though she moved back to the UK with her children to do this, it soon transpired that the demands of intensive training and full time motherhood proved overwhelming and impossible to juggle. With careful, emotional considerations, Asiyah and her family decided it would be best for the children to stay with Asiyah's mother, husband and extended family in the Middle East, whilst Asiyah completed her training. The plan was that once she had successfully completed her training, then she would re-locate her family back to the UK once she secured a post, where her older children will be of school age and husband will join her, working in the UK. During this time, Asiyah drew on infrastructures of both technology and ease of mobility to sustain her relationships. She travelled frequently on the weekends, and holidays to be with her children through the perks of aviation discount, and used technology, such as video calls, to stay present in her children's daily lives. This contextual information is important, though quite exceptional, it foregrounds the significance of affective assemblages in shaping how individuals move through the entangled demands of personal and professional becoming, that sit in contrast to the standardised, homogenous teacher discussed in Part 2.

The emotional weight of separation lingered deeply for Asiyah. The conversation we had made it clear she bore the emotive weight of this heavy decision; despite reassurance her children were being cared for by her own family. This temporary separation also required her to prematurely end breast-feeding her young baby.

*I had to stop breast-feeding my baby, I didn't want to but I had no other choice...*

As she said this, she became visibly upset. The premature, forced stop in breastfeeding her own child became a burden carried in her body. This interruption in the way she provided care to her child was an outcome of the forced structures in place where there is no space for embodied difference. The forced structures, through the demands of an intensive teacher training programme, the institutional expectations of professionalism, maternal care work being classed as secondary, as well as financial pressures through her student status, made practices like breastfeeding impossible to sustain. These forced structures also contribute to the temporary sacrifices Asiyah feels like she had no choice but make. I was curious to find out whether she informed training providers and mentors in the workplace, but Asiyah responded with:

*They think it's my choice, my decision. There's no support, I just have to live with it and manage it myself.*

As our conversation unfolded, the tension around sacrifices surfaced more forcefully. We spoke about the choices Asiyah had made, choices she recognises as her own, yet ones that sit heavily upon her. The consequences, though framed as personal decision, often felt profoundly unfair and unsupported, leaving her with a bubbling sense of anger. There was a noticeable shift in tone during this part of the conversation, a heavy, silent minute. When she did speak again, she reiterated the following concerns and bothersome moments, underscoring her sense of not quite fitting into institutional norms.

*'it's so unfair...*

*they should take people's circumstances into account when issuing bursaries – not everyone is on the same page... apparently I did not qualify for it – it's just pushing me out...*

*I've worked hard, and achieved all the necessary requirements for the course, yet I'm still sidelined with opportunities...*

*I see people getting treated differently...*

Here, Asiyah nods to the differing requirements for ITT bursary and how this played a part in her own circumstances. Asiyah did not meet the criteria set out by DfE (2020), which makes no allowances for personal or financial contexts. Asiyah's frustration reflects how she found herself excluded from this financial support because her qualification and personal situation were read through the rigid framework of bursary entitlement. For Asiya, the bursary scheme, which was a clear incentive for her, in practice privileged some over others. Asiyah is left with a deep sense of inequity that left her bothered but also contributed to the choices she went on to make.

Asiyah went on to share her teaching experiences in the classroom and despite the school and students being 'brilliant', her first placement was extremely difficult due to strained relationship with her school mentor. Asiyah talked to me about how her mentor clashed, how things were difficult. She points out that

*'I think it was because I was Arab – she didn't like that'*

The situation escalated to the point where she was pulled out by the university after multiple, worrying incidents. Asiyah described it as feeling disrespected, belittled and emotionally impacted by the experience, leading her to question herself. She states with her hands in the air,

*'Maybe I don't know, maybe I can't do it, maybe she's right...'*

The 'maybe' matters here. It shapes what Asiyah feels and how she experiences the education spaces around her. Living with doubt and uncertainty, those persistent maybes, deeply impacts her experiences as an ECTeacher, especially when she is made to feel inadequate and begins to question her own worth.

Asiyah talked about the couple of weeks at an alternative provisional school following Placement 1's abrupt end. In this alternative provision, she was deeply affected by the students' behaviour and poor attitudes to learning but her feelings of being disturbed shifted as her concerns quickly turned towards the student's welfare and began to consider the broader social and family contexts. She expressed disbelief at the normalisation of behaviour by staff who framed it as a matter of 'culture'.

*'I couldn't believe what I was seeing*

*The behaviour and attitude to learning was so poor – but I kept thinking about their families.*

*I was vocal about this to the staff, who were very much accepted the way students were – ‘it’s the culture’*

*I was shocked at the state of education - Where has it gone wrong?’*

Her experience revealed to her the rigid structures of the school system and the impact they have on students and staff. What she observed; regimented routines, high exclusion rates, disconnection from families and a normalisation of poor ‘culture’ exposes the structured and restrictive spaces of the educational system. A system that is ordered, controlled and confines movements and expressions. They discipline bodies and enforce normative expectations. It also reveals how deeply bodies are impacted by the atmospheres and emotive climates in education. Her ‘shock’ also implies her body’s response that resists the normalisation of the school systems; recognising that it just does not feel right. Asiyah’s words also speak to the tension with performativity – the system’s pressure to manage behaviour and achieve measurable outcomes, often at the expense of well-being. This visceral response reflects the affective intensity that signals dissonance and has already started to signal the affective knowledge Asiyah brings in challenging the logic of performativity in education (Massumi, 2008).

She turns to faith and how she feels faith grounds us and gives us purpose and direction in life, a common thread between the two of us alongside motherhood.

*It’s hard, but my belief in God gets me through. I do believe He doesn’t burden a soul with more than they can bear. It will be ok, it’s just hard*

Here, faith emerges not as a private, personal practice but as a source of grounding and orientation. It is part of the way Asiyah moves through this journey and learns to survive it. The connection between us, where we end up momentarily tearful, performs an affective moment of solidarity. Our shared experiences here created powerful connections. Emotions are contagious.

We met again for another conversation which Asiyah referred to as ‘catch-up’. This small and seemingly insignificant phrase is not a matter of semantics – it becomes a relational and affective encounter. Catch up, rather than meeting, refers to a connection and in some ways resists the logics of efficiency of ‘meetings’ by privileging the personal connections. The term ‘catch up’ intra-acts with becomings and actively shapes the material-discursive reality, producing a softer, gentle, entangled form of coming together. In our catch-up, what emerged was Asiyah’s confidence to speak wholly, and

unapologetically about her experiences but it is through this she has also learned to control her voice and identity.

Asiyah's professional experiences have led her to a school located in inner-city with a predominantly Muslim student population. The school provides structured support and professional learning opportunities. Asiyah responded very positively about many aspects of being in this school, particularly the diverse pedagogical practices. However, her reflections also reveal a growing sense of critical awareness regarding the nature of professional development within such institutional structures. While opportunities were plenty, they appeared, at times to prioritise performativity and standardisation over personalised or context-specific support. She mentions:

*'Not everyone is fresh out of university and 'young'. People come back from different backgrounds, and you don't get the support you need that takes that in account. People expect you to get on with it and doesn't really support. It's the way it is in university and schools. For example I was overwhelmed with the different systems and technology in schools (and university) but there wasn't any CPD for using technology... lots of CPD on other things but not what functions in schools!'*

Asiyah, from her own lived experiences, recognises that teachers arrive at different points. She voices her frustrations at the implicit expectation to 'just get on with it' regardless of what support you may or may not need.

Temporal intensities of school life, through its pace, demands and expectations, are central to Asiyah's experience. She mentions how 'busy' school is and feels the embodied pressure of meeting institutional demands that often seem impossible. Her words capture the affective weight of temporality in schools:

*'there is absolutely no time for everything you are expected to do! Be professional, social in workspaces, on top of your subject knowledge, planned and marked everything, complete all the paperwork, be present for your family, for yourself etc. Something always gives in'.*

The intensification of time is sticky (Ahmed, 2014), that demands from Asiyah, constant self evaluation and regulation. Asiyah's admission that 'something always gives in' points to the deeper structure of sacrifice needed to meet expectations. Women have historically been positioned as sacrificial bodies within systems that extract affective and reproductive labour while denying reprieve (Collins, 1986).

Asiyah is pointing to the perpetual sacrifice with ‘something that gives’ in exchange for a ‘belonging’ in a profession that is very much a deeply felt struggle.

*‘I don’t think there is any time for people who need extra support. Everyone is treated the same to some degree, but not everyone is. Schools should be mindful about the lack of time that there actually is taking account all aspects of school life. It’s not the mentor’s fault, it’s the system. Too much is at stake here (lives) and you need to be realistic.*

Her frustrations are heard when her tone changes when she says, ‘too much is at stake here’. This moment signifies a deepening of emotional intensity and almost a turning point – where she recognises the risk of not managing her role and failure to meet demands has real and possibly high stakes consequences – whether this is personal or professional capacity. This phrase becomes ‘sticky’ as it is associated with fear and pressure. She is also becoming aware of being accountable and the burden this has on her body. In this sense, the frustrations she feels is not just on an individual basis but tied to the structures that dominate this space that makes failure not an option and with devastating implications.

She moves through this space by negotiating her identity. Instead of voicing her concerns, which in the past has not enabled change, she has learned:

*‘..over time to ‘put a sock in it’ and just get on with it. Things won’t change for me, and I just have to pretend that I am deaf and blind. If I stopped at everything and everyone who was not nice towards me or even questioned things that I didn’t sit right with, it would always be considered my fault... it is relentless.*

This strategic response to what she was experiencing was a way of managing the problem that she thought she became. Asiyah felt voicing her concerns positioned her as the problem. This form of self-silencing has led her to feel that any action taken is futile and her own voice and experience is insignificant. Ahmed (2014) uses the term ‘emotional costs’ to refer to bodies inhabiting spaces not built to sustain the difference. What emerges here is not just passivity but a compromised agency. Asiyah’s ‘choice’ here to be silent is being done at a cost to her emotional well-being; where feelings of being different are exacerbated. Her ‘choice’ to be silent emerges from her own suppression of discomfort and being visible in spaces. These feelings make Asiyah feel out of place and shape how

Asiyah comes to know and relate to herself in space. Her muted presence becomes part of the wider Asiyah-Muslim-woman-mother-mature assemblage she finds herself in.

*I've come to realise actually why teachers leave, it's demanding and too much pressure.*

*I understand it now and I see it'.*

Asiyah's words, time and time again refers to the relentless performativity measures in schools. The affective value of stress, pressure, disappointment and feeling disillusioned in classrooms and wider educational space are not 'fresh' concerns for teachers. The teaching sector is saturated with concerns about workload as discussed in earlier cartographical accounts of policy and practice, but here a PQ perspective sheds light on how this shapes Asiyah's experience. As she lives through her teacher becomings, she feels the affective strain of performativity on her own body but that of others too. She nods to the demand and pressure teachers feel; this affect circulates through the material landscapes of schools and classrooms. Her subtle recognition acknowledges this heavy atmosphere – reminding us that the forces of performativity, not just through policy, are deeply embedded in the everyday rhythms of teaching life. Here, we see forces come together and intra-act, Asiyah is not simply reacting to policy but it is co-constituted by the entangled affective and material intensities that shape what and how it means to teach. As a trainee teacher Asiyah has not been directly involved with the typical performative measures of a school dictated through policy, but has been aware of, witnessed and felt the pressures subject English teachers are facing in schools.

Asiyah digs deeper when she starts to talk about her experiences with teaching Subject English in the classroom, but much of this part of the conversation centres around how time (or lack of) shapes practices. She gives plenty of subject specific examples of spending too long/too little time on topics which impact student progress. She talks to the 'pressures' and the 'struggles' she felt, since there was 'no time given to the text which deserves it'. She felt passionately about how reading deserves time, resisting the fast paced approach to reading she has witnessed.

*Give the time to the text – it deserves it. Skimming over it, summarising it is not helpful for anyone in the long-run.*

*Again with poetry, its just a skim through the poems. Students have 2 days with one poem. No time to take the time. Such a shame.*

Her words echoed a deep affective moment where texts are not passive objects to be decoded but forces capable of affecting and being affective. Personifying the text by stating the importance of time 'it deserves' acknowledges the significance it brings. Skimming, summarising or rushing through the text, as Asiyah has experienced, denies the possibility and opportunity for a genuine encounter. She proceeds by shrugging her shoulders with her hands, and palms facing outward, signalling a non-verbal expression of her lack of knowledge to why this is happening but also a quiet disappointment. She feels the loss for the slower and more attentive modes of reading. I asked if she found time to adapt those lessons to find the time or speak with mentor about this, but what follows in her narrative concerned me;

*'I can't voice any of this because school/mentor might get offended or I'm just complaining''*

This reveals the fragility in educational spaces that suppress any form of critique. The lack of voice and the rushing through sticks here. Her hesitation to offer her critical perspective is felt. She feels dismissed, or risks being a problem. Ahmed (2014) argues that complaint itself becomes a politically charged act, one that is often invalid to maintain the status quo and 'easier' situation. Rather than being interpreted as meaningful suggestions, Asiyah fears the risk of being labelled as disruptive or a problem. Her hesitancy is not due to her unable to use her voice but the violent structures in places silencing her voice. This affective labour of holding back becomes a silent negotiation of her own becoming.

Asiyah also experiences a sense of exclusion within the school setting. She notes that a white, male trainee she describes as 'tall, brown hair, charming and white' was clearly and overtly favoured by the headteacher, receiving public praise in the staffroom and career encouragement, where she and other trainees felt sidelined. She uses the words:

*'white equals wonderful and we are not. I feel this... Aren't I wonderful?'*

These words leave an affective trace on her body, underscoring how whiteness appears to be idealised and rewarded, and is centered as superior and desirable, while other bodies are not. They are marginalised and offer less value and then denied basic fairness in Asiyah's case, when not being told about job vacancies. This leaves Asiyah with a lingering feeling of questioning her own worth, which is rooted in systemic bias.

Her experiences of systemic bias and prejudice is further exemplified with her presence in the classroom and wider school environment. She talks defensively about herself and I feel the struggle she has learned to manage and cope with. She reiterates to me:

*'I'm very straightforward –I'm not here to negotiate. I know my place and just do my job. People that know me well, well I develop relationships for life with people. I'm not fake. Some people take that as an instant dislike or see me as a threat. I'm not a threat.'*

What is striking here, is when Asiyah declares that she is not here to negotiate. On the surface, it would be seen as refusal or even strength amongst a pressured space, however this assertion can be associated with more complex affective negotiation. This negotiation is not verbal or even conscious, it is embodied within Asiyah. Through her past encounters and exclusions, it has shaped how her body moves, feels and performs in schools and classroom where she has negotiated with her visibility and voice, mentioned earlier as she has learnt to suppress her voice. Asiyah-mother-Muslim-subject English teacher assemblage leads her to negotiate her own becoming, thinking about how to exist without being too loud, too 'other'. These internalised feelings are materialised effects of structural affect (Pedwell and Whitehead, 2012) embedded in the educational setting Asiyah finds herself in. Her discomfort and reluctance in being herself emerges from the affective assemblage of body, discourse, norms and histories as explained earlier.

Her statement of not being a threat functions as a powerful moment of defence and revelation. She has a full and conscious awareness of being perceived through a lens of suspicion, where Vincent (2018) describes the figure of 'Muslim' as 'potential hazards', suggesting a normalisation of distrust that attaches itself to Muslim bodies regardless of their conduct. Although Asiyah states that she is not here to negotiate, it juxtaposes her self-positioning as someone who must constantly manage perception and behaviour. While she asserts a firm sense of identity, her self-monitoring and awareness of how others interpret her suggest a more complex negotiation of herself. This is reflected through an unconscious internalisation of needing to tone down expressions of identity to avoid being 'too much', 'inappropriate', or even 'too Muslim', particularly in a politically charged context shown below when she says:

*'The children, especially the Muslim (Asian) kids, they are so excited and often greet me with 'as salaamu alaikum' and are respectful! They are fascinated by the fact I'm half Palestinian.'*

*When kids ask me 'where am I from', I notice my mentor's listening attentively and I notice this, and I will say 'yehh I'm from Palestine'...and then ok let's move on...'*

*I'm worried that my mentor might think it's too much...*

*Kids get excited, they relate to me because I'm Muslim like them. I'm doing really well with the children, although it's like walking on eggshells in that school. I'm learning a lot but in terms of the atmosphere it's not really comfortable. The course is so demanding, and now I understand why people do not want to get involved with the course.*

*Sometimes I think whether my name, my ethnicity, are these my issues? I've asked my mom (she's white (xxxx, but white)) why am I facing these issues...*

We can see that Asiyah's experiences are materially embodied – visible in the way her ethnicity, faith and identity stick to her body and shape her interactions. Her anxieties about how she is perceived, especially when discussing her background with students suggests how her body becomes a site where power and subjective expectations intra-act. The environment itself, through policy, surveillance, contribute to reproducing marginalisation. When she instinctively moves on when acknowledging her own Palestinian heritage reflects the affective force of fear – fear of judgement or misunderstanding or perhaps something else unknown. This idea that Muslim bodies represent a 'suspect community' (Panjwani, 2016) indicate how suspicion of certain bodies permeates through education and shapes experiences, particularly when she worries that her mentor might think 'it's too much'. I ponder on this and think about what is 'too much' here. The discomfort Asiyah feels, reveals how environments and ideas are structured around normative bodies and identities, making others feel invisible or out of place. Asiyah's body is 'too much' for this space, it is not designed for her nor does it truly embrace her.

Asiyah also highlighted the complex nature of intersectional identity, as she recalls being 'half-Arab', and visibly Muslim through her name. She speaks to the visible difference to her Irish white mother, which makes her more vulnerable to stereotyping. The material and affective forces embodied in the conversation through shoulder sloping, deep breaths, hands up, and emotive responses reveal how teacher education and wider education policies and practices are enacted through lived experiences, shaping atmospheres of tension and exclusion. These dynamics are deeply felt and managed. For some bodies, they endure this but for how long. As mentioned earlier, soon after starting her ECT1 post, Asiyah had quit.

### 4.1.2 Residue

What lingers after listening to Asiyah is the weight of what her experience reveal about care, sacrifices and the costs of belonging in the space she is situated in. In her sticky moments, motherhood is entangled in her teacher becomings. The sacrifices she makes, reconfiguring the way she manages her caregiving responsibilities and her own visibility in professional spaces, stay with me as affective ruptures. Asiyahs' sticky moments mark the ways education spaces demand conformity to their time, their measures, whilst disregarding the temporalities and embodied labour of motherhood.

Our meetings also felt very significant, not just for the purpose of the study, but the feeling that it was much needed. The duration of our conversation was in total approximately 3.5 hours, it felt natural and valued, particularly for Asiyah, letting me know that 'it was good to talk' and 'I know you understand'. I discuss the importance of relationality between participant and researcher earlier in Part 3, but the encounters with Asiyah really did feel significant and the relation allowed for open conversations to occur. I also recognised that despite allowing room for conversations to flow, there was so much more that I did not know and remain unknown too. But the feeling of being deeply connected to others through our shared values and struggles provided opportunities to feel empathy and compassion as we continued to meet. Every encounter with Asiyah left me with sense of humility and admiration of her strength pursuing a career in ECTeacher of Subject English whilst juggling her personal responsibilities and coming face to face with barriers. I truly felt the struggles she embodied – as a mature, Muslim mother juggling the demands of both professional and personal lives. Asiyah's journey is marked my immense tension between finding a balance, visibility, using her voice, and belonging. Her narrative speaks to the cost to persist in systems that fail to recognise embodied difference.

I witnessed Asiya's embodied distress, as a signal to the educational structures that push parental care to the margins. As a working mother myself, who worked in schools, I felt this strain and understood the struggles of balancing roles. This part of Asiyah's narrative speaks to the relational labour and emotional cost that is often rendered invisible in dominant discourses of teacher development. Within these frameworks, teacher becomings are framed as an individualised, rational and linear progression, dislodged from the affective entanglements of care and motherhood. Asiyah's narrative disrupts this but also reorders the care she learns to give and receives due to professional expectations, with finding alternative care arrangements, travelling frequently and utilising technology to maintain her role as a mother.

Ahmed's (2014) work reminds us that certain bodies carry the weight of institutional happiness. Asiyah's upset and struggle with separation and the premature stop to breastfeeding expose the violence that educational systems demand to gain professional qualification and status. Her story here challenges us to rethink what professional development is and for whom it is designed for, making visible the challenges and material conditions that shape and often constrain women's pathways to teaching. Asiyah's upset, although unique to her, speaks to others' experiences where professionalism is prioritised at the expense of intimate attachments.

Her reflections here do not just pay attention to the personal grievances she has, but also point to the structural conditions that disproportionately impact women like her – racialised, gendered, mature, mother etc. Ahmed (2021) describes this as the paradox of inclusion, where institutions welcome difference only to an extent where it does not disrupt their norms. Asiya's frustrations here echo hooks' (1989) critique on how racialised women are often allowed into professional spaces only by managing or muting part of themselves, creating a dissonant space between presence and belonging – pushing bodies further into the margins. Asiyah deeply feels the affect through her words 'unfair' and being 'pushed out', marking moments of exclusion when she has to separate from her children to meet demands of the school and course, or pulled out from Placement 1 due to mentor troubles, or learn to 'put a sock in it'. These expressions point to how subjectivity is shaped through relational and material encounters (Blackman, 2012). The language Asiyah uses above forms a felt disposition (Gilroy, 1993), revealing how feelings of injustice and displacement are derived from intra-actions that take place. Her experiences can be understood as part of an affective assemblage (Kofoed and Ringrose, 2012), where bodily presence, socio-cultural norms and institutional dynamics intra-act to produce feelings of marginalisation. We might think of Asiyah-Muslim-mother-mature ECTeacher assemblage as one that also carries the weight of past exclusions. In this sense, Asiyah's subjectivity is not fixed or autonomous but formed through these gendered and racialised processes that shape how Asiyah feels and how this is embodied, whilst also being tied to broader social forces that operate beyond her (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010). The affective language she employs reflects more than a reaction as it marks the ongoing materialisation of exclusion and its embodied consequences. These sticky encounters reside as they contribute to Asiyah's exit. When I asked what had happened through message, she replied with 'it's too much, couldn't make it work'. I chose not to press further due to timings and scope of this study, though I was sorry to hear this as I knew Asiyah had intended and tried to 'make it work'. Yet I was reminded of our conversations in which Asiyah expressed feelings of stress, pressure and disillusionments – emotions often unacknowledged and unaccounted for in dominant discourses of teacher education, which I have engaged in the killjoy cartography in Part 2. Drawing on

Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Asiyah's narrative suggests that difference is often managed, if not erased, in favour of conformity to homogenised practices. Asiyah's experience makes visible the affective costs of these practices.

Her relationship with her first mentor brought another affective break. Moments of undermining and dismissal fractured her fragile sense of becoming, where bodies are forced into narrow pathways of legitimacy explored in Part 2. These encounters left traces of self-doubt that clung to her, shaping how she felt and moved within professional spaces. The power her mentor held exemplifies how normative standards police belonging, embedding doubt as an affective residue. Pedwell (2017) describes affect as a binding technique, compelling us to inhabit our responses and opening possibilities for change. Asiyah's self-doubt, while painful, also creates a space for different self-knowings, where fragility and exclusion signal broader structural inequities. Her words, her pauses, her sighs are not only expressions of strain but also invitations to rethink the conditions of professional life. What remains is the silence—her muted body navigating survival through compromise, her sacrifices folding into the rhythm of institutional time. Yet these residues are unstable. Thompson et al. (2021) remind us that assemblages are never total; they can be disrupted. In this way, Asiyah's narrative resists erasure, pointing toward possibilities for transformation even amidst constraint.

One particular moment that continues to stay with me is Asiyah's abrupt end to her breastfeeding journey. Although, it appeared to be a personal decision, it is an affective rupture where the temporal demands of teacher education collided with the intimate rhythms of motherhood. It became a sacrifice where her body had to conform to institutional time, rather than the other way round. It is a moment that will linger for Asiyah, as she moves forward in or out of educational spaces. I am left thinking whether this moment of sacrifice at the early stages tainted her expectations and reality of working in schools as an ECTeacher that contributed to her eventual premature exit. The sacrifices continue and, in some way, become compulsory as those who bring difference to the forefront are challenged by the homogenising structures of teacher training. Asiyah's body becomes muted. The emotional and material toll of this muting is immense as it manifests through a steady silencing. Her silence and sacrifices are survival strategies as she responds to exclusion. It is also born out of continuous interactions between sacrifice, time and institutional structures that disregard difference. Asiyah's experiences are about much more than burn out and quitting the profession, it is the material consequence of systemic disregard for embodied difference.

## 4.2 Shila

Shila's story began at the start of her ECTeacher training at a local school in Birmingham. She had finished her training that previous summer and secured a full-time role as a Subject English teacher. During this doctoral research, I met her three times and within this timeframe, she shared her experience of being an ECT1 (Early Career Teacher Year 1) and ECT2 (Early Career Teacher Year 2). Through reading and re-reading her conversations with me, I trace how her emotional expressions, gestures and experiences of marginalisation emerge and intra-act in her negotiations with 'feeling seen but remaining invisible' with dominant structures of education, culture and society.

During our meetings I noticed assemblages shifting and shaping her becoming. Early in our conversations, her assemblage of Shila-Bangladeshi-family-Birmingham-teacher was oriented around eagerness and self-awareness, shaping her aspirations and drive. Towards the end of ECT2, her assemblage had begun to reconfigure, as a growing sense of criticality emerged, shaped by what she saw, heard and felt in the professional environment. These sticky moments of being seen and being heard by those in hierarchical positions to her working in education, become pivotal in shaping her teacher becomings which I illuminate in the reading that follows, as her assemblage dynamically embodied the tension of seeking visibility within spaces that often render her invisible.

### 4.2.1 Sticky Moments – Feeling seen, being heard

At the start of our conversation, I explained that I was interested in her experiences, and she could just start talking to me about her journey into teaching. Although surprised at the lack of structure, she was happy to do so, and started with her family, and upbringing. She talks proudly of her 'immigrant parents who have worked hard and were adamant all their children worked hard in education' and how she had a happy, fulfilling upbringing. She comments on how 'family was everything' and the 'strong sense of community shaped her'. She signals to the possible disappointment her parents may feel since she chose teaching as a career, compared to her sibling's choice of medicine and accountancy but reassures herself with:

*'I just love it, you know... seeing kids develop and have those lightbulb moments. I feel like I'm doing something worthwhile. I don't think I've let my parents down; they seem proud of me.'*

Here, Shila foregrounds the importance of family and community in her becomings, resonating with Asiyah. Shila-Bangladeshi-family-teacher assemblage is significant here but affective tension surfaces

here with a sense of guilt and doubt juxtaposed with pride and purpose. Shila smiles marking a moment of pause and reflection, yet the smile goes beyond the explication of an internal state, it is a bodily intensity that moves her, including my own body as researcher. I can feel Shila's decision making and the impact it brings as a ripple that carried pride and care across bodies and relations. The sticky moment here, affirms becoming teacher is entangled with the weight of expectations and desires, where joy and responsibility fold, unfold and fold in again. Shila continues with her aspirations as a teacher, she shared her strong desire to work in predominately South-Asian and Muslim communities believing that was where she was needed most. The assemblage Shila-Bangladeshi-family-Birmingham matters here as she added:

*'I really liked our conversation about representation literally when I first met you, and it just stuck with me,'*

*'As people who are from ethnic minorities, although I don't see the minority in our community, I want to be able to show that you can work hard, be able to speak and write clearly, and have a decent life.'*

*'I want to be able to show that you can do it'.*

She was acutely aware of the barriers many young people face, from family expectations, financial struggles and even societal stereotypes. I nodded along, and she continued with talking about her training year, showing that I was paying attention and 'understood' this as we shared similar backgrounds. She seemed to be going in a linear path of re-telling how she arrived to the point she was at now:

*'It was such a shock,' ..., sometimes it was overwhelming, but my mentor at school was so supportive. All my observations went well and were really progressive.'*

She moves to what lies ahead (ECT training)

*'It's a lot more real now, feels quite full on'*  
*'the last few weeks - I've already learnt a lot'.*

Here, she describes being an ECT1. I probed further by asking, 'why is it full on?'. She talks about the full time teacher role and how she was 'protected' under the shadows of 'trainee teacher' and now she is 'living and breathing' the roles and responsibilities of a subject English teacher; 'a lot more hours of teaching and assessment and everything else'. We talked about the reality of being a full time

teacher, and that the year ahead promises to be one where you learn a great deal and Shila was optimistic of that.

We met seven months later and after ‘catching up’, we moved on to talk more about the ECT phase she was in. She took a deep sigh with shoulders sloped:

*‘not gonna lie, it’s been mental! I’ve wanted to give up a few times but my family helped me through it’.*

Shila-Bangladeshi-family-teacher assemblage resurfaces but here, her body also becomes an embodied manifestation of the affective weight of labour within the neoliberal systems in education, explored earlier in Part 2. I asked further as to why she felt like giving up and she talked through how exhausted she always felt, and felt like she couldn’t keep ‘top of the workload’. I asked if things are better now:

*‘I’ve got a rhythm now, but it has taken me a lo-oooo-nng time to feel like a human again. I was like machine!’.*

Her description of feeling ‘like a machine’ crystallises the dehumanising rhythms of working in education, where bodies are folded to adhere to logics of efficiency, productivity and relentless output (Strom, 2020). The temporal stretch of her ‘loo-ooo-nng’ emphasises the drawn out affective labour of re-finding humanness against a system that demands machinic repetition. Exhaustion here is, for Shila, an embodied saturation that reshapes her posture, voice and breath. Shila’s becoming is marked by negotiation between machinic demands and the struggle to sustain a liveable rhythm. She experiences an exhaustion that is personal, structural and affective as it is felt across her body. Puar’s work (2017) distinguishes debility from disability, identifying debility as the slow wearing down of populations who are not officially recognised as impaired. This slow violence normalises exhaustion, as teachers like Shila give their all until depletion itself becomes invisible, expected practice.

Shila started to discuss the immense responsibility that she felt having ownership of whole classes. She talks specifically about a challenging Year 9 class, mainly populated with EAL/SEND students. She worries about not being able to ‘meet everyone’s needs all of the time’. Here, Shila is coming to terms with the responsibility that comes with teaching, something she does not choose, it becomes an affective demand (Ahmed, 2014), shaped by dominant power structures and normative expectations. Shila is expected to teach and make a positive impact on the students learning, yet implicitly tasked with emotional and often unsupported labour that comes with teaching students she described. Here,

teaching becomes more than pedagogy, it is a site where feelings circulate and disproportionately burdens some over others.

*It's really tough...Behaviour has been something of an issue, ... I just feel sorry for them ...English content is just way too difficult ... I'm not surprised, a lot of them are learning English ... for the first time, so trying to explain ..is challenging.*

*'... The issues of the (subject) material not being suitable have been shared, but it's like, um.... (pausing....) the message is simple as the material cannot change because it's the what the examination is on, so we have to find ways to teach the material. It's all the adaptive teaching stuff we've learnt about in the ECF. BUT, this is so hard to do when there is a time limit of 6-8 weeks on average for a topic. I don't know, there's so much pressure in schools, it feels draining. I mean its actually such a disservice to the students and teachers'.*

Her reflections extend the affective weight of her labour into the classroom where she is faced with pedagogical challenges as they entangle with systemic constraints. There is a sense of compassion with her students and frustration for them, as the pauses in her speech, her hesitation explicate the struggle of wanting to nurture her students, but she is caught in the rigid demands of curriculum and assessment. The classroom is saturated with conflicting affects: care for her students, sadness at their struggle, and frustration at the impossibility of being flexible. What sticks is the repeated emphasis on time underlining how temporality itself becomes an oppressive force, pressing on all bodies in this space. She adds:

*'Then also, its like there's no time to pray as lessons were during that time and I felt so disconnected from my faith because I missed the prayers ...I felt soo guilty about that. It's not like you can say I can't teach my lesson for 5 minutes as I need to pray or I'm late to the meeting as I have had to pray. I probably get sacked if I even asked! All of it together just makes me feel like ok I need a break from this and try something different. But then I also love it too so I'm torn... anyway my family helped me and I hope it does get easier. I'm going to stick with it and see, literally go with the flow'*

This is a powerful moment of affective exclusion (Zembylas, 2013), where the institutional practices of education fail to accommodate the embodied, spiritual, and cultural realities of individuals like Shila. Her inability to practise her faith freely during the workday not only generates feelings of guilt and alienation, but also reflects broader structural inequalities that dictate whose bodies matter, and which

are silenced or marginalised (Ahmed, 2014). What interrupts this moment of exclusion is the presence of her family. She, again, foregrounds their importance in enabling her to continue, who actively sustain her in her capacity to endure teaching. The family operates as a stabilising force and an assemblage that allows her 'to go with the flow'. At the same time, Shila's reliance on her family to help her get through intensities of exhaustion and exclusion highlight how systemic inequalities are displaced onto personal networks as family becomes an affective anchor in her teacher becoming and resonates with Asiyah's account of how her 'mom was her rock'.

When we met again to talk more about her experiences as she moves into ECT2, I noticed that she now wore a loose abaya<sup>7</sup> and a keffiyeh<sup>8</sup> draped around her neck, carrying these garments with a quiet confidence that expresses her identity. The abaya and keffiyeh are more than material, they are intentional, symbolic choices resonating with her own becoming, gestures of care and acts of resistance within that process. The keffiyeh carries histories of resistance, occupation and solidarity with the Palestinian people and in wearing it, Shila brings those entanglements into her everyday presence. In this moment, Shila-Bangladeshi-Muslim-keffiyeh emerges as an assemblage of history, identity and affect. The keffiyeh does not drape her body, it intra-acts, allowing the material and symbolic forces of the keffiyeh' to perform resistance, making visible the histories and struggles she embodies.

Shila talks to me about ECT2 and at the start of term, she felt good, like a new person, literally. But soon realised nothing really changed in schools.

*'It's like you just have to get on with it, sometimes like a robot. Busier timetable but still have mentor and ECT time, which is helpful and valued. Mentor feels confident in me, knows I will get on with it and get the work done. . .'*

Shila's explanation of having no choice but to get on with it is a vocalisation of absence of choice that resonates deeply with the lack of voice Shila has. There is no space to do otherwise and the reductive nature of working in schools is taking its affective toll but she recognises the support within Shila-family-teacher-mentor assemblage as being 'helpful and valued'.

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<sup>7</sup> Abaya – long, flowy outer garment worn by Muslim women designed to be modest, covering the entire body except for the face, hands and feet.

<sup>8</sup> Keffiyeh – a traditional black and white headdress worn by men from the Middle East region, particularly in Palestine. Originally worn for practical purposes such as protection from the sun, dust and sand, the keffiyeh has also become a powerful symbol of Palestinian identity and resistance. It is often worn to express solidarity with the people of Palestine as well as an act of resistance against occupation, displacement and violence – what many describe as ongoing genocide.

Shila has become increasingly confident with teaching Subject English. As a Subject English teacher and teacher educator myself, I was curious to learn what texts she has been teaching. She listed them and she feels confident. I asked if there was room to choose her own texts:

*'oh, there's no room for that, and what's the point since it's not in the exam anyway. School will just see it as a waste of time'.*

Her words carry frustration, showing the limits placed on her professional judgement. I asked if she felt it was a waste of time, she replied with:

*'hmmm, no actually I don't think I've ever thought about it. Actually, wait a minute... I did wonder during the riots in the summer<sup>9</sup>, whether we could read more about things that could teach more about being racially aware or even tolerant about other people's culture and religion. So much hate in the summer, it was so scary. And you could really learn a lot from just reading about other peoples' struggles and stories, builds empathy and connection with people. But apart from being learning the key skills of reading you know the AOS, I struggle to see the benefit Macbeth brings to kids in inner city Birmingham who face racial tensions in the community!'*

In this moment, affect and pedagogy intersect. She wants her teaching to *matter*—to emotionally and socially resonate with students. Her longing to include texts about racial tension and cultural understanding is a desire to create classrooms where both she and her students feel seen and heard. We talked about the riots and how it was a frightening time for a few times, as we both received messages from our friends and family not to leave the house since the EDL/Far Right were protesting and be on alert. Shila talked about how her husband was worried about her wearing hijab and even thought she could have acid thrown at her as she liked to go for jog in their local park. She looked at me and said 'that wouldn't happen, would it?' I paused for a second, Shila had caught me off guard and I felt stumped because I had asked my husband the same question during that time. I replied with 'I don't know...my husband had the same worries'.

She sighed and looked solemn,

*'why do we have to always take extra caution because of what we like look like and what we believe in. It's just frustrating, this is what I mean about reading different texts with students, it builds their*

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<sup>9</sup> The 2024 UK summer riots followed a knife attack in Southport that killed three children, after which false rumours about the suspect's identity, amplified by far-right groups and social media, fuelled anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim violence across several the UK.

*knowledge and empathy for other people and their values, beliefs otherwise if they believe everything they see on social media, then there will be so much hate and destruction in the world. Honestly so scary, look at America now, Trump won! It wasn't even close!*

Shila appears to find an avenue in the conversation to share a significant political affect. Her experiences, and mine too, of being visibly a Muslim woman, and a teacher in a racially tense Britain has had a clear effect on her sense of safety and belonging. It was as if Shila was seeking reassurance from me that something dangerous 'wouldn't happen, would it?' because of her visibility and vulnerability as a Muslim woman. Her rhetorical question here is loaded with fear, and I feel it. Shila's visibility becomes a site of vulnerability. The emotional weight of being too visible in a climate of racial hostility contrasts starkly with the earlier experiences of not being heard enough at school. In some places she is too visible and in many other instances she is not. Shila has become a hazard as she is 'signifier of Muslim' (Vincent, 2018, p 238) through her body. Her affective response are feelings of frustration and fear as she learns to cope with life as a Muslim woman in the UK. Shila's hopes for what Subject English could become reflect a desire she becomes entangled with. The reference to Trump caught me off guard, it was unexpected. Despite the distant events unfolding, they feel deeply personal and present.

Shila-body-Muslim-teacher-politics assemblage becomes acute here. Her embodied presence, her faith, her racialised visibility, her professional role and the broader socio-political climate intra-act, creating a space where her vulnerability and exclusion coalesce. The assemblage is not static, it is shifting and reveals how her becomings are entangled with the material, social and political worlds she is in.

*'You know, talking about the recent conflict in the Middle East is soo good, yes heartbreaking but the kids want to know about it and talk about it. ... Eyes roll... I'm used to it you know the conflicts of teaching in schools, what to do and what not to do so not to raise eyebrows, you just have to get on with it.'*

Shila is battling with not being seen and heard, she has learnt not to 'raise eyebrows and get on with it' but this does not sit comfortably when her 'eyes roll'. Her awareness of managing what she says to not draw attention speaks to the surveillance of teachers' behaviour and particularly their voices (Ball, 2021). This moment reflects a burden Shila is carrying; one where she has learned and then navigates what is deemed appropriate knowledge to teach. By complying, she is silenced and not heard. If she

speaks up, she faces judgement and must tread carefully. Shila is drawing on the tension she feels and continues to feel between survival and resistance.

We end our conversation pondering over the future, but Shila insisted she will ‘carry on’ and see where it takes her, despite touching upon the frustrations and upset she has recently felt. The classroom and the school function as emotionally charged spaces where Shila grapples with whether her voice matters. A few of her last words were:

*‘I won’t give up!’.*

#### 4.2.2 Residue

What remains sticky from my conversations with Shila is the weight and intensity of the affective currents that flow through her story. These residues are both bodily and affective as they stick and resonate beyond the moment of speaking. Shila’s journey is filled with pride, responsibility, exhaustion and care, and they fold, unfold and fold again, creating a complex texture of lived experience that persists long after the conversations we had.

The assemblages that constitute Shila becomings [Shila-Bangladeshi-family-teacher, Shila-Muslim-body-school, Shila-body-politics-classroom] leave traces in the spaces she inhabits are shaped by histories of colonialism and hierarchical power structures embedded in the spaces she is in. Her pride in her family’s values and support, her commitment to students, and her desire to enact culturally responsive pedagogy coexist with exhaustion, structural barriers, and affective exclusion. These traces linger in her posture, pauses, hesitations, and even in the way her clothing becomes an enactment of identity, care, and resistance. They stick to me, too, as a researcher, shaping the rhythms of listening, noticing, and reflecting.

But I am also left thinking whose bodies matter and why? Shila’s body is not neutral, it carries histories, power and the weight of what has been demanded by her. The ‘hard work’ Shila talks about takes the form of invisible labour disproportionately shouldered by marginalised groups. At times, she appears to become aware, perhaps unknowingly, that her desires to help her community are challenging the conditions that deny access in the first place. What really mattered here and what resides, is the tension between possibility and reality. Deleuze and Guattari (1984) suggest that desire is a productive force, with the capacity to bring new realities into being, despite the constraints. At times, I sensed

both possibility and ache. The ache was not solely personal, it was structural and racialised, stemmed from long histories in which white, western, patriarchal figure of 'man' is held as the human standard, rendering others as less than (Wynter, 2003). Shila's recurring sense of not being 'enough', of needing to do more, and not giving up emerges from this context and sticks to her body as reminder of her presence. Yet, in her determination, in the early insistence that she wanted to 'show you can do it', there are glimpses of a shift, moments where she begins to reimagine her worth. Anzaldúa (in Garcia, 1997, p43) calls this is 'painful rebirth', a process of rejecting and pushing against the boundaries of othering, moving beyond the demand to be 'enough' toward being herself, fully entangled with history and struggle.

Residue emerges particularly in the affective dimension of being seen and heard. Shila's narrative is marked by ongoing tensions between institutional silencing and her own voice, within her Shila-Bangladeshi-Muslim-family-teacher assemblage. These tensions carry both exhaustion and resilience and pushing to be seen is both professional and political as she wants to be validated within systems that often render her invisible. The stickiness of our conversations remained, the warmth and familiarity of our coffee meetings, the light in her eyes when she recognised me not just in the physical moment, but through our shared experiences is a reminder that relational and affective entanglements produce spaces for recognition and possibility (Haraway, 2016; Manning, 2016). Small as they may seem, they leave traces of visibility, affirmation, and relational safety that continue to shape Shila's teacher becomings.

Shila's exhaustion was also embodied. As she sighed, sloped her shoulders and spoke of her fatigue, her body became a site where the entanglements of affect, labour and power were made visible. Government evaluations of the ECF (DfE, 2025, p27) highlight ECTeachers struggle with heavy workloads, time pressures and repetitive processes. Shila's bodily expressions can be understood as affective intensities produced within these assemblages, where workload is not an individual failing but a systemic effect.

Here, survival takes on the form of resistance and care. Lorde (1984) insists that what matters most must be spoken, even if it risks being misunderstood. Hooks (1994) likewise frames survival as a radical act. Coping, then is embodied, affective and relational. Yet teaching under huge pressures and demands that Sahila signals to, often strips away this human touch, rendering Shila and other teachers a 'machine' and 'robot' in their relentless productivity and performativity. Shila, in this moment, becomes part of an assemblage (Shila-Bangladeshi-Muslim-family-teacher) that demands output.

At times, Shila's voice itself becomes an agent of resistance, reclaiming her becoming, through wearing the keffiyeh, questioning the curriculum, thinking about her sense of place. At the same time, her body is drawn into machinic assemblages of production, where her value as an ECTeacher is measured by output in this machinic state, she risks becoming a cog, silenced, disempowered. And still, in the residues of our conversations, we find traces of her refusal, her reimagining, her struggle toward being fully seen.

What remains is the tension between survival and agency, between care and constraint. Shila's insistence that she will 'carry on' despite exhaustion, exclusion, and fear is itself a form of residue: a sticky, affective testament to endurance and hope. The traces of these conversations continue to reverberate, affecting both her trajectory and my understanding of what it means to inhabit classrooms, institutions, and social worlds as a visibly Muslim teacher.

### **4.3 Kareena**

Kareena comes from a family of educators and initially worked in journalism in her home country (South-East Asia) before deciding to pursue a career in education. She chose to complete her teacher training in the UK, specifically in Birmingham, drawn by the city's multicultural environment and its status as the UK's second city. Kareena successfully completed her teacher education course and ECF and is currently employed as a Subject English teacher. Throughout her training, Kareena demonstrated admirable dedication and commitment to teaching while managing the challenges of living independently in a new country. Unlike some other participants, she did not explicitly critique the education system she worked within, though she occasionally expressed mild curiosity through observations framed as 'isn't it strange' comments. Our meetings took place in a city centre coffee shop. We met twice, once at the end of her training year and once during the middle of her ECT1 year.

As I re-read Kareena's narrative, something that 'stuck' was the persistent disbelief others expressed; disbelief in her presence and legitimacy within the spaces she was in. These seemingly innocent comments were anything but that, they stuck and are charged with histories of exclusion and assumptions about which bodies matter more. Kareena's-body-history-knowledge assemblage pushes her to the margins, where she experiences a sense of situated ease, where hooks calls 'a site of radical possibility, a space of resistance' (1990, p342). Kareena lives in that marginal space where she develops new ways of knowing and resisting against the disbelief that surround her by finding ways to 'cope'.

The sticky moments discussed below also show her lived experiences gesture towards a broader epistemic hierarchy, one in which certain bodies and knowledges are continuously made to matter more than others. Kareena's experiences also reveal how the environment, institutional structures, cultural discourses and embodied experiences intra-act to shape her teacher becoming.

#### 4.3.1 Sticky Moment – 'What? You've never heard of Dungeons and Dragons!'

When we met, our conversation flowed naturally catching up on recent events. Kareena proceeded to talk about her first placement. It is here, I noticed Kareena intra-act with place differently than other teachers in this study. In her first teaching placement, which was nestled within inner-city Birmingham and had a predominantly South Asian student population, Kareena felt that she was part of the school community. I began by asking how she found working there, with a mix of surprise and ease she responded with,

*'... it was great and felt like it was a reverse culture shock as there was hardly any White students in my classes or even school'*

A sense of relief here was heard. The 'great' experience is one that is affective and relational. The relief in her tone is more than comfort as Kareena is being recognised by the space. This moment can be understood as a bodily sense of becoming-with (Haraway, 2008). The recognition and acceptance of Kareena's embodied presence emerges through the shared knowledge and relational encounters with others, contributing to her no longer feeling othered. It is this encounter that held Kareena differently. She no longer anticipated her body standing out. Her voice, perhaps previously a site of tension which she alludes to, also became a space of ease,

*'even my accent, they just accepted it, no funny looks or remarks'*

What matters here is not only what is said but equally what is not said. The absence of scrutiny from others forms a type of care that stabilises this space for Kareena. Franklin-Phipps' (2022) emphasis on identities which are co-constituted through intra-actions of bodies, voices and materials produce the conditions of possibility of knowing and belonging – and it is through this entangled body-place-voice assemblage Kareena becomes part of the affective field of becoming-with and no longer a marker of difference.

However, affective ease is unsettled by other moments in other spaces that shape how her body is perceived. She recounts moments that materialise microaggressions as everyday violences. She tells me that when she tells people that she is a teacher and teaches English, they are always surprised, almost judgemental and she is often met with prejudice. She gave the example of the estate agent earlier in the year who asked and then quickly answered her own question:

*'so, what do you teach?' ....'maths?'*

When the agent heard it was English, she was surprised with a physical disbelief displayed on her face, which Kareena mimicked. Kareena talks about how people silently question the idea someone from another country, whose first language is not English, goes on to teach subject English in England. She recounts this with a laugh. Such moments are not isolated or rare, they are part of a recurring pattern of being doubted or quietly unsettling others' expectations of what being a Subject English teacher looks and sounds like. These encounters materialise through her body, as she laughs it off, and they shape how she moves, speaks and teaches.

In our second conversation, we drifted to the ECF and I was curious to how Kareena found it. Kareena spoke about the logistics of her engagement with the programme and responded, almost cautiously that it was 'going ok', I sensed that there was more to it, more than just what her words revealed, so I gently probed a bit further, 'are you sure?' She laughed a little, then clarified:

*'no, its ok, but I don't engage with the online content weekly or daily as it's too ambitious to do all the tasks/modules on a daily basis. I use half term to go over the content online. Some of it is useful and relevant. The case studies are very helpful, something to learn from as it makes it more relatable to what happens in the classroom'*

Kareena recognises the value, but also comments on the mismatch. The moments she found most useful were those embedded in her lived experience.

*'case studies would have been more helpful, in the training year'*

Her reflections gradually unfolded into a more critical space, with a sense of disappointment emerging:

*'The training year equips you with an abundance of strategies and pedagogies, but what about the real-life situation of having, for example, SEND students, how do you deal with this?'*

This part of the conversation shifted into a much deeper affective turn, where Kareena grappled with the gap between knowing about inclusive teaching and being with students in their complexity. Her voice then shifted again, softening to explain,

*'Don't get me wrong, the teaching course was so good as it taught me something – especially the curriculum, school life, lesson plans etc. I learned a lot last year. Grateful for this! Definitely a huge learning ordeal.'*

This sudden backtrack was an affective moment that carried the embodied politics of speaking critically. As she navigates the emotional labour of becoming a teacher, she is also weighed down by the unconscious demand to remain grateful.

Our conversation shifted to whether others in her school were also ECTeachers and Kareena shared her experiences working with other colleagues. She talked very positively about a small group of colleagues, across different subjects in the school, whom she found friendship with. Kareena describes their relationship as one where they,

*'get' each other'*

The idea of 'got' becomes a stabilising force within this space. These relationships mattered here as they became more than any formal structures of support. They allowed her to feel seen, to laugh, to vent and connect without fear of misunderstanding. But her description led to something more troubling as she felt a sense of disconnect with other colleagues in her department when she revealed that most of the time she cannot relate or understand what they are talking about,

*'There's a cultural thing, you know... what interests me, doesn't interest them and so I can't contribute to their conversations...'*

This inability to connect creates a subtle form of exclusion and an affective rupture where Kareena feels out of place within the dominant discourses in the Subject English staffroom. It also becomes a site of interruption, and 'sticky' as she is dislodged from the flows of dominant discourse. She gave the

example of Dungeons and Dragons, which Kareena has never been interested in. When the topic came up in the staffroom, one colleague stated in horror,

*‘What? You don’t know what this is....You haven’t heard about Dungeons and Dragons?... ‘*

The colleague’s disbelief, like the estate agent before her, is an affective force where it becomes much more than knowing about Dungeons and Dragons. It is a failure for Kareena to be known *within* dominant cultural spaces as she is rendered unknowable. The disbelief becomes a site of epistemic exclusion where Kareena’s unfamiliarity with certain forms of cultural knowledge is interpreted as deficiency, shaping who is seen as capable of knowing. What is striking is how Kareena manages this dissonance. She becomes defensive and centres on her own value.

*‘I’ve got my own set of knowledge, and someone else will have theirs. When someone makes such comments, it questions your cultural capital... it doesn’t make you less knowledgeable’.*

Kareena is validating herself and centres on what she brings to the space. She recognises the value in herself and the knowledge she brings to the space. In asserting her own legitimate cultural knowledge, she engages in a type of self-recovery claiming her own epistemic legitimacy. She re-territorialises this space by affirming her own knowledge systems. It is the start of reclaiming intellectual and cultural authority that has historically been denied through colonial systems of knowledge. Although, it is in this affective moment, knowledge is not about what Kareena knows but how Kareena’s knowledge is received.

#### 4.3.2 Residue

Kareena’s sticky moments show us that she is living through a network of racialised affect, colonial language practices and institutional norms which are shaping everyday experiences of exclusion and belonging. Her sticky moments also reveal how power circulates through her body and the institution.

It is particularly important to consider Haraway’s (1984) notion of situated knowledge. Understanding that what resides in Kareena’s sticky moments is derived from a specific social, cultural, historical and personal context she is in. What emerges here is not just what Kareena experiences but what knowledge is produced through the intra-actions of racialised affect, colonial history and institutional expectations. Her story, like others in this study, reveals the structural operations of power that are often hidden beneath the everyday.

From the moments of expressed disbelief from others (estate agent and her colleagues) steadily led her to question what she brings to the Subject English spaces. But they are more than social judgements. They are affective interruptions that accumulate over time begin to leave traces in her body, as sticky residue, that shape how she moves and responds in the spaces as she journeys through her teacher becomings. These micro-dislocations, as Ahmed (2012) describes as subtle, everyday moments of disorientation occur when marginalised bodies do not 'fit' into the norms of a given space.

Such moments also mark sites where racialised epistemologies of language and histories of prejudice interrupt her own sense of belonging and becoming. These encounters with other people, are not just social judgments, but they are intensities that reside in Kareena's body. The surprise in the agent's voice registers as an intensity, a type of micro-affective judgment that does not just pass over her but settles in her. These sticky moments allude to a type of cultural imperialism (Marion-Young, 1990), where her own knowledge and body are rendered invisible. This is a form of epistemic exclusion and is determined by the affective infrastructure of whiteness that underpins institutional norms.

Kareena's initial sense of comfort in her first placement is telling of how becoming-with is felt in motion, as the body infolds affective and social volitions (Massumi, 2002). But her teacher becomings is not steady as it is continually renegotiated in relation to the institution norms and expectations. Her reluctance to speak overtly critically about her experiences reminds me of so many like Kareena, even myself at times, where there is the unspoken demand to be grateful, to not complain or be cast as unprofessional and difficult. This tension illustrates how the structures of power shape experiences, but also her voice.

Yet Kareena displays, through her early experiences, a slight, subtle resistance to the dominant knowledge practice embedded in the space, by centering her own value and knowledge, functioning as self-validation. Marion-Young (1990) reminds us that justice is not about erasing difference but about recognising and affirming it. In Kareena's negotiation of difference, we see how she works to manage the tensions between dominant norms and her own ways of knowing. This managing of difference becomes embodied, felt and then carried in her teacher becomings.

As I engaged with conversations with Kareena, listening became a form of feeling. Her sticky moments resonated with my own embodied memories, particularly with the surprise on someone's face when you tell them you are an English teacher. These residues are lodged within (Ahmed, 2014) and writing

about Kareena, and others in this study, is also about writing about myself as our bodies remember and carry the weight of these exclusionary practices. What is left lingering are the traces of exclusion, the labour of managing difference and the quiet resistances that speak to the alternative possibilities of becoming.

#### 4.4 Annie

In presenting Annie's sticky moments, it is important to acknowledge the ethical decisions made regarding the representation of Annie. I briefly mention in 3.6.1, that considered ethical choices were made and this is one of them. To protect her anonymity, I have deliberately omitted specific details that could make her identifiable, assigning her a pseudonym that is not culturally similar to her actual name.

Annie is an international student and like Kareena had selected Birmingham to do her teacher education course noting its appeal as 'a big city with nice people'. In her home country, she completed her university courses in English and a postgraduate course. From the outset, Annie showed great enthusiasm for participating in this research. After one of the university teaching days, she approached me directly and scribbled her contact details on a piece of paper and handed it to me. Our relationship was different to others in the research, retaining a level of formality and extreme politeness. She often expressed admiration during the research process for what I was doing, gestures that were humbling and revealing of her own values. We met three times in the university social space as she wanted to meet here. It appeared a comfortable space for her to be part of this research and as the year progressed, Annie became much more confident and resilient with the challenges she faced.

What stood out in Annie's story was the persistent challenge she faced around language, specifically, how her spoken English was frequently critiqued as falling short of the standard expected in educational settings. It is through the entangled forces of language, affect and institutional expectations, her spoken language becomes a site when colonial norms of acceptable expression are asserted and materially shape her experience and contribute to her eventual failure on the course. Through our conversations, it became evident that such feedback was not only frequent but had a direct and devastating impact on Annie. This sticky moment does not reside solely in Annie's body or voice, but emerges through a network of discursive practices, policy standards, and affective atmospheres as she journeys through her Subject English teacher becomings. Here, language practices intra-act with racialised bodies, emphasising *whose* bodies matter and *how* they matter.

#### 4.4.1 Sticky Moment – Hopes and ‘failures’

We met at the university social spaces as that is where Annie wanted to meet and was convenient after a day of being at university during her training period. In our first meeting, we talked a lot about what brought us to teaching and our different backgrounds. There was a keen interest from both of us, to take time and learn about each other at a personal level, which contributed to feelings of ease and connection. Our conversations flowed and led to Annie discussing her first placement, what soon transpired to be her first real teaching experience. This is where stickiness emerged. She exclaimed, nodding her head:

*‘it’s good, really good, I am enjoying it’*

She goes on to say,

*‘I’ve got lots to learn, my mentor has told me the mistakes I make when I talk, I’m glad they have told me as now I know what I need to practice’.*

The conversation turned toward ‘mistakes’. It is at this point, where Annie’s body, discourses and pedagogical norms intra-act. When she uses the word ‘mistakes’, she has already accepted and internalised the standardised norms of language and speech and sees herself as being in deficit. She positions her body, through what she has experienced, as a site for correction. Her acceptance and willingness to ‘practice’ reveals the regulatory gaze placed upon her. Her speech becomes an instrument in which normative discourses on language operate, highlighting the embodied process of meeting institutional expectations. She tells me her mentor has suggested writing scripts before lesson, rehearsing it and then reading from it, which became more-than suggestions for improvement. It affirmed Annie as a speaker in deficit, in need to improving and fixing herself.

I probed a little further, asking if she felt that was the concern. Annie went on to clarify,

*‘I don’t think it’s a language issue as I may have had this issue if I was speaking my [native language] so I think I need to practice simplifying instructions and using the ‘correct’ grammar when speaking’.*

Here, she shows a slight resistance to what was being directed at her when she detracts from the language concerns. The concept of ‘problem’ is folded inward and the issue of language as a structure is not in question. It becomes more about how Annie as speaker-body is the problem. The affective weight of institutional discourse saturates and sticks here. The problem is not static and emerges from

sustained intra-actions of mentor, student relationships, discourses and institutional norms. It is carried in the body and is part of Annie's becoming-with. Annie's reflection that

*'people are usually surprised when they find out I'm teaching English too, I thought about it and I think they expect to hear Maths or Science'...*

Just like in Kareena's narrative, these perceptions signal to ongoing affective entanglement between racialised assumptions about language competence and belonging, as previously discussed in Part 2. The surprise Annie expresses refers to intra-actions of broader discourses that position subject English as a subject normatively associated with whiteness, being 'native' and particular speech patterns (Rosa and Flores, 2017). Annie's reflections on the surprise others express upon learning she is an English teacher do more than just recount a moment, they ripple outward and highlight the subtle yet persistent microaggressions that cling to racialised bodies in educational spaces. This affective stickiness, just like Kareena, unsettles the boundaries of belonging and worthiness. The repeated surprise of learning both teach English, echoed in silences and looks are sedimenting over time. These encounters are entangled with broader discourses of language and race and Annie responds generatively by thinking and 'justifying' their thoughts. She reaches to other disciplinary subjects such as Maths and Science as an attempt to locate where the dissonance originates and why the English teacher must still be imagined in a specific way. Annie's experiences speak to the relationality and exposes the patterned exclusions that shape who gets to be an English teacher and who is surprising to be one.

Midway through the year, we met again at the end of subject pedagogy day at university. The familiarity of the social spaces provided a sense of spatial continuity, but the encounter was notably altered in affective tone. Annie was eager to meet and as we sat down and got comfortable, she began with a declarative statement.

*'you must know already that I have failed Placement 1'*

The assumption might have been made based on my perceived role as a staff member, indicating the ethical entanglements of my positionality, discussed earlier in 3.12. But this assumption, embedded in her statement, positioned the matter of her failure as something anticipated and already circulating within institutional space; an affective moment that she presumed to have occurred prior to our meeting. I had, in fact, not been informed and her statement initiated a shift in the relational dynamic,

producing what felt like a rupture in the conversation as it was unexpected and concerning. In response to my expression of concern,

*'I'm okay now,' .... It was really hard when it happened, but it is ok now'.*

While her words suggest acceptance and recovery, affective dissonance is felt. Her attempt to reassure me and herself that she is now ok, points to the ongoing negotiation with the disappointment she felt. One that is shaped not just by her own body, but from discourses and institutional norms and expectations. Annie explained that her failure had been attributed largely to her problems with oracy. She stated directly,

*'It is mainly my speaking, the oracy skills are not good enough'*

This articulation is significant and is sticky. It positions her voice and her way of speaking, again as the central deficit. Annie proceeds to inform me about the support plan that she was 'supported' with. It had three targets; firstly, to have a script to read to students to avoid any grammatical mistakes and improve fluency, second to get students to repeat what they have asked to aid understanding of their misconceptions so it can be addressed appropriately and lastly to adapt lessons to address the challenges which the teacher/student may face. These interventions, while framed as supportive, are embedded within normative assumptions about language fluency and correctness (Cushing, 2023). Rather than addressing structural barriers, the focus remained on regulating Annie's performance of speech and her own body.

What was interesting was not just Annie sharing the plan but the way she enacted its material presence. She reached into her bag, pulled out her laptop and opened the documents to show me, a gesture that brought the support plan into the room as more-than-a-file. It became entangled in our conversation as later that evening, she emailed me the documents, attaching them as proof or perhaps redistribution of the affective weight they carried. The actions of retrieval, the showing, the sending intra-act to make meaning of what had occurred.

During the time on the support plan, Annie had two hours a week in total of teaching time to implement these targets, and was told very early on by her school mentor

*'you will fail, even if you pass the support plan'.*

This was clearly quite upsetting and did bring Annie down, questioning the point and meaningful nature of what should be a supportive measure of the support plan.

*'it was hard time, because no matter what I did, I was going to fail'*

Her failure appears to have already been prefigured, pre-stuck to her body through the intersecting norms of language, race and professionalism. The sense of inevitability which Annie expresses was a condition in which she was made to inhabit. Failure operates as a regulatory mechanism, rendering which bodies are supportable. For Annie, she simply just did not fit.

Annie also expressed how it was quite challenging to meet the support targets because on one hand they were expecting her to adapt and/or create lessons and then write a script.

*'it was very hard to do, and lots of time was taken but it is ok'*

Annie's words gesture towards exhaustion. The labour required was not only intensive but structured in a way that fulfilling one aspect of the plan often meant falling short on another. If she invested time in adapting or creating lessons, then there was little time left to script her spoken delivery. If she focused on scripting, she risked being seen as incapable. In this way, though framed as support, the targets become affectively and materially unachievable, positioning Annie in a constant state of being incapable. Annie recalls:

*'just felt like a lose-lose situation'*

Annie's frustrations are felt here as she experiences the constant feeling of not being good enough or always falling short. Her school mentor kept a written record of Annie's teaching by documenting a minute-by-minute recording of what was said by Annie. I asked how she found this,

*'this was good, I can use this to go back and see my mistakes'*

The focus is always on Annie and her 'mistakes'. Annie stays optimistic and hopeful to what a different placement can bring. She hopes she will be better supported and do well.

*'I can try again now and this will be better because I have learnt'*

As Annie settled into her new placement, we met again and this time there was an element of positivity in her voice. She started off talking about her mentor,

*'my mentor there was incredible. Unlike my first placement, where support felt...errr distant, she was always there, actually taking time to talk. We'd annotate lesson plans together, brainstorm you know....'*

A sense of vulnerability and contrasting experiences. This collaborative approach proved invaluable as Annie navigated the challenges of teaching. The challenges remained and her oracy was once again highlighted and 'managed'. This time though, Annie, with a supportive mentor, felt she was able to accept the outcome of overall failure of the course due to the consistent language concerns. She did not challenge but she embodied the failure. She ends our conversation with the affirmative statement of:

*'I know I can improve,'*

The problem remains with Annie-body-speech assemblage, she simply could not fit in the space she wanted to be in.

#### 4.4.2 Residue

What is left lingering in Annie's narrative is more than the memory of being marked as inadequate but the quiet violence that stuck to her which positioned her as a problem to be fixed. Her embodied difference became hyper-visible through the practices of dominant language practices. Difference mattered but more than something that needed to be corrected. It shaped how Annie came to understand herself within the space of teacher education as someone who was always already failing. The epistemic notions of dominant language practices saturated this space, leaving little room for 'other' ways of speaking, knowing or being. These practices become a form of linguistic governance, where proficiency is policed through normative, often racialised expectation of 'acceptable' English. Language here sticks and excludes. This sticky moment calls attention to the way affects, bodies and institutional, societal norms intra-act.

What remains significant in Annie's story is how her experience is not just about an individual encounter but about the weight of a much longer history of linguistic dominance. Standard language ideology positions one variety of speech, typically aligned with the English upper middle classes, as the only 'correct' or legitimate form (Cushing and Snell, 2023). This ideology, seen in schools and teacher education, is not a neutral ideology. It produces hierarchies of value and belonging, explored in detail in Part 2. Annie's difference was made legible through this ideological frame, marking her not as a developing teacher but as a deficit to be corrected.

The emphasis on 'oracy' in Annie's development reflects wider accountability structures in teacher education and what constitutes 'standard English' (Cushing and Snell 2023, Baker-Bell 2020). The problem is located within her own body, rather than within the system that renders certain speech practices as more legitimate than others. What remains sticky in Annie's story is how her experience is more than just a pedagogical critique but the manifestation of a larger racialised and classed history of linguistic ideologies. The ordinary, everyday practices and policies that structure education, quite often, leave some bodies marked as being an outsider. The standard language ideology is reinforced in Annie's story, producing hierarchies of legitimacy that privilege a certain way of speaking as being the 'correct' way. This 'sticky moment' opens up important questions about the ways language proficiency is assessed and policed within teacher training, especially for marginalised students. Annie's experience illustrates how standards of 'acceptable' English are often embedded in colonial legacies that privilege certain accents, dialects, and modes of expression over others. Such frameworks risk marginalising bodies further and reflects deeper power dynamics and systemic inequities within education.

What struck me in Annie's account is the way she internalised the criticism, accepting it as her deficit, her failure, it was her problem. This is how the linguistic violence sticks as she embodies the inadequacy. Annie's experience speaks to how the system shifts the blames on the individual body, concealing the structural inequalities, making them easier for them to exist and persist. I am reminded of Ahmed's (2022) work that if we do not name and speak of these violences then they carry on doing it. It is not Annie's choice to speak out, the system is designed that if you do, you risk being a complainant.

What I am left wondering is how many more Annie's will there be, where racialised, non-native, speakers get pushed out of teacher education, violently marginalised, continued to feel like they are never good enough. These are part of relational events involving institutional discourses, material

spaces, bodily affects and power relation that intra-act to (re) produce difference as deficit. These intra-actions reflect more than pre-existing inequalities, they actively generate them, making Annie's difference hyper-visible and a failure. Lorde (1984) argues such processes rely on the 'master's tools', here wielded through linguistic standards that appear neutral but function to discipline and exclude. Annie's experience demonstrates how language regulation extends beyond spoken language into the governance of belonging and who is permitted to imagine themselves as a legitimate teacher.

#### 4.5 Ilham

Ilham completed her teacher education course and took part in university taught days. A visibly Muslim woman of Somali heritage, Ilham presented herself with a calm and gentle demeanour, consistently articulating herself clearly and confidently in her interactions. She wore hijab and dressed modestly in an abaya, and during our encounters at university sessions, she also wore a niqab<sup>10</sup>.

In the sessions I taught, I initially noticed a hesitancy in Ilham. She held back from voicing her thoughts and contributed sparingly to discussions, appearing cautious of those around her. However, as I grew to know her better, she gradually became more open in her conversations with me. Realising that my role at the university differed from that of her other tutors seemed to provide reassurance, allowing a greater sense of comfort and trust to develop. As a result, she became increasingly willing to share her experiences, linking back to my discussions on relationality in 3.5.

We met twice, the latter meeting was brief and as the conversation developed, Ilham's inner thoughts and feelings were revealed. Ilham's account offers an important perspective; that of a deeply practising Muslim, Black woman in education, an area still under explored in research. Her narrative highlights the paradox of experiencing both hyper-visibility and invisibility in different contexts. The more visibly Muslim she appeared, the more she felt unseen or overlooked by others. The way others look at her, or rather, fail to look at her, shape(s)(ed) her experiences of becoming Subject English teacher. Ilham frames her experiences as a 'necessary struggle' embodying both resilience and determination, suggesting a recognition of the systemic nature of suppressing difference and the need for ongoing resistance.

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<sup>10</sup> A niqab is a veil that covers a Muslim woman's face, leaving only the eyes visible

#### 4.5.1 Sticky Moment – ‘Just a body in the room’

I first met Ilham for our conversation well into the teacher education course year. The timing was not incidental, it took time with the careful building of relationships for trust and openness to emerge. Our conversations unfold as a series of affective intensities, moments that stuck, surprised and unsettled.

Ilham had already completed her first placement and was immersed in her second. Reflecting on her experiences, she began by saying:

*‘I was pleasantly surprised with my second placement as it was a Catholic school’.*

Her pleasant surprise marked a shift in her anticipated discomfort. The school’s identity sat in perceived difference to her own visible Muslim identity. This difference becoming a site of welcomeness which mattered here. But it mattered more, when she drew contrast to her previous experience. She continued:

*‘in [first placement], when I asked for a prayer space, they showed me to a dusty cupboard space in one of the classrooms. I was a bit surprised but also grateful for the space so I can fulfil my prayer’*

The moment was significant as her gratitude and surprise coexisted, creating a tension that revealed more than just logistical concerns. The dusty cupboard is not a neutral space, it materialises the marginality of religious practice within regimented, institutional practices. Ilham-body-prayer-dusty cupboard-school formed an assemblage where elements of faith and space intra-act. When I asked why the experience surprised her, Ilham explained:

*‘I don’t know, just didn’t expect that. They were all Muslims too so I was a bit taken back by that but happy that there was provision’.*

Her comment pointed to an expectation of shared understanding in a Muslim-majority environment, an assumption that was not fully met. Her surprise then was affectively tied to the assumptions about relationality and recognition. The moment lingered, shaping her anticipations for the second placement.

*‘so from that, I was just a bit nervous about working in a Catholic school and started to over-think about how they would welcome me and provide me with the space I needed but when I spoke to my mentor...they were so warm and welcoming. They provided me with a clean, open room to use, she even made a sign to put up indicating the direction of the prayer and notice of prayer too’.*

The impact of this gesture stuck. The materiality of a clean, open space with a physical sign were not symbolic. They did something more. It signalled her value and that Ilham also belonged in this space.

They produced a relational space where Ilham's-body-faith assemblage could intra-act with the school without any friction. Her final reflection captured an affective entanglement:

*'I felt so valued and taken back, despite the different faiths, the respect was there. Literally our faith connects both me and the school together as this is most important part of every day'*

This is about Ilham-body-faith-material-space assemblage and how in the second placement, faith does not stand out, it is weaved through it. But these intensities have been marked out by previous social tensions as her experience of being in the university is marked by a sense of being out of place.

*'I felt like I was sticking out like a sore thumb and my personality was not coming out'*

Recalling her experiences on the university teaching days was not centred around pedagogy or subject knowledge at first but was on the embodied effect of being seen and not seen. The tension with this reveals a blockage in the flow of self-expression, suggesting an interruption in this space. The environment, the gaze of others and other unspoken norms intra-act to block her authentic self to emerge. The subject days becomes a place where identity is excluded and her presence in the university space was shaped not only by her choice to wear the niqab, but also by the gaze that met or avoided it. She explained:

*'for me this is liberation and empowerment, but for others it is a threat'*

The niqab as material, religious and affective 'thing' becomes contested. For Ilham, it is a way of self-expression and spirituality, but for others it signals difference or discomfort. It is more than a piece of cloth as it isolates and marginalises. This is the nature of Ahmed's (2004) affective economies, where the niqab has produced meaning for Ilham. She goes on to describe being:

*'a body in the room and being invisible'*

This more-than a metaphor signals to her own self being acknowledged. The materiality of the niqab renders her both hyper visible and invisible at the same time. She is entangled with how others approach her. She adds:

*'Once people get to know me, it gets a little better. The tutors know me and I do contribute, but it does feel like I'm the elephant in the room'*

What Ilham feels matters here, as the elephant description becomes an affective presence. Her own body, as it is presented, becomes relational, as others do not know how to be with her. Ilham's experience materialises how her assemblage, Ilham-body-faith-niqab, become affectively saturated constantly negotiating what part of her is seen and what is not. Despite this, Ilham does not position herself as passive but names this experience as:

*'a necessary struggle'.*

This ethics of coping is not a form of resignation but a strategy as Ilham battles through the challenges. Ilham recognises that the struggle is more than with herself, it is to do with other structures that shape her experiences. She goes on to share with me her creative outlets in the shape of a blog she maintains which reflects on life, firmly rooted in faith. Her faith is central to who she is and is becoming and her love for English as a subject stems from its creative possibilities where it becomes more than a subject to learn. It becomes a space to create and express, which becomes paradoxical to her own lived experiences as a Subject English teacher. She continues and ends with a familiar quote drawn from a Quranic verse, echoing Asiyah's experience:

*'With every hardship comes ease'*

#### 4.5.2. Residue

Ilham's narrative does more than tell us what she has experienced. Her narrative circulates, intensifies, disturbs and settles unevenly across the landscape she is in. What sticks here is that Ilham's faith is not an isolated part of her identity. It is entangled into how her experiences shape her but also how her faith shapes her experiences. Faith is a material, affective force that moves through cupboards, clean rooms, fabric, gazes and the rhythm of prayer.

Her story does not have a singular meaning. The dusty cupboard, the clean prayer room, the gaze of others, the niqab, the feeling of being seen and unseen mark affective change. They all (and more) intra-act and create meaning to how Ilham's body is carried. They intra-act, producing shifting affective states that make her feel valued in one moment and marginalised in another. The cupboard does not simply 'host' the prayer, it materialises exclusion, whereas the clean room with a sign for prayer does not signal inclusion, it enacts belonging. These materials stick to Ilham, shaping her body's possibilities and leaving behind residues that reverberate through her sense of becoming. Ilham's reflections are more than about being Muslim in non-Muslim or Muslim-majority spaces, they trace the unstable positions of expectations and recognition. Ilham's surprise of being excluded in familiar spaces, whilst feeling the quiet and powerful gesture of being welcome in an unfamiliar one. Ilham's value is negotiated and felt. What is lingering is a sense of struggle that is both necessary and generative. She does just cope, she strategises and creates spaces to reimagine. Her blog, creativity and faith become generative residue. They reimagine what it means to be. Through her final words of 'with every hardship comes ease', we hear the continuation. What matters here is how Ilham feels, how she moves and how she is moved, whilst also unfolding.

As I listened to Ilham, I felt residue gathering in me too. Our conversation was not one way, it resonated across our shared Muslim identities and practices of faith. I recognised the intensity of wanting to remain visibly Muslim while negotiating the interruptions and accommodations of daily prayer and ‘the gaze’. I felt the pain of withholding parts of oneself, of not being allowed to be fully yourself, and the weight of believing this is a necessary struggle. This entanglement is not accidental, Black feminist thought reminds us that knowledge is never neutral, that experience is embodied, situated, and relational (Collins, 2000, Lorde, 1984). To witness Ilham was also to witness myself, and in turn, to be witnessed by her. Our connection complicates the binary of researcher and researched. Instead, it produces what bell hooks (2003) calls a ‘communion of struggle’, where shared pain and survival strategies become a ground for theorising.

This residue is thick with race, gender, and faith. Ilham’s niqab, her body, her prayer, her words are all saturated with histories of securitisation and racialisation. But they are also saturated with survival, with agency, with what Sharpe (2016) names ‘wake work’ as practices of living and imagining otherwise within ongoing structures of oppression. The residue that clings here is also about the creativity and re-imagination that sprout from it. Residue, then, is not passive. It is sticky, generative, and unsettled. It attaches itself to Ilham, to me, to this research, to the institutions and materialities that host and exclude. It is what remains after words are spoken, uneven, unresolved, yet alive, still moving, still unfolding.

#### 4.6 Iqraa

Iqraa was a confident member of her teaching course cohort. She engaged actively in the university sessions, contributing thoughtfully and was attentive in discussions. Her story unfolded slowly and on her own terms nodding to the relational and affective aspects of PQI discussed in Part 3. It was not until later in the year that she reached out, making it clear that she found my work interesting but hesitated about the time to commit to meeting since it was such a busy period. She subsequently agreed to meet, just as Annie and Asiyah did so.

Iqraa is a young, Pakistani-heritage Muslim from the heart of Birmingham, who completed her teacher education course immediately after completing her undergraduate degree. At the time of the conversation, she had decided not to pursue a teaching position as an ECTeacher, as she repeatedly described the whole experience as ‘insane’, a visceral reaction to a system that demanded more than it gave back, echoing Shila’s use of ‘mental’ earlier. Though she remains in education and is committed to supporting students but not in the capacity of a subject English teacher. What sticks in Iqraa’s

narrative is the tensions between resistance and care and the affective forces that both bind and unsettle her journey.

#### 4.6.1 Sticky Moment – ‘It’s insane’

From the outset, Iqraa described her teacher education course as one characterised by an overwhelming intensity. The feeling of being overwhelmed is not just an emotion she experiences but is one that is a product of relational and institutional pressures that accumulate and press upon Iqraa’s body. When discussing the prospect of applying for teaching roles, she said many of the schools, after recently experienced interviews:

*‘sounded insane’,*

The word ‘insane’ surfaced multiple times in her narrative, functioning affectively to signal rupture and a rejection of normativity. It was not just about the interviews she experienced or classroom observations, it was a visceral response to the rationalised, performative demands of the teacher labour market. I asked her to share what she meant at different uses of the word ‘insane’ and she shared that it was the structures and expectations imposed on teachers that was about ticking boxes and achieving targets. She went on to talk about the observation assessment, despite always performing well, she felt she was being reduced to measurable outcomes. Despite her passion for English, Iqraa resisted being funnelled into an ECTeacher, without intention and purpose. She felt reduced to a set of metrics and expectations recalling how institutional demands felt:

*‘they wanted me to perform like I already had five years of experience’*

She insisted:

*‘I want to do what I like to do, I enjoy it, but I don’t want to be pressured/forced to do things. It takes the fun out of it’.*

Her desire and resistance are in tension. The genuine passion for teaching through the joy she finds engaging with the students and the subject she loves, is repeatedly haunted by the pressures of institutional compliance. What she wants from teaching is deeply human and relational but what she is asked to do is often impersonal. This tension becomes most visible when she spoke about her school placements, which operated as contrasting sites of affective experience. The first placement, where she was part of a supportive department, offered a glimpse into what teaching could feel like when values aligned. There, she felt seen and understood as a whole person, not a trainee. She recalled:

*‘people matter when teaching....so do other factors’.*

I asked what she meant by other factors and she reflected on the profession valuing relationships, community, kindness, empathy just as much as pedagogy and policy. She commented on the safe space in the placement noting that this supportive environment allowed her to engage fully and perform confidently. In stark contrast to this, her second placement embodied the institutional pressures which she found difficult to move through. Iqraa described encountering rigid power relations between those in senior positions to her, an affective atmosphere dominated by fear and hierarchy. The directive she received from colleagues was stark:

*‘just get on with it, you just need to get through it’.*

Comments like this, stuck with Iqraa leaving her visibly uncomfortable. She clearly struggled with the idea of compromising her values or placing herself in situations that challenged her sense of self. She struggled with the idea of compromising her core values, which centered on care, empathy, integrity, and meaningful engagement with students. For her, teaching was not just about meeting targets or adhering to institutional procedures, it was about fostering genuine relationships, supporting students’ wellbeing, and creating inclusive, respectful learning environments. Any situation that pressured her to prioritise metrics, conformity, or hierarchy over these commitments felt at odds with her sense of self. As our conversation unfolded, it became increasingly clear that accepting such circumstances made her uneasy, not just in what she said, but also how she said it. Her body spoke just as loudly as her words through her shifting posture, tense facial expressions and deep frowning. It felt as though Iqraa was releasing the weight of an entire year, offloading her experiences in a stream of thought that had long been waiting to be heard. It became clear she needed this space to speak freely without interruptions and justifications and be listened to. Her words flowed, not rushed but steady, punctuated by slow, reflective pauses as she recalled conversations and moments that had clearly left a mark on her.

She starting to talk about her own emerging teacher ‘persona’ and this added another layer to the conversation, revealing how she was negotiating her teacher becomings alongside her values and experiences. She sat up straight and gave the example of being a ‘blank paper’ at the beginning of the teaching journey and depending on the context, experience and individual, it can determine how colourful (or not) this blank paper becomes. As she shared this, she lifted her hand, palm open to symbolise the blank page she imagined. There was a softness in her tone, as she reflected upon the early stages of becoming. What you experience shapes what begins to form. With sudden intensity, she said:

*'darken the paper and my teaching persona will be compromised...I will lose myself'*

As those words left her mouth, she lowered her hand sharply, as if rejecting the idea. The gesture was striking, a bodily reaction to her refusal. She does not want her professional development to be rushed or moulded to specific institutional demands that erases her own self. For Iqraa, becoming teacher is about colouring her own paper too, not having it coloured for her.

Our conversation began to shift, moving from teaching and identity to something more personal; our experiences as Muslim women. We spoke about life journeys, faith and cultural backgrounds shaping how we move through and see the world. It was during this part of the conversation that Iqraa began speaking about her experience of wearing the jilbab at work. As she did, her tone changed and became serious and her voice louder. She began with a rhetorical question:

*'when you go to work, you have to dress smartly, right?'*

I nodded in agreement. She then held up the fabric of her jilbab up as she asked:

*'I used to question myself, is this smart enough?'*

It was a moment that had lingered for Iqraa, as well as for me. This question emerges not from internal insecurity, but from the collision of institutional norms with her embodied religious expression. The guidance on 'professional dress' felt vague and culturally narrow, despite it being a broad statement. It left room for interpretation that often reflected unspoken norms about what smart looks like. This moment lingered for Iqraa by a comment made by her mentor's suggestion to:

*'maybe wear something that looks more formal',*

This introduced a microaggression that lingered, when she first wore the jilbab in school. Iqraa said the comment caught her off guard and initially thought it was 'stupid' but later found that the seed was planted and found herself questioning her attire. She said:

*'it is hard to be yourself (wearing jilbab), because you don't know whether it goes against school values, British values. Will they think I'm a terrorist?'*

She laughed as she said this, perhaps as a way to soften the weight of the questions, but the unease was felt. Despite these intrusive doubts, Iqraa remained true to herself and continued to wear her jilbab as there was no formal complaint made. What surprised her most was the after effect, the way that one moment made her revisit the question of whether her jilbab was 'professional' or 'smart' enough, a question that she never really gave much thought to before. She used the word 'insane' to describe this experience. As she spoke, she grabbed her jilbab with both hands and held it up slightly, as if to show me, this piece of clothing, this part of who I am is an issue.

I asked her whether she would consider an ECTeacher role next year once she had taken some time out for reflection as I could see she still loved teaching. Iqraa mentioned she would and that it would have been better if the ECTeacher period included the training year. She talked about having a Year 1 (training year), Year 2 (in teaching role) and Year 3 (in teaching role, with less support) and how this would emulate a Bachelor degree style professional development route. She argued for non-linear attitude to professional development with:

*'you don't have to be perfect by the end of it – mentors need to understand this.'*

Despite her progress on the course, Iqraa hesitated in a fulltime teaching role and considered furthering her education through a postgraduate course but at the time of conversation has taken time to pause and reflect to make considered choices. She finished off with how much she enjoyed talking to me and felt natural to:

*'let it all out, I love teaching, but the environment and industry tarnish it'.*

As a follow-up email conversation, Iqraa informed me she had taken up a student support role in a post-compulsory education setting.

#### 4.6.2 Residue

What remains with Iqraa after her intense training year is not just confined in memory, it lives on in her body, emotions and sense of becoming. The residue of her experiences lingers as she recalls and feels the microaggressions, pressures from institutional demands and slow erasure of her own self. But this residue also carried traces of resistance. Iqraa does not resign herself to a system that demands conformity. Her insistence that teaching should not come at the cost of losing herself marks a refusal to be reduced. In this sense, the residue in Iqraa's sticky moments becomes both a site of struggle and potential.

Her recollections of being told to 'perform like I already had five years of experience' exemplify the logics of performativity that Ball (2003) describes as a regime where teachers are not valued for authentic practice but for their ability to make professional competence visible in ways that satisfy assessment rubrics, observation checklists, and data metrics. In this system, every moment becomes colonised by performance through lesson timings and content, rapid progress cycles, marking deadlines, leaving little room for the slower, relational pedagogies that sustain joy, care, and community. Iqraa's continuous use of the word 'insane' is more than an expression of overwhelm as it signals a rupture, a refusal of this colonisation of time and self.

The teaching year, as she narrates, functions as a crucible of compressed labour. In less than twelve months, ECTeachers are expected to collapse years of professional growth into the immediacy of

observable competence. This temporal pressure produces what Iqraa calls the 'fun being taken out of it' and enthusiasm and creativity are disciplined into speed, efficiency, and compliance. The emotional labour of care through her desire to nurture relationships with students and subject, is overshadowed by the fear that one failed observation or critical mentor comment could derail her trajectory. Such precarious conditions are not neutral but disproportionately burden those, like Iqraa, whose embodied difference of Muslim, Pakistani-heritage, wearing the jilbab, already risks being read as incompatible with dominant, racialised scripts of professionalism (Mirza et al, 2019).

Yet residue is never only deficit. It also carries the trace of resistance. When Iqraa insists that she will not allow her 'blank paper' to be darkened, she performs a refusal of being overwritten by institutional demands. This imagery captures a post-qualitative sense of becoming as subjectivity is not fixed but continuously shaped by encounters with people, policies, spaces, and objects. The blank page is open ended and charged with potential. For Iqraa, becoming a teacher is not about conformity to pre set forms (and norms) but about colouring her own page, on her own terms.

Reading her narrative through decolonial lenses makes visible how professional formation is racialised and secularised in ways that privilege certain bodies and silence others (Mignolo, 2011). The mentor's suggestion that she 'maybe wear something more formal' exemplifies how institutional norms about 'smart dress' are coded through Eurocentric and secular norms. Her jilbab becomes a material that unsettles the imagined neutrality of professionalism what Puwar (2004) calls the 'somatic norm' of institutions, referring to the unspoken bodily standard that institutions deem as 'normal' and acceptable. The residue of that microaggression lingers for Iqraa and for me because it exposes the fragility of a system that cannot fully accommodate our presence. It is a felt residue, one that deeply bothers us where we have to (re)think how we can fit our bodies in spaces.

In this sense, residue is a site of struggle and possibility. It marks how power circulates through teacher education, shaping what can be said, worn, or felt, while also signalling what endures through Iqraa's refusal to lose herself, her insistence that teaching must remain joyful, relational, and human. Her sticky moments show that professional formation is not linear but deeply relational and embodied. Her resistance to being 'moulded' and 'darkened' is a pushback against the performative measures of professionalism, especially those that render visible expressions of faith as less 'appropriate'. The more Muslim she appears, the more her presence risks being read as incompatible with institutional norms. Yet rather than conforming, Iqraa reimagines what it means to be a teacher on her own terms. Her stepping away from an ECTeacher role is not simply withdrawal but a reconfiguration of relation: an opening to other ways of being in education that do not demand the erasure of self, shaped by the affective residues that linger in her decision.

## 4.7 Faheemah

Faheemah entered ITE following the completion of a postgraduate degree, where she had taken pride in her dissertation and the academic trajectory it represented. She approached the teacher education course with optimism, framing teaching as a site of transformative learning and social contribution to the community of Birmingham. As a Pakistani Muslim woman, she was acutely aware of the need to move through professional spaces with resilience and self-assertion, recognising this as an important strategy for survival in contexts where marginalisation could be felt, evidenced through her previous academic work. Her early engagement with the programme was characterised by a tension between aspiration and the realities of professional practice. The everyday demands of ITE, alongside her encounters within school placements, generated affective intensities that began to unsettle her initial expectations of the profession. These experiences accumulated as moments that stuck, carrying a charge that extended beyond their immediate occurrence and shaping how she understood both herself and the institutional environments she was entering.

A central aspect of her narrative is a particularly sticky moment in which she heard teachers describe pupils as being ‘angry inbreds’. This encounter, saturated with exclusionary and dehumanising language, left a lasting trace on her own teacher becomings, producing both affective disruption and a sharpened sense of resistance. At the time of this study, Faheemah had temporarily stepped away from the teacher education course for personal reasons, intending to return but uncertain about her longer-term commitment to teaching.

### 4.7.1 Sticky Moments – ‘they’re all angry inbreds’

Faheemah’s account of a staffroom exchange reveals the force of language and the intensities it carries. During an English lesson, a reading of *Wuthering Heights* to a majority South-Asian population of students, had led to a lively discussion of cousin marriages. In the staffroom afterwards where all the staff had gathered, one teacher remarked positively on how the lesson had gone, particularly around the cousin marriage discussion, but another interjected with the comment:

*‘they are just angry inbreds’,*

Which, Faheemah felt was directed towards the largely South-Asian student population. For Faheemah, the words were shocking and deeply upsetting, even whilst she recalled this, her face carried the same visible shock. The casual dehumanisation of students, wrapped in the pronoun they, stuck to her in ways that were difficult to shake off. The force of the words struck Faheemah

immediately. She repeatedly described the words that were used as ‘dehumanising’ as she recalled the events, a form of casual violence that lingered in the air. She continued to recall that at the time, she privately turned to a colleague, voicing her discomfort and beginning to pick apart the weight of the words. She told me she broke the words down:

*‘It’s the words they used, just horrible. THEY ARE ANGRY INBREDS.*

*They – all of us.*

*Angry – labelling all of us as being volatile*

*Inbreds – such an offensive slur*

*How dare they say that?’*

But things soon escalated as the colleague raised a formal complaint about what the staff member had said and how Faheemah was deeply offended and upset by what they had just heard. Yet, as the situation unfolded, Faheemah found herself increasingly isolated. The complaint quickly reached senior members of staff, particularly that Faheemah was complaining. Without Faheemah being directly approached or spoken to, the incident became the subject of an investigation. The process took on a life of its own, involving multiple staff, but left Faheemah herself in the margins. She was shocked at how decisions were being made around her, how conversations about her role in the matter circulated without her being asked to speak. What she felt most strongly was disappointment and betrayal; she had expected colleagues to at least talk to her, to listen, but instead she was rendered silent and deemed a ‘complainer’ within the very process that concerned her.

As the matter was framed as an ‘investigation,’ Faheemah described her frustration at being positioned as uncooperative, despite never having had the chance to articulate her concerns formally. She shared:

*‘All this was happening around me, getting emails and things, and I didn’t even get a chance to speak’*

*‘how is that even possible without getting my views. It’s like they treat trainees as insignificant and in the way’*

Here, the feeling of powerlessness was accompanied by fear. In the staffroom, colleagues began to speak in ways that underlined her marginalisation within her earshot. Faheemah stated that they would say:

*“I’d be careful what I say as someone might hear and report it”*

The atmosphere became charged with hostility and intimidation, leaving her feeling ostracised and targeted. As the investigation unfolded, she sought support from a union representative. Yet before any meeting could take place, she received an email stating the investigation was now closed. The official reason given was her ‘uncooperativeness’. The abruptness of this conclusion left her frustrated and powerless, her concerns dismissed without the chance to be voiced. The sense of being silenced was compounded in the days that followed.

*‘so frustrating, how can they just dismiss this by saying I was the problem. I was waiting for a union rep because I needed someone else there but labelled me as uncooperative’*

The two days following the email closure of the investigation were described by Faheemah as ‘hell’ and ‘disgusting’. The staffroom atmosphere turned hostile. In this staffroom, insensitivity, prejudice, hostility, and the subtle but forceful mechanisms of silencing were revealed. Unable to continue, Faheemah withdrew from the placement as fear, disappointment, frustration, and exclusion weighed heavily on her, producing what she later described as a sense of being traumatised. She later secured another placement, hopeful for a more positive experience, yet the traces of this moment, its stickiness, remained. The words they are just angry inbreds, and everything that followed that, clung to her experience of teacher education, shaping her sense of self, her belonging, and her precarious position within the profession. Faheemah’s account aligns with Ahmed’s (2021) complaint, highlighting how institutions frequently redirect complaints away from themselves and back onto those who raise them. Faheemah’s experiences are not singular, one-off incidents, but typical of how institutional structures operate to weaponise complaint, reinforcing exclusionary practices, rather than addressing the true concern.

#### 4.7.2 Residue

The incident in the staffroom leaves a residue that exceeds Faheemah’s immediate encounter, reverberating across material, relational, and affective dimensions of the teacher education environment. The harmful utterance of ‘they are just angry inbreds’, cannot be read as an isolated linguistic act but rather as what Barad (2007) terms an ‘intra-action’, an entanglement of language, bodies, histories, and institutional structures that co-constitute affective intensities and positionalities. The utterance, the atmosphere of the staffroom, the complaint procedures, and the traces left in both

material and digital forms collectively act upon Faheemah, shaping her sense of belonging, professional becoming, and embodied vulnerability. Ahmed's (2004, 2010) concept of 'stickiness' is particularly resonant here, the dehumanising language sticks to Faheemah, to the space, and to the institutional memory, producing affective residues of fear, anger, and humiliation that cannot be erased by the procedural closure of case.

What remains, then, is not only Faheemah's personal account but a layering of exclusions that are affective, structural, and historical. Lorde's (1984) insistence that silence will not protect us is palpable; Faheemah's body bears the marks of both the racialised insult and the institutional silences that followed. The staffroom becomes a charged space, shadowed by hostility, vigilance, and the risk of further harm. As hooks (1994) reminds us, spaces of learning are never neutral, they are contested sites where power and resistance co-exist. Faheemah's experience reveals how pedagogical spaces become sites of surveillance and exclusion when colonial logics of othering persist unchallenged.

For me as a researcher, the residue is felt in the immediacy of her account, the shock on her face, the injustice, and affective weight that persisted in retelling. These traces resist neat closure as they circulate as what Ahmed (2004) describes as affective economies, where emotions move between bodies, sticking to some more than others. What lingers are the moments of exclusion, the relentless social policing, and the embodied sense of being targeted. The formal processes of institutional complaint do not dissolve these residues but rather intensify them, entangling Faheemah in what Barad (2007) describes as the ongoing performativity of power as the institution itself becomes complicit in reproducing the harm it claims to address.

The language deployed against marginalised communities exemplifies the enduring violence of colonial discourse. Phrases such as 'angry inbreds' function not just as insults but as instruments of social and epistemic marginalisation, framing entire communities as inherently volatile and undesirable (Fanon, 1961). This rhetorical violence is particularly striking when considered alongside historical practices, such as cousin marriages, that were commonplace in British society and are rarely subjected to critique within educational curricula (McKinnon, 2018). The selective deployment of condemnation highlights the asymmetries of power; colonial and postcolonial texts construct the 'other' as morally and socially deficient, while historical behaviours within dominant communities remain normalised and invisible (Homes, 2014). In this sense, such language is not an isolated instance of offense but part of a broader pattern in which the legacies of colonialism are reproduced through discourse.

Faheemah's presence in the staffroom becomes a site of negotiation, her every movement and silence intra-acting with the racialised and gendered affective field. The residue of this moment, through fear,

anger, humiliation, and hyper-vigilance clings to her body and her teacher becoming. These traces align with Ahmed's (2010) theorisation of the 'feminist killjoy' by exposing the harm of the dehumanising comment, Faheemah unsettles the comfort of the space, redirecting the problem back onto the institutional structures that marginalise her. Yet, as Lorde (1984) powerfully notes, transformation requires naming the pain even when doing so produces further vulnerability. Faheemah's refusal to absorb the insult silently enacts both survival and resistance.

The residue, then, is a multilayered affective assemblage, it is the entanglement of colonial histories of othering, the affective stickiness of dehumanising language, the institutional silences that amplify harm, and the resilience required to persist in hostile pedagogical environments. Braidotti's (2019) call to understand subjectivity as a nomadic, affective, and relational process underscores how Faheemah's experience of exclusion and survival is not personal but embedded in broader assemblages of power and resistance.

Ultimately, this sticky moment demands that we rethink what teaching is and can be. Hooks (1994) urges us to imagine pedagogical spaces as communities of care and mutual recognition; yet Faheemah's experience shows the persistence of colonial and racialised legacies that fracture belonging. To attend to these residues is to confront the complex entanglement of affect, power, and history in educational spaces, recognising, as Ahmed (2022) argues, that the work of the killjoy is not only to disrupt but to insist on the possibility of another way of being together. The irony is acute, when pointing out what is constructed as savage and dangerous, Faheemah is labelled as savage and dangerous, exemplifying the recursive violence of colonial discourse (Ahmed, 2004). Faheemah leaves traces of a feminist killjoy as she embodies what Ahmed (2024, p 262) says 'we have to keep saying it because they keep doing it'.

#### **4.8 Asad**

Asad's decision to volunteer for the research was unexpected. Our first meaningful exchange occurred not in a formal academic setting, but over a shared meal at the end of year lunch with his cohort of ECTeachers. Although we had coexisted in the same university spaces, there had been little prior interaction between us. In this relaxed context, the nature of our interaction shifted. Asad approached me with a warmth and attentiveness that had not previously been expressed within our limited encounters. He recalled my work with surprising clarity and expressed a genuine curiosity. In this moment of connection, he articulated his experiences were important and 'needed to be shared'. His sense of validation, of being seen and heard, was palpable. It became an embodied insistence that his

lived experience mattered. It was at this point that I invited him to participate in this research, marking the beginning of his formal involvement. A follow-up meeting was arranged soon after.

Asad is a young South-Asian, Muslim male ECTeacher from Birmingham, a city he has never left and to which he remains deeply attached to personally and now professionally. We met in the summer of him completing his teacher education course and securing a teaching role in a local school to complete his ECTeacher training. He sees his role as more than a teacher; through his active commitment to the young people of Birmingham, nodding to the importance of representation. What stuck most in our conversation was his attunement to the emotional weight carried by other marginalised bodies. His observations were affectively charged as he *felt* the struggle of others and located his own identity within that shared landscape of resistance and visibility.

#### 4.8.1 Sticky Moment – I am needed

What emerges in conversation with Asad is the current of affective tensions, between resistance, visibility, duty and desire. Asad speaks with conviction, but there is a tenderness under the surface, a sense of vulnerability as he too learns to move through difficult spaces. At first, it felt as though Asad expected me to ‘interview’ him and ask him a series of questions, but I reassured and reiterated this was just a space to have an open conversation about his experiences of teaching. He was taken back, with a smile and raised eyebrows, he said ‘ok, I’ll start at the beginning’.

Asad shaped our conversation along a linear path, beginning with his own schooling, his choice to become Subject English teacher and then his various teaching experiences. It is through the latter, that sticky moments started to emerge. He acknowledged the uneven spaces others move through, particularly for Asian Muslim women in education. His voice, though calm, carried a weight of knowing shaped by witnessing these struggles up close. Asad says:

*‘it’s very tough on Asian (Muslim) women, but with men it can be different... it really does depend on how you are as a teacher and a person’.*

This becomes more than just an observation, as he is increasingly attuned to how identity circulates in schools affectively, particularly how bodies are read and felt. He moves on to share an example of a strong role model for him, a previous mentor at a school, who he described as a ‘strong Indian woman’. He describes her with admiration and sees her as a role-model, lingering on her ability to remain grounded and respected figure, despite working in hostile environments. He describes her as,

*‘strong and had everyone in check despite the abuse. A lot of Asian teachers have come and gone but her personality allows her to stay and manage. She sticks up for herself’.*

Asad admires this strength, which becomes affectively contagious as he wants to embody that kind of presence in his own practice. He acknowledges the abuse she faced and his observation that some ‘Asian’ teachers come and go, framing such experiences as ordinary conditions of teaching rather than exceptional events. Asad’s comments signal to both awareness of the hostile terrain and a normalisation of its violence as an everyday occurrence for such bodies. When he contrasts this against the ‘strong’ teacher’s ability to stick up for herself and endure, it is tied to a specific personality type, one of resilience and grit. I return to this point below in the residue section when I consider what forms of subjectivity and survival are demanded in this space.

When Asad speaks about his current school, there is a calmness to his voice. The space itself feels safe, and he talks about his belonging:

*‘the school is not regimented, fixed or programmed, the school is amazing...the department is so nice, everyone works together, it’s diverse and leadership all sit and work well together’*  
*‘it’s like it’s like family’.*

His experience of working in schools where his presence mattered and he observed how others also mattered led him to use the figurative language of ‘family’ to signal more than a workplace. Its relational significance where care and belonging are foregrounded were felt matters. In this sense, Asad’s description idealises the school space and exemplifies how affective labour is central to sustaining cohesion and survival.

Just like Iqraa in her sticky moments, the ‘family feel’ contrasts with Asad’s past experiences of toxicity. He does not detail incidents, but talks about a ‘vibe’, one of alienation, competitiveness and exhaustion. The difference between his professional placements is affectively profound, moving from fear to safety.

*‘lots of dog-eat-dog moments and I just picked up the vibes straight away, it’s just not nice. The management was poor. But the management here is WICKED, they’ve got a top SLT team and everyone is approachable and amazing from the assistants to the top, so responsive to whatever you need and ask for. You’re not afraid to ask. Polar opposite to my work experiences’.*

What sticks here is the affective shift he identifies when he moves contexts. When he uses the word ‘vibe’, he really is telling us more than what he saw, he also felt the forces that circulated his body at that time, shaping how he felt about that school environment before any incident had been processed. By naming the ‘vibe’ as ‘not nice’, Asad points to an affective climate of toxicity that is perhaps difficult to explain. The contrast to his current school is equally affective but one rooted in safety. What emerges is not a simple comparison of different contexts but one of distinct affective economies and how vibes operate as a way of knowing and moving through spaces and places.

Asad’s sense of purpose is deeply situated to his own sense of place – his Birmingham, his community.

*‘young, male, Muslim, from the community...I am needed here and I can make 100% difference in my own local community than anywhere else’.*

Asad affirms that his presence matters and is echoed throughout our conversation. It appears to catalyse a reorientation in him as he did feel momentarily drawn to the Middle East working as a teacher there. After speaking with his university tutor, it signalled a rupture:

*‘That just made me think and reconsider’*

*It was only after I realised that I wanted to change the perceptions of Asians and Muslims, because we are the face of this’.*

Here, he gestures towards a wider discourse of racialised and religious stereotypes that shape how teachers like him are seen. Yet, these stereotypes remain largely unspoken about, he does not say what those views are, he leaves them unspoken as if already known. This silence is significant and points to the internalisation of such normative thinking of particular bodies. I draw more on this in the residue, but what is left unsaid is revealing to the everyday management of racialised visibility and stereotyping.

Listening to Asad left me feeling unexpectedly proud of him. His clarity and commitment offered a glimpse of what might still be possible in a system so often marked by disillusionment. I elaborate on this in the residue section that follows. I share this with Asad and he laughs, a moment of lightness. He says:

*'There is a lot of doom and gloom about education. It's tough, but I think I always try.'*

His experience is also shaped by the embodied experience of being a visible Muslim, Asian man working in a system that often demands neutrality. He is very much aware of his difference when he states again:

*'I'm Muslim and Asian, it's what I know and it's my religion and background and I can't hide that fact.'*

He positions himself with a refusal to fragment the personal from the professional. Asad's presence in the classroom is political, not by choice, but by the force of dominant norms that read his body as being different. Despite everyday interactions shaped by assumptions, stereotypes or biases as mentioned above, Asad remains hopeful and grounded about his role in education. He feels a strong sense of responsibility and aims to incorporate kindness and compassion into his teaching, which becomes modes of survival. His commitment is relational and he sees teaching as an act of care but one that is complicated by structural inequalities, particularly for those more marginalised than himself.

*'It is tough at times, a lot tougher for Asian women. If I was to give them advice, 'stand your ground'*

His recognition of gendered power relations situates Asad within these dynamics not outside them. Curious at what shaped this view, I asked him to elaborate. Asad spoke candidly about the impact of masculinities and online misogyny:

*'People like Andrew Tate, stuff online, have such an impact on kids, it's normal to treat women like shit. It's not nice.'*

A different type of stickiness emerges here. It is not from his personal experience, but from the witnessing of harm and seeing the spaces where misogyny is normalised and racialised bodies are read through violent practices. These moments, for Asad, become sticky as they demand a response. Her recalls a racist incident involving a female Asian teacher,

*'as hard as it, as shit as it is, you have to stand up for yourself'*

The reality of what survival looks like is that there is no promise of safety. His words sit heavy, as he pauses. Something deeply human emerges and he claims not to have all the answers but he leads with reflexivity and care:

*'I feel like I have a lot of responsibility as a teacher. I enjoy teaching, I can't force you to enjoy learning but I will try'.*

In this moment, trying becomes Asad's form of care. His effort to be a teacher cannot be separated from the wider entanglements of himself. Teaching is not just a job for Asad, it is part of his becoming, rooted in responsibility. He speaks with a deep sense of gratitude and sincerity when reflecting on what drives him:

*'everything that I've done is for my mom, she will still have a moan at me, but I just want good for my mom... I'm not interested in fame and fortune just building solid foundations for my own family. I love English. What I speak now, I represent my family, they came to this country without speaking English but now I teach English, same with the community. I try, I try...'*

The words 'I try, I try' hold significance here as he moves through the spaces steadily not loudly as he stands up against stereotypes. He is acutely aware of the damaging effects of negative portrayals of Muslim and South-Asian men. Rather than internalise them, he chooses to face them through his presence as a teacher. He is someone who could have, as he says 'gone the wrong way' but what got him through his dark days of loss and grief when a parent died, stuck. He recalls his own schooling again, and how his own experience now shapes how he offers care and support to others. The emotional architecture of his journey informs how he teaches and lives as he continues to 'try and try'.

In our conversation, he becomes curious about my own research and work. He asked thoughtful questions about my PhD and noted how rare it is to see Muslim women, particularly Asian Muslim women, pursuing doctorates and how significant that representation feels. We spoke about how Muslim communities are so often portrayed through negative lenses, where one harmful narrative is made to stand in for the many. Asad reflected on the imbalance:

*'One bad representation does not mean the same applies to everyone. It's harder to share the positive, so more is needed.'*

He acknowledged how my presence, my research, and this conversation itself were forms of boundary pushing by challenging the narrow boxes that Muslim bodies are often placed in. In that moment, something shifted, it felt like the conversation had become mutual ground, a space of shared recognition as I also acknowledged Asad's boundary pushing.

As we wrapped up our conversation, Asad smiled and said:

*'It was refreshing to talk, feels like something off my shoulders just talking. Thank you — I've not talked about my life before like this. It feels good.'*

His words lingered as our conversation released the tension his body held.

#### 4.8.2 Residue

What lingers most from the conversation with Asad is the emotional charge behind his experiences and the quiet power of someone who chooses care, presence, and responsibility in a system that is hard to move through for particular bodies. His repeated phrase 'I try, I try' stays with me, as a form of doing, showing up, and holding space for others in spite of witnessing hostile and toxic environments. The stickiness of his experience is the affective labour of moving through visibility, the moral pull of teaching as care work for himself and those pushed to the margins. His hope is grounded in a lived awareness of what survival and dignity look like in hostile conditions but also through the belief on how he matters (hooks, 2001).

Asad's story tells us that teaching, for racialised and visibly Muslim educators like him, is never just about pedagogy, it is affectively and politically entangled with representation, duty, and the quiet refusal to be flattened by dominant narratives of what being Muslim means (Mirza, 2016). As a visible Muslim, Asian man, his presence in classrooms is inevitably read through dominant cultural norms. This visibility carries weight as it shapes how he is perceived, how he manages relationships, and how he experiences institutional expectations. But he also feels the weight on how other bodies do the same. In our conversation, these feelings were known, despite not being talked about. Being Muslim and having a conversation with another Muslim mattered here, it allowed for mutual, understood feelings of being 'othered' to emerge. The ways in which listening, witnessing, and being present became ethically charged practices, where Asad was able to share more openly without any judgement.

Asad refuses to fragment the personal from the professional, entangling his experiences with care, compassion, and relational attentiveness as central to his becoming. These everyday acts of trying, while remaining modest, operate collectively as subtle forms of resistance and renewal, embodying FPNM ideas that bodies, affect, and relationality are inseparable from social and structural forces.

The residue of his story also highlights the affective stickiness of witnessing harm. He speaks candidly about gendered power relations and the ways misogyny circulates among students and colleagues. He is acutely aware of the precariousness of safety and the uneven spaces others navigate, particularly Asian Muslim women, yet he does not shy away from these realities. His ethical orientation is relational as he observes, feels, and responds to inequities, shaping a form of teaching that is grounded in care, empathy, and responsibility. These moments illustrate how affect circulates not only through personal experience but also through witnessing, shaping ethical attentiveness and relational modes of survival. The lingering effects of entrenched stereotypes shape the educational spaces for Muslim bodies.

Asad's sense of purpose is profoundly situated within his community and sense of place. He positions himself as a teacher not just within the system, but in service of his local context, describing how he seeks to challenge stereotypes and support students while honouring the legacy of his own family and community. His narrative reminds me, as a researcher, that affective residue is mutual, listening to his story leaves traces on me, shaping my understanding of relationality, ethical engagement, and the responsibilities inherent in witnessing and listening to experiences. The conversation became a space of mutual recognition, where boundary-pushing and reflection were shared, and where the relational, affective dimension of research itself became visible.

What remains after this encounter is the quiet yet persistent power of presence, the ethical weight of everyday care, and the ways affect, identity, and structural conditions are inseparable in the lived experience of teaching. The residue, then, is both Asad's and mine, the lingering affect of witnessing someone navigate visibility, inequality, and moral responsibility while continuing to 'try and try'. It is a reminder that the work of teaching, like the work of research, is never neutral, it is charged, relational, and profoundly human.

## Part 5: Affective becomings of ECTeachers

Part 5 turns toward these *sticky encounters* to consider how complaint functions as an affective and political practice. To enter this part is to 'stay with the trouble', which Haraway (2016, p18) describes

as ‘to stir up’ or ‘to disturb’. It means not trying to escape, ignore or quickly solve the trouble, in this case what the ECTeacher’ affective encounters revealed. Haraway (2016) encourages us to live with these difficulties, to face them honestly and work within them. It requires ‘true presence’ and cultivating an awareness of where we are and who we are as we configure ‘places, times, matters, meanings’. (Haraway, 2016, p18). With ‘staying with the trouble’ in mind, this part of the thesis moves from the tracing of the affective intensities that shaped ECTeachers’ becomings through their sticky moments to dwelling within the institutional textures that make those becomings possible and painful in Part 5.

Here, I take up Ahmed’s *complaint* (2014) as a way of attending to the moments when affective dissonance becomes an act of refusal. Complaint is not necessarily spoken or formally lodged; it is lived. It surfaces through bodies that do not fit, through pauses, hesitations, or quiet endurance. To persist in spaces that reproduce exclusion is to inhabit complaint as an affective condition. For the ECTeachers in this research, complaint circulates as a form of survival, a mode of staying in relation with systems that would prefer their silence. These complaints may never reach regulatory bodies or those in charge, yet they reverberate through everyday encounters where inequities are both felt and managed. In this sense, this thesis attends to and will continue to attend to these reverberations, working to render these complaints more audible within spaces that do not readily listen.

Turning towards sticky moments, I illustrate, ECTeacher becomings are relational acts that expose the institutional walls of education and particularly teacher education. Complaint and listening with feminist ears is a method of noticing, of staying with what bothers, what resists, and what continues to linger.

The participants’ accounts reveal how becoming teacher was lived as an affective negotiation with exclusionary practices that shaped who could belong, speak and be recognised within the assemblages that the ECTeachers found themselves in. Lambert (2020) describes teacher becomings as an ongoing process formed through entanglements of power, discourse, space and affect. For marginalised bodies in this research, whose identities intersect with race, gender, religion, culture and motherhood, ECTeacher becomings emerge from the uneven terrain they are situated in.

Becoming is not only generative but is also exhausting and unequally distributed. The affective readings in Part 4 of this thesis, reveal that becoming teacher is rarely smooth or celebrated. It is enacted through a labour of staying present with systems that deem certain bodies as ‘too much’ or ‘invisible’. Ahmed’s (2021) notion of complaint becomes instructive. To situate yourself in institutions

that repeatedly reproduce exclusion is to live with the friction of ‘making complaints’ (Ahmed, 2021, p 26), these are not only formal acts but are affective gestures that expose the walls of the institution. For the ECTeachers in this study, the very act of persisting, naming inequities, or even quietly enduring can be read as forms of complaint of the systems they found themselves in. These complaints, however, often circulate unheard, absorbed by what Ahmed calls *institutional walls*, where diversity and inclusion are spoken but rarely enacted. I refer to this as granular exclusions through the subtle, every day, micro-led practices that contribute to the exclusion of their bodies, which I now will explore.

The sections that follow extend this inquiry by thinking about ECTeacher’s encounters and becoming as lived affective negotiations with exclusionary practices that shaped who could belong, speak, and be recognised and how listening differently, through a feminist ear, illuminated their granular exclusions.

### **#Killjoy moment**

*It’s the moment you realise everyone else can sit comfortably, but you’re fidgeting, adjusting, shrinking yourself to fit a space that was never made for you. You mention it lightly, even with a laugh and the mood dips. Suddenly, you’re the problem, not the chair. That’s the micro stuff, the quiet exclusions that smile while they shut you out.*

## **5.1 Granular exclusions**

The ECTeacher’s affective encounters revealed that subtle, everyday, micro-led practices contribute to their exclusion. These granular processes occur in the fine-grained textures of institutional life, in tone, gesture, affective atmosphere, language choices, and even in the phrasing of policies and procedures. They are not always overt acts of discrimination or hostility but rather the accumulation of small, affective and material-discursive practices that, over time, shape who is seen as legitimate, competent, and belonging within the profession.

### **#Killjoy moment**

*It’s more than what the teachers have shared with me. It is where their words and encounters are situated. It is a socio-eco-political recipe for pushing out.*

Such exclusions are not always seen, named, or challenged. They often blend seamlessly into the rhythms of the everyday and become normalised as the way things are done (Ahmed, 2012, p 22). The unremarkable quality of these practices allows them to escape notice, even as they quietly sediment into institutional norms and professional expectations. For instance, the ways in which ECTeachers in this research were (un)heard, reported, or ignored in their teaching spaces constitute affective

assemblages through which belonging is negotiated and exclusions enacted (Ahmed, 2014). This alongside the policy centred around Subject English and professionalism legitimise particular ways of knowing, being and teaching – those aligned with whiteness and eurocentrism, whilst marginalising alternative epistemologies and practices (Lander, 2016).

These granular exclusions can be understood as material-discursive practices, following Barad's (2007) argument that meaning and matter are not separate entities but are co-constituted through intra-action. The boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are therefore not pre-given; they emerge through these intra-actions, where affect, discourse, and materiality intertwine to render certain subjectivities intelligible while positioning others at the margins. Through such processes, specific ways of teaching, speaking, or feeling come to matter and to count as legitimate or valuable. The ECTeacher's body becomes entangled in these assemblages, where institutional discourses of competence, resilience, and professionalism are materially enacted through mechanisms and practices through which ECTeachers are made visible, monitored, or known within their schools and ITE/ECF providers.

In this way, exclusion operates not only through explicit acts or policies but also through diffusion of affective intensities. It is the uneasy silences, subtle glances, or habitual patterns of dismissal that circulate in their affective assemblage. Franklin-Phipps (2023) describes how silence functions as a disciplinary atmosphere, a mode of maintaining the professional silence that upholds the status quo. Franklin-Phipps (2023) calls attention to how these affective dynamics make absence felt, how what is not spoken, not seen, or subtly dismissed reproduces racial hierarchies even within seemingly progressive spaces, much like when Ilham felt ignored and when Annie failed her training, when Kareena did not know about Dungeons and Dragons. It made them acutely aware of their difference. The ECTeachers sticky encounters coalesce into powerful assemblages that sustain hierarchies of belonging. As such, exclusion must be understood as an ongoing doing, a set of distributed and contingent practices that shape which bodies come to matter, and how (Barad, 2007; Probyn, 2005; Ahmed, 2012). Exclusion is an orchestration of affect that positions some bodies as out of place and others comfortably centred (Franklin-Phipps, 2020).

Recognising the granular nature of exclusion shifts analytical attention to the affective textures of institutional life, to the atmospheres and sticky moments through which power and belonging are continuously negotiated. It invites a sensitivity to the ways in which seemingly minor gestures, who is included, who passes, who voices are listened to, reverberate through the assemblage to reproduce or disrupt exclusionary conditions.

ECTeacher becomings then, is a relational process occurring through affective survival, silence, language and discourse. Reading the participants' encounters with feminist ears means recognising the murmurs, hesitations, and refusals that signal the strain of surviving as a teacher marked by otherness. Affective readings also illuminate a politics of endurance at the heart of ECTeacher becomings. Research foregrounds the possibilities of affective and material encounters (Lambert, 2020, Strom et al 2019) but this study reveals that encounters are also saturated with inequity. For marginalised bodies, becoming teacher involves affective survival within systems that mark them as other. Complaint becomes both a mode of exposure and endurance; silence becomes a strategy to shield and strain, and language discourses operate as a gatekeeper of belonging which I will expand on in this section. But these dynamics also raise a critical reflection – do teachers recognise that the conditions of their work are shaped in systemic inequities such as racism and instead interpret their experiences solely through the lens of behaviour, workload or pay? In this sense, affective survival is entangled with personal endurance but also with its limitations of collective understanding and naming of structural injustice.

## 5.2 Affective Survival as a mode of becoming

For many participants (Shila, Asiya, Ilham, Annie, Iqraa), becoming teacher was lived through the intensities of survival. Complaint emerges as affective in that it is felt and enacted through their daily negotiation of exhaustion, doubt, and exclusion. This reflected a form of affective persistence where they were found continuously recalibrating themselves in response to the shifting forces that defined who and what could matter within their educational spaces. For these teachers, survival becomes what Barad, (2007) describes as an onto-epistemological practice where they continually remake themselves amid the institutional conditions that limit their mattering. It is more than a coping strategy, it is part of their process of becoming teacher, enacted through the entanglements of body, discourse, policy and affect (Zarabadi, 2023).

Yet, the capacity to persist was unevenly distributed. While some bodies remained entangled in the exhausting labour of endurance, others began to resist the demand to survive within oppressive assemblages. For Iqra and Asiya, the work of survival became too compromising; too entangled with silencing, negotiating themselves, and the violence they witnessed, and so they withdrew and refused as alternative modes of becoming. Their movement away from these spaces echoes Braidotti's (2013) understanding of nomadic subjectivity as an ethical repositioning rather than a failure or 'quitting'. It becomes a reorientation that preserves their potential to become otherwise. Surviving and departing

are not opposites, or binary terms, but a response to how effects of affective encounters, limit what forms of teaching (and being) can come to matter within specific educational assemblages.

### *#Killjoy moment*

*Writing about the ECTeachers, it is hard. It is also about me and we are carved from the violences that demand our survival.*

Nearly all of the participants, particularly the female ECTeachers, spoke of the sheer exhaustion that permeated their everyday experiences of teaching. This exhaustion was more than physical tiredness. It emerged through the entanglement of institutional demands, embodied histories and working with deficit ideologies that excluded them in their spaces. Exhaustion then becomes more than a consequence of a challenging job; it is an affective survival that both limits their teacher becomings but also signals to the possibilities of their teacher becomings within spaces that mark their bodies as out of place.

Ahmed's (2017, p 13) concept of 'staying-with' referring to ways in which bodies stay with the complaint or trouble or feeling. Staying-with appears to resonate here, as the ECTeachers can be read as affective practices of endurance since they are choosing to stay present in spaces that refuse easy belonging. This is shown when Shila insists, she will not give up; and when Kareena questions and confirms that the knowledge she brings is important and valued. Also, when Ilhan continues to carry on despite sticking out like a sore thumb. Fatigue in these instances, becomes a force that both constrain and sustain. To stay-with and continue is to inhabit complaint, to endure and persist despite the very structures that produce exhaustion. Listening to sticky encounters with feminist ears reveals how endurance and weariness speak even when words fall silent. It is through this embodied negotiation with exhaustion that new modes of becoming emerge - a process forged in and through affective struggle.

Furthermore, these sticky encounters show that complaint is collective and relational. Asad's awareness of others' exhaustion demonstrates how complaint travels affectively and thus illustrates a different kind of affective orientation. His reflections reveal an awareness of the uneven distribution of fatigue and belonging, suggesting that affective survival is not experienced uniformly but is deeply shaped by gendered and racialised bodies. While his encounter centred on his own desires, capability and determination, it simultaneously acknowledged the affective labour that is disproportionately experienced by others. Listening to Asad with feminist ears recognised the weight of others'

exhaustion and complaint. His awareness illuminates how affective survival is lived collectively as complaint travels. Fatigue resonates and the affective economies (Ahmed, 2012) of becoming teacher are distributed unevenly across lines of privilege and vulnerability.

### 5.3 Silence as a liminal practice

For many of the ECTeachers in this research, silence emerged as one of the most persistent and affectively charged strategies through which they moved in/through/out of the institutional landscapes of teaching. Building on the previous discussion of exhaustion and survival, silence appeared as an embodied mode of endurance as a way of negotiating their own exposure, protecting themselves, and remaining within spaces that were not always receptive to their presence. Within ECTeacher assemblages, silence was lived through the body; in the careful calibration of tone, the suppression of reaction, or the hesitation to speak. These silences became affective practices that manage what could be said, heard, and felt within their professional environments.

For Asiyah, silence was something learned through experience: she recalled having to ‘put a sock in it’ or else she was deemed to be a ‘complainer’. For Shila, it meant avoiding anything that might ‘raise eyebrows,’ a form of anticipated potential consequences to prevent being marked as difficult or unprofessional. Kareena became acutely aware of her accent. Annie felt trapped in a ‘lose–lose situation’, to speak up risked judgement and consequence, but to stay silent risked invisibility as she fails her teacher training course. Ilham described feeling like ‘just a body in the room,’ her silence is both a result of being ignored, and a strategy developed, within an environment that barely registered her presence. These moments illustrate that silence was neither chosen freely nor imposed entirely from outside; it was lived through complex affective negotiations with systems that simultaneously constrained and produced their teacher becomings.

Silence, in this sense, was a material-affective phenomenon. It carried weight, texture, and rhythm; it moved through the body and the room. The ECTeachers’ silences signalled the continuous negotiation of belonging, safety, and professionalism. They were not passive but deeply relational, material-discursive acts that constituted the very boundaries of what could be said and felt in institutional life. Silence became a liminal practice (Lambert, 2023), a threshold state through which ECTeachers moved as they recalibrated their positions within shifting affective economies of inclusion and exclusion.

Ahmed’s work on affect and institutional life helps illuminate these dynamics. Institutions, she argues, are affective economies that distribute comfort and discomfort unevenly (Ahmed, 2012). Within such economies, to speak up can risk becoming the ‘problem person’, while staying silent may feel safer,

though that safety remains fragile. The teachers in this study inhabited precisely these terrains. Their silences were not cognitive decisions but embodied responses to what Ahmed calls the *stickiness* of power, the affective residues of fear, shame, or weariness that attach to particular bodies. When Asiyah ‘put a sock in it’, her silence was an affective recalibration, a way of managing proximity to power in an atmosphere that rendered her difference precarious.

A post-qualitative theoretical perspective can see these silences as *onto-epistemological points* (Barad, 2007), spaces where meaning and matter are reconfigured. Silence marks the blurry zones between resistance and compliance and between presence and absence. In these zones, teachers are neither fully silenced nor using their voice; rather, they intra-act with discourse, policy, and matter to produce new configurations of their teacher becomings. ‘Staying with the trouble’ (Haraway, 2016) involves enduring contradiction long enough for alternative possibilities to emerge. The teachers’ silences performed precisely this kind of endurance. The sticky moments were vibrant encounters in which affect and matter reconfigured what it meant to belong, to speak, and to teach.

Ahmed (2010) reminds us that affective labour in institutions often involves negotiating how close we get to *happiness* mandating the unspoken demand to be positive and compliant as well as a demand of the neoliberal cultures of contemporary education. For the ECTeachers, silence became a means of negotiating this demand. Choosing not to speak was sometimes a refusal to align with institutional happiness, a quiet rejection of affective assimilation. Kareena’s hesitation to speak, shaped by her awareness of her accent, can be read as a kind of minor *feminist snap* (Ahmed, 2017), a bodily withdrawal from the affective demand to smooth over difference. She does not explode, but her moments of silence mark a withdrawal of labour. As Ahmed (2017) suggests that a snap is generative and does something. For Kareena, it reorients attention and subtly disturbs the flows of comfort that sustain institutional norms.

Understanding silence as a liminal practice reframes it from deficit to possibility. Drawing on Lambert (2023), liminality is not a linear passage from one stable identity to another but a continual negotiation of thresholds. The marginalised ECTeachers in this study occupied liminality not by choice but by circumstance; yet, within this precarity, they enacted modes of quiet resistance. Silence became a performative threshold, an embodied holding space between despair and persistence, invisibility and subtle action. This resonates with Ahmed’s (2017) *killjoy*, the figure who refuses the smooth functioning of institutional happiness. Silence, in this sense, is a killjoy tactic. By withholding speech, the ECTeachers disrupted the affective flow of compliance, particularly for Faheemah, Annie and Asiya.

Reimagining silence as a feminist liminal practice invites a rethinking of voice, agency, and recognition in education. Silence resists capture by binary logics of voice versus voicelessness, oppression versus agency. Instead, it operates as an affective-material process through which marginalised teachers negotiate belonging, care, and endurance. As Lorde (1984) reminds us, silence can be a means of survival in oppressive contexts; for bell hooks (1994), it can be a space of critical reflection and reimagination; and for Collins (2000), it can be an epistemic practice that safeguards marginalised knowledges.

For these ECTeachers, silence vibrated with potential. It was not the opposite of expression but one of its most affective strategies. Within the affective economies of education, their silences traced the edges of mattering, mapping how teachers' sense, resist, and survive institutions that struggle to hear them. To listen to these silences with *feminist ears* is to recognise them as full and thick with feeling, ethics, and the slow, ongoing work of becoming teacher.

#### 5.4 Language, discourse and (un)belonging

ECTeachers' use of language reveals the affective weight of speaking *into* an institution that already speaks back. Their accounts show how discursive norms do not organise communication but organise feeling by determining who can be heard as legitimate, who sounds 'right' and who remains slightly off-key. Shila comments on the 'extra caution' she needs to take because of what she 'looks like', Asiya is 'not fresh out of university', Kareena 'can't contribute to conversations', Annie reveals her 'oracy skills are not good enough', Ilham's niqab is a 'threat', Iqraa's repeated use of 'insane', Faheemah's breakdown of 'they are angry inbreds' and Asad's affirmation that he is very much 'needed'. These sticky words do more than recall individual experiences. They make audible the institutional conditions that shape who is professional and competent discussed in the Killjoy Cartography in Part 2.

Following Ahmed (2021), complaint here becomes a method: the teachers' words through their hesitations, accents, insistence register friction with the institutional ear trained to hear only certain kinds of professionalism; those aligned to white, western, euro-centric norms. To speak differently, or to refuse the smoothing of accent, is to lodge a complaint in the sonic texture of the institution itself. The teachers' voices mark the walls; they create small disturbances that reveal how belonging is acoustically policed. Marginalised bodies do not conform to the professional norms because of who they are and so can be marked as 'off-key'.

Language thus functions as both conduit and barrier, a discursive corridor through which recognition travels unevenly. Such moments echo Ahmed's description of the feminist killjoy—those whose speech interrupts the comfort of the dominant conversation. The discomfort their language generates is not failure but evidence of how institutional listening operates: some voices are amplified, others absorbed, others deflected. Through the lens of CRT, this unevenness becomes intelligible as a structure. Cushing's (2022, 2023) raciolinguistic ideologies emerge in education that normalise white-normative speech and silence or correct others as deficient. In other words, the institution's ear is already tuned to whiteness, and the speaker is adhering to white ideological standards. When someone speaks differently, or 'complains' their voice is at risk of being heard as being 'off-key'. Language used is then misheard and their bodies become excluded. Complaint then emerges as their bodies register the failure of the institutions listening to accommodate their difference.

Listening with feminist ears means attending to the grain of these voices, to the minor tonalities that persist even when institutional discourse attempts to standardise them. When ECTeachers allow their accent to linger, or when relational pedagogies come to matter in the classroom, affect leaks through linguistic discipline. These are moments of complaint-as-method, not necessarily loud but materially felt as what might be understood as the sound of those who do not get used to it. As Ahmed (2021, p 163) writes 'you refuse to adjust to what is unjust'.

Through this lens, (un)belonging becomes audible. The ECTeachers' linguistic expressions shared with me, is the ongoing labour of their teacher becoming, clearly and willingly revealed as they move through a system that was never designed for them. Yet within these frictions, belonging is reimagined as something sounded out collectively, through repetition, refusal, and resonance. Language, then, is not only the site of exclusion but also the medium of persistence: a way of staying in the room, even when the room refuses to hear.

## 5.5 What Marginalised ECTeachers Matter and Think Other Matters With

As Donna Haraway provocatively reminds us,

*'It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories' (2017, p12).*

Within a PQI, Haraway (2017) invites us to attend to the intra-actions of marginalised ECTeachers through the entangled assemblages of bodies, technologies, curricula, spaces, policies, and affective economies through which teaching is lived and made meaningful. In the context of education, particularly teacher education, it becomes pertinent to consider some of the following questions. Whose experiences shape the stories we tell about teaching, learning and professional identity? Whose voices matter and how do they matter? As outlined in this thesis, dominant discourses in education often overlook or marginalise particular groups, leaving their experiences invisible or insignificant for transformative change. As such, listening and paying attention to marginalised voices and experiences illuminate the complexities, challenges and possibilities of educating in ways that challenge systemic and entrenched institutional norms and expectations (Ahmed, 2021) which is a key contribution of this thesis.

If we continue to think with Haraway (2017), marginalised ECTeachers do not operate within pre-existing structures; they co-constitute those structures as they navigate, resist, and reconfigure them. What they value, what they notice, and what they bring into relation with other matterings are themselves acts of world-making. The knots they tie, between their bodies, beliefs, teaching, policy and pedagogy and community are material, relational, and ethical, demonstrated in Part 4. Their stories do not just describe worlds; they participate in the ongoing enactment of those worlds.

Therefore, to consider what marginalised ECTeachers matter with is to trace the entangled material-affective threads of teaching: the objects, relationships, affects, and narratives that co-produce possibility. In doing so, we recognise that worlds are always being made, and that by attending to the matterings and stories of marginalised ECTeachers, we can imagine alternative pedagogical and professional futures that are more just, generative, and sustaining.

I have written about sticky moments and stickiness throughout this thesis but as I draw close to the 'end' of this research, I am once again left in wonder (Maclure, 2013), wondering what holds and clings throughout and beyond this process. I have lived with this thesis since 2022, but I think the trouble started with me long before that when I started work in education as I quietly and loudly questioned the systems we found ourselves in. In the following section, I think and write about the stickiness of this thesis, particularly around the contributions of this research and the possibilities of working with post-qualitative ways.

## 5.6 What does this thesis do and who is it for?

As I progressed through this thesis, continually folding and unfolding, I often reflected on who might benefit from the work undertaken and how my contribution aligns within the broader landscape of educational research. Articulating this positioning proved challenging, and even at this advanced stage of writing, residual feelings of imposter syndrome persist. It is important to acknowledge, however, that imposter syndrome does not manifest uniformly across all individuals; rather, it is shaped by one's embodied experiences, cultural background, and social positioning within academic spaces. For some, like me, those from marginalised or racially minoritised backgrounds, it is compounded by systemic inequities and the implicit privileging of dominant identities (Noor et al., 2025).

### *#Killjoy moment*

*There's a flicker of doubt - will anyone take my work seriously and who will do what with it? Yet, I am here. My perspective matters. My research matters. Even if recognition is slow or uneven, this work carries weight, builds knowledge, and stakes a claim for voices that are too often overlooked. I've got to keep moving forward anyway.*

Despite this, I hope this section clearly highlights the contributions of this research paying particular attention to who this thesis might benefit. By engaging with 'data differently' (St. Pierre, 2011), exploring the material-affective nature of ECTeaching for marginalised bodies and acknowledging my own entanglement within the research assemblage (Barad, 2007), this research offers unique contributions to understanding the experiences of marginalised ECTeachers as well as contributing to the wider theoretical and methodological conversations in post-qualitative inquiry. Although I initially anticipated the teachers in this study would foreground subject English as the central focus of their teacher becomings, their sticky moments revealed, in unexpected ways, that experiences in teaching are deeply entangled with broader social, institutional and affective matters. Therefore, this research speaks to the wider educational landscape, where questions of identity, belonging and marginalisation remain pressing concerns.

One of the key contributions this thesis makes, lies in its critique of deficit-oriented thinking as it manifests across various educational and research contexts. Dominant discourses within education tend to privilege particular epistemologies, ontologies and practices as outlined in this thesis. Consequently, ECTeachers who do not align with these dominant norms may experience 'outsider-ness', particularly when such spaces remain entangled in deficit-based understandings of what it means to be a teacher. Working towards genuine inclusion within educational environments therefore requires a nuanced appreciation and understanding of the material-affective entanglements that

shape teaching and learning experiences. This thesis argues that deficit-oriented thinking must be critically interrogated with greater awareness cultivated to foster inclusivity. The discussion that follows elaborates on how this thesis contributes to such an understanding and identifies the various groups for whom this work may hold particular resonance.

### **1) Initial Teacher Education**

Working in ITE is tough. It is a complex affectively charged space, shaped by the discourses of accountability and performativity. By foregrounding the material-affective entanglements of ECTeachers, this work aligns with anti-racist and decolonial pedagogies that prioritise relationality, reflexivity and multiplicity in teacher education. It offers ways of thinking-feeling with the complexities of becoming a teacher beyond linear narratives of what it takes to be a teacher. In doing so, the research supports teacher educators in designing spaces that resist dominant, homogenous practices and instead purposes equity-oriented, affectively tuned and ethically response dispositions of teachers. But this requires work. It requires teacher educators to be more research informed around culturally responsive pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 2021) and anti-racist frameworks (Lander and Smith, 2023). It requires more resistance to the narrowing and standardising of curriculum, pedagogy and professional practice, which this research and alongside others, contribute towards creating. There are easy wins here, but also longer structural and institutional change that also needs to happen. In this sense, this research benefits more-than teacher educators but also HEIs to protect ITE provision as a space for criticality and autonomy.

While teacher educators play a critical role in shaping ECTeacher's initial encounters with the profession, mentoring extends this relational and affective work into the lived spaces of schools. Both practices exist within overlapping assemblages of people, materials, discourses, and affects that contribute to the ongoing becoming of teachers. Mentoring within schools, particularly for ECTeachers, is a deeply affective and relational practice entangled with institutional norms, policy pressures, and everyday material conditions. This thesis contributes to understandings of mentoring by troubling frameworks that reproduce deficit-oriented narratives, those that position ECTeachers as incomplete, lacking, or in need of correction to align with dominant performances of the 'competent' Subject English teacher. Mentoring can instead be understood as a site of ongoing intra-action, where affect, discourse, and materiality coalesce to shape what mentoring does and how it feels. ITE plays a pivotal role in making this happen, particularly how anti-racist educational research is circulated between universities and partnership schools. An avenue in which ITE could do this is to embed anti-racist research through mentor development programmes, taking heed of Ahmed's work on diversity work that needs to be embedded in the everyday practices and institutional structures, so equity becomes integral to professional learning and education. Furthermore, anti-racist scholarship could

become built into teacher education when it shapes core readings, case studies, assessment criteria, and structured mentor–mentee conversations. It informs policy when commitments to equity and racial justice are embedded in recruitment practices, progression and assessment frameworks, and definitions of professional standards, rather than positioned as optional or supplementary content. It shapes knowledge-sharing when ITE providers create dialogic spaces, through joint research projects, online platforms, and cross-institutional networks, where mentors and ECTeachers critically reflect on practice, interrogate normative assumptions, and co-construct more just pedagogical approaches. In these ways, anti-racist research moves beyond tokenistic intent and becomes materially and discursively embedded within the infrastructures of teacher education.

Drawing on FPNM thought, this study reimagines mentoring and ITE differently than the linear or hierarchical process it currently is, but as a reciprocal, contextually situated and ethically responsive engagement. Attending to material-affective flows allows mentors to notice what emerges in the moment - uncertainty, discomfort, joy, hesitation - and to work with these intensities as productive forces rather than as signs of deficit if we listened differently to complaints.

## **2) Policymakers**

Educational policy assemblages – ITTECF (2025), National Curriculum (2014), Teacher Standards (2012), carry powerful affective force that shape what teaching is and who a teacher can become. This thesis argues that specific education policies (discussed in the Terrains in Part 2), are underpinned by deficit-oriented and performative logics that privilege measurability, compliance and normative notions of teacher quality. These are powerful forces that circulate within the teacher education spaces, producing subjectivities while silencing others. These policies fail to recognise difference, with the slow erasure of the multiplicity of bodies, experiences, languages and cultural knowledges that constitute the teaching profession. The forces embedded within these policy frameworks orient teaching towards sameness, marginalising difference and reinforcing normative ideals of professionalism and competence. Drawing on the anti-racist framework of Lander and Smith (2023), this thesis extends their call to disrupt the racialised and cultural hierarchies embedded in educational policy. Through the ‘affective readings’, this research illuminates how these performative mechanisms are lived, felt, and contested in teacher education spaces. As such, the thesis offers policymakers new ways of engaging with policy as an *ethical and affective practice*, rather than as a purely regulatory mechanism. By attending to the material-affective entanglements of policy enactment, policymakers can begin to imagine more inclusive and responsive frameworks—ones that account for difference, relationality, and the uneven power dynamics shaping teacher identities. In doing so, this research supports the development of anti-racist and equity-oriented policy approaches as a statutory requirement for all those involved in teacher education. If it is not, educators will not

embed it. With this in mind and drawing on the Cartography in Part 2 and teachers' responses in Part 3, anti-racist practices need to be embedded in policy creation and made visible to ensure they are enacted and sustained. Otherwise, like I mentioned earlier, it will not become embedded.

### **3) Research community**

For the broader research community, this thesis offers both theoretical and methodological contributions that extend the ongoing dialogues within FPNM scholarship. The development of diffracting for affect, or 'Affraction' as a methodological practice contributes to emerging conversations about how affect can be read diffractively. In doing so, it expands the possibilities of what counts as analysis within educational research. Furthermore, the study models how post qualitative inquiry can resist deficit framings and instead produce generative understandings of teacher subjectivities. Researchers interested in critical, relational, and affect-oriented methodologies may find the conceptual tools developed here useful for exploring similar issues across educational contexts. Ultimately, this thesis contributes to the research community by demonstrating that methods themselves are not neutral tools but living, affective processes that participate in world-making. Affraction offers one such process, an emergent, experimental way of thinking-with data that opens possibilities for new, more just, and more relational ways of doing educational research.

### **4) Killjoy as a practice of resistance**

Inclusion or diversity initiatives can be resisted or rendered invisible when they are not seen as relevant to the perceived 'core business' of teaching, especially in policy contexts that prioritise performativity and standardised outcomes (Ball, 2012). As Young (1990) reminds us, the pursuit of equality often conceals a desire for sameness. In teacher education, this can appear as calls for 'consistency' or 'professional standards' that inadvertently silence difference. A feminist politics of listening resists this impulse, seeking instead to hear difference as a productive force, one that challenges, stretches, and sustains our collective practice.

This research shows that challenging these norms often requires more than following complaint protocol – it requires interruption of the smooth flow of institutional expectations. In this sense, the feminist killjoy becomes generative of this kind of work. To speak up, to insist on difference or to refuse the smoothing of norms and practices, is to perform a kind of affective resistance. The killjoy creates moments of discomfort that makes visible the otherwise invisible hierarchies and exclusionary practices.

Thus, this thesis positions killjoy as a practice and contribution in itself. Inclusion is not a static goal or checklist but an ongoing, relational and affective process of negotiation within complex, individual

assemblages. The deliberate interruptions enacted by killjoy writing and *#killjoy moments* illuminates the moments that have bothered me and gave me reasons to challenge the standard way of doing things.

In tracing these entanglements, the research contributes to a growing body of post-qualitative scholarship concerned with the ethical, material, and political dimensions of teaching and research (Braidotti, 2013; Jackson and Mazzei, 2012).

### *#Killjoy Moments*

*Equity isn't a box to tick. Disrupt. Speak. Be heard.*

This research also points towards collective possibilities for thinking, listening, and acting differently. As Ahmed (2017, p 3) reminds us, 'a feminist movement is a collective political movement'. The implications of this research therefore lie in fostering collective practices through which ECTeachers and other professionals can recognise that what often feels like a personal struggle is, in fact, shared. One possibility is the creation of solidarity spaces, whether formal or informal, where experiences of complaint can be voiced without fear of dismissal, judgement, or the expectation that they must immediately be resolved. Such spaces do not seek to remove discomfort but to remain with it, recognising complaint as a relational practice through which new understandings, connections and knowledge become possible. As Ahmed (2021, p 7) argues, 'a complaint can be a feminist pedagogy', teaching is not only about institutional life but also about how we might live and work differently within it.

Equally important is the cultivation of what I have described throughout this thesis as a feminist ear: a practice of listening that attends to affect, power, silence, and what remains difficult to say. This form of listening extends beyond methodology; it becomes an ethical and relational practice that colleagues, mentors, teacher educators, school leaders, and researchers can enact in their everyday encounters. Such attentiveness resonates with Braidotti's (2013) affirmative ethics, which understands ethical relations as emerging through our capacities to affect and be affected by others, inviting us to imagine educational communities grounded in relationality, mutual responsibility, and collective becoming.

The commitment to collective forms of listening did not remain confined to this research but became something I sought to enact throughout my doctoral journey. In my role as PGR Rep, I came to see the position as an opportunity to cultivate spaces of solidarity in which doctoral researchers could voice concerns, frustrations, and uncertainties without the expectation that every complaint required an immediate solution. Beyond formal committee meetings, these moments often emerged in everyday

conversations with fellow postgraduate researchers, academic staff, and professional services colleagues. Such encounters became opportunities to practise what I have described throughout this thesis as a feminist ear, remaining attentive to affect, recognising the significance of seemingly minor concerns, and resisting the impulse to dismiss or individualise experiences that were, in many ways, shared, reminding me that solidarity is often built through ordinary acts of listening, recognition, and remaining alongside others. In this way, the ethics that informed this research also shaped how I sought to inhabit my place within the university, demonstrating that feminist and PQ research is not only something we write about but something we endeavour to practise in our everyday academic relationships.

Finally, this study demonstrates the generative power of theory when it is shared rather than confined to academic texts. Concepts such as complaint, the feminist killjoy, affect, and relationality gave participants a language through which to recognise and make sense of experiences that had often remained unnamed. As Ahmed (2017, p 10) observes, 'theory can do more the closer it gets to the skin'. In this sense, theory becomes a collective resource that enables people to name what they are living, to find solidarity in shared experiences, and to imagine educational futures that might be otherwise. This, perhaps, is the most enduring implication of this research: not that complaint should be resolved, but that it should be heard, shared, and lived with collectively as a resource for ethical contemplation, critique, and becoming.

## 5.7 PQI Potential and Possibilities in (Teacher) Education

PQI is still an emerging practice within education as it often leaves people uncomfortable from deviating from the traditional ways of knowing through qualitative, quantitative or mixed-methods (St Pierre, 2021). PQI has 'no pre-existing research designs, methods, processes, procedures or practices', instead it begins with the 'onto-epistemological of key concepts such as ontology, epistemology, discourse and language etc' (St Pierre, 2021, p 163). As such, it becomes *different* to do research in this way and to start to think *otherwise*, but the potential and possibilities in doing so can be illuminating and create new forms of thinking about teacher education beyond the normative expectations. I have slowly shifted towards PQ ways of thinking about education and research as relational, emergent and affectively charged and this opens up possibilities and potential to thinking with this paradigm. PQI is concerned with what is becoming, rather than what is (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). I have discussed who might benefit from this research in the previous section, but I want to use this part to open up the discussion to the PQI possibilities and how I am left thinking 'and, and, and...' as this research comes to an 'end'.

One key possibility is thinking differently about bodies and how they come to matter in a given space. Bodies are not neutral and it is through PQI, we are able to pay attention to the relational, affective and material-discursive entanglements that shape how bodies are produced (Braidotti, 2013). Thinking with Sara Ahmed's work on affect becomes useful to think about the conditions of certain bodies and whose bodies come to matter, how they come to matter and perhaps why they come to matter too. PQI makes it possible to notice this through putting theory to work (St Pierre, 2019). It opens up ethical possibilities of researching differently as explored in Part 3. But it is through feminist killjoy perspective too, we must 'tell each other stories of different ways you can live, different ways you can be; predicated not on how close you get to the life you were assumed or expected to have, but on the queer wanderings of a life you live' (Ahmed, 2017, p 269)

This research has also opened up potential for further research using PQI, as I have started to think if we use PQI, what does it mean for teachers not just in Birmingham but other locations in the UK? And what does this mean for different subjects across different phases (primary, secondary, further education etc)? And what becomes possible if we listen *differently* to these teachers (and other bodies) as they experience different stages in their career? The 'and, and, and' is part of PQI, and continues to question 'our attachments that keep us from thinking and living differently' (Lather and St Pierre, 2013, p 631).

## 5.8 Listening with a Feminist Ear: Difference and the Work of Complaint

The way this research unfolded, through my own researcher becomings, through the ways participants approached me, through the shape and rhythm of our conversations, and through what lingered and stuck within them (Ahmed, 2010), all mattered in the research space. The relational and processual unfolding of these encounters became in itself, a methodology in becoming; a fluid, situated practice that challenges representational certainty and foregrounds the ethics of doing response-able research (Haraway, 2008). This methodological becoming was not simply about finding a method that 'fits' but about staying with the troubles, tensions, and frictions that emerged in the act of research. It was about listening differently, about cultivating a kind of *feminist ear* (Ahmed, 2021) attuned to the reverberations of complaint, discomfort, and care that ripple through institutional and interpersonal relations.

To become a feminist ear is to hear complaints together. As Ahmed (2021, p 6) writes,

*'You have to dismantle the barriers that stop us from hearing complaints ... hearing complaints can also be how you learn how complaints are not heard'.*

In this sense, to listen as a feminist researcher is to practice an ethics of attention to the said and unsaid, to tone and texture, to silence and refusal. To acquire a feminist ear is to become attuned to the *sharpness* of words: how they point, to whom they point, and what they risk in being spoken. The act of hearing complaints, then, is not neutral; it is a situated, ethical act that requires the researcher to notice how voices are heard or not heard within the research assemblage.

In the conversations that formed this study, all the teachers, in some way, *complained*. Sometimes the complaints were overt, expressed in frustration or exhaustion. Other times, they surfaced subtly in pauses, hesitations, laughter, or the soft edges of sentences that trailed off. To take complaint seriously is not to reduce it to negativity or resistance, but to see it as a mode of engagement, a form of *diversity work* (Ahmed, 2017) the work one does to be accommodated, to make space for oneself and others within institutions that may not wish to hear. Complaints, in this sense, are not merely expressions of dissatisfaction; they are epistemic and affective gestures that expose the workings of power.

Ahmed (2022 in *feministkilljoys* blog) reminds us that:

‘a complaint becomes a magnifying glass - so much is put into focus’.

In this research, complaints became both data and method, affect and analytic. They illuminated how teachers negotiated institutional norms, how they carried the weight of marginality, and how they enacted small resistances within constrained systems. They also revealed the limits of institutional hearing—how complaints are often judged before they are even spoken, how they are dismissed as ‘annoyance’ or ‘negativity’, how they ‘disappear’ yet continue to follow the complainer home.

As a researcher, to listen to these complaints was to enter a space of ethical risk: to be affected by what was said, to resist the urge to smooth or resolve discomfort, and to hold open the possibility that complaint might not lead to closure but to *complication*. The research thus became an exercise in collective complaint, not in the sense of grievance, but in the sense of *sharing the weight of what is hard to say*. In listening together, participants and researcher co-produced a space where complaint could be reimagined as creative, relational, and transformative.

### **#killjoy moment**

*It was important to listen and write about the feelings the participants shared with me. It was important to document what they said, minor or major. It affected them. It bothered them and it meant something.*

This approach offers valuable insights for the wider educational research community, particularly for those seeking to engage ethically and creatively with marginalised voices in post-qualitative inquiry. To listen with a feminist ear is to practice an ethics of care and accountability, one that refuses to separate methodology from relationality. It invites researchers to hear complaint not as failure but as possibility - to recognise in complaint the potential for critique, for solidarity, for imagining otherwise.

In the end, complaint became a mode of becoming. For me as a researcher but also the ECTeachers involved in this study. It is a lived experience. To do this research was to learn how to hear and how not to hear; to attend to what lingers, what is silenced, what persists. It was to realise that the work of feminist, post-qualitative research is, in many ways, the work of complaint itself: slow, affective, relational, and never quite finished.

While the figure of the feminist killjoy provided a valuable lens through which to understand moments of tension, resistance, and discomfort, it is important to recognise that the thesis was equally characterised by moments of joy. The term *killjoy* itself is pejorative, implying the spoiling or interruption of happiness; as Ahmed (2010) argues, the feminist becomes the one who is perceived as 'causing unhappiness' simply by exposing inequality. Yet this framing risks obscuring the many moments in which critical work is also deeply joyful. Throughout this research, joy emerged through conversations with people involved, directly or indirectly, shared laughter, mutual curiosity, and the reciprocity of relationships that developed over time. These encounters demonstrated that critique and joy are not mutually exclusive but can coexist in generative ways. Braidotti (2013, p. 54) argues that an affirmative ethics is concerned with 'transforming negative passions into positive ones', not by denying pain or difficulty but by cultivating the capacity to act and relate differently. Similarly, she describes joy as an empowering affect that increases our capacity to connect with others and to create new possibilities (Braidotti, 2019). The relationships formed with participants exemplified this affirmative potential: moments of openness, trust, and shared meaning-making sustained the research emotionally while also enriching its intellectual contributions. Rather than positioning the thesis solely as an account of negotiating discomfort, these experiences reveal that the work was also vigorous by the pleasures of relationality, reciprocity, and collective knowledge production. In this sense, joy does not stand in opposition to the feminist killjoy but accompanies it, reminding us that challenging injustice can itself create the conditions for more hopeful, ethical, and life-affirming ways of being together.

## Part 6 - Residual Remarks

To end feels difficult. There is always something that clings, that remains, a residue that resists tidy closure. It is not the end of my researcher and educator becoming, it is only just emerging. Following Ahmed's work, perhaps this residue is the 'stickiness' of the work itself: the emotional, affective, and institutional traces that attach to us as I (we) move through teacher education, through feminist and anti-racist commitments, through the everyday labour of care and critique. The stickiness is not simply what slows us down, but also what reminds us that teaching, educating, and research are deeply entangled with feeling, with the histories and attachments that shape who and how we can be in these spaces.

This thesis journey has meant listening with a *feminist ear* to colleagues, to students, to myself, hearing what is difficult, what resists articulation, what feels 'too much' and doing something about it. It has also meant staying with discomfort rather than resolving it too quickly, learning to read the affective atmospheres of teacher education as political, not merely personal. Perhaps this is also what it means to be a *killjoy* in education, to refuse the smooth narratives of inclusion that obscure the ongoing work of anti-racism and ethical practice. To insist on hearing what institutions would rather not hear. To stay with the 'sticky' feelings of frustration, exhaustion, hope and more that attend any attempt to make things otherwise.

Lastly, this thesis is for all teachers who continue to navigate these complexities: those who recognise the challenges we face, who voice our concerns, and who share our stories. It is a reminder that speaking up, even in small ways and within academic spaces, can spark change, whether through shifting assumptions about which bodies matter, or through showing up as our authentic selves.

These are the residues that remain: the traces of collective effort, of feeling, of care. If there is a lesson in them, it might be this, that transformation in education is slow, sticky, and affective. It requires us to keep listening, to keep noticing, and to keep insisting that teaching can be a sustainable and fulfilling practice, one that gives back as much as it asks of us - perhaps. I 'end' this thesis with a poem I wrote one morning, after living with these ideas for so long, and continuing to live with them. It is a killjoy commitment.

**To killjoy is to open a life, to make room for possibility, for chance, for change** (Ahmed, 2017, p20)

## *#KILLJOY COMMITMENT*

Times are hard  
the air stirs with slogans  
social media static.  
Flags bloom like invasive flowers,  
bright colours masking rot beneath the soil.

Hate travels through streets  
a low electric current  
people carry it in their shoulders,  
they tighten their eyes  
hold their breath  
before speaking.

Genocide  
returns without shame  
sits at the breakfast table  
sips our silence.

In playgrounds whispers form small  
Conspiracies  
In workspaces, glances are razors  
thin, polished,  
cutting the air.  
Teachers – drift uneasy in their own sentences.

And still  
I choose this dull, necessary devotion  
to be a killjoy  
to stand, to speak  
A refusal as fragile and  
as heavy  
as hope.

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## Appendices

### A1: Ethical Approval



Faculty of Health, Education & Life Sciences Research Office  
Seacole Building, 8 Westbourne Road  
Birmingham  
B15 3TN

HELS\_Ethics@bcu.ac.uk

15/Jun/2023

Ms Salya Akhtar

salya.akhtar@mail.bcu.ac.uk

Dear Salya ,

**Re:** Akhtar /#11946 /sub2 /R(A) /2023 /Jun /HELS FAEC - An Exploration of the Global Majority Teacher Becoming(s) in Early Career Teaching in Secondary English

Thank you for your application and documentation regarding the above activity. I am pleased to take Chair's Action and approve this activity.

Provided that you are granted Permission of Access by relevant parties (meeting requirements as laid out by them), you may begin your activity.

I can also confirm that any person participating in the project is covered under the University's insurance arrangements.

Please note that ethics approval only covers your activity as it has been detailed in your ethics application. If you wish to make any changes to the activity, then you must submit an Amendment application for approval of the proposed changes.

Examples of changes include (but are not limited to) adding a new study site, a new method of participant recruitment, adding a new method of data collection and/or change of Project Lead.

Please also note that the Health, Education and Life Sciences Faculty Academic Ethics Committee should be notified of any serious adverse effects arising as a result of this activity.

Should the committee feel that the activity is no longer ethically sound, it reserves the right to withdraw its approval. In the unlikely event of issues arising which would lead to this, you will be consulted.

**Keep a copy of this letter along with the corresponding application for your records as evidence of approval.**

If you have any queries, please contact HELS\_Ethics@bcu.ac.uk

If you would like to provide feedback on the ethics process, please complete the feedback form using [this link](#).

I wish you every success with your activity.

Yours Sincerely,

Mr Neil Sheasby

On behalf of the Health, Education and Life Sciences Faculty Academic Ethics Committee

## A2: Permission of Access



[REDACTED]  
Associate Dean  
Research, Innovation and Enterprise  
Faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences  
City South Campus  
Westbourne Road  
Birmingham  
B15 3TN  
[REDACTED]

27 June 2023

To Whom it may concern,

Re: Salya Akhtar

This is to certify that Salya Akhtar has approached me to ask access permission to conduct their research. I am happy to grant access upon scrutiny of relevant ethical approval/submission.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]  
Associate Dean for Research Innovation and Enterprise  
Birmingham City University

## A3: Participant Information Sheet

October 2023



### Participant Information Sheet

#### **An Exploration of the Global Majority Teacher Becoming(s) in Early Career Teaching in Secondary English**

Early Career Teachers (ECTs) are entering a profession flooded with recruitment and retention issues. There are significant concerns regarding workload and the well-being of teachers. Teachers from the Global Majority (GM) face these very issues, but it is magnified by other matters related to their identity, making it a much more challenging and complicated space for them. This research aims to explore the lived experience of being a Global Majority Early Careers Teacher in English.

1. Research Aim: **An exploration of the lived experiences of Global Majority ECT in subject English.**
2. The purpose of this information sheet is to inform you about the project so that you can decide whether you want to take part. It would be beneficial for the research to involve different genders, ages, and cultural backgrounds, which will allow a rich sample of ECT's experiences.
3. You, as an Early Career English teacher, have been asked to participate in this research because you are considered an expert in teaching English at secondary level. You have valuable knowledge and experience that needs to be considered when exploring the Early Career Teacher experience. Some of you are part of the Global Majority, where you identify as either Black, Asian, Brown, dual-heritage, indigenous to the global south, or racialised as 'ethnic minorities' and this is important but so are the views of all as you will identify as a teacher of English at secondary level.
4. Your participation is voluntary to all aspects of this research and non-participation is entirely your choice and will not have any adverse effects on your access to your professionalism or practice.
5. You can choose to consent to:  
**(1) Informal Conversations with me**  
**AND / OR**  
**(2) Contributing online using Padlet to share your experiences.**  
Entries are anonymous and should be easy for you to access through a URL Link or QR code.

If you are happy to provide informed consent, then you will be presented with a consent form which you will sign and date prior to informal conversations and Padlet entries being completed.

6. All information collected will be anonymised, remain strictly confidential and stored safely outlined by GDPR and BCU information management.
7. You have the right to provide informed consent, the right to anonymity and data protection. Interview data can be withdrawn, up to the point of data analysis completion, which is 31<sup>st</sup> August 2024, where all data will be anonymised. Padlet entries will be anonymous hence identification of individual responses will not be possible, meaning data withdrawal will not be possible.
8. Should you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact my supervisors:  
[REDACTED]
9. Researcher's contact information  
Salya Akhtar, [salya.akhtar@mail.bcu.ac.uk](mailto:salya.akhtar@mail.bcu.ac.uk)

## AN EXPLORATION OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GLOBAL MAJORITY EARLY CAREER TEACHERS IN ENGLISH



**Global Majority refers to anyone who is Black, Asian, Brown, dual- heritage, indigenous to the global south, and those racialised as ‘ethnic minorities’**

### **Why is it an issue?**

ECTs are entering a profession marked by recruitment and retention issues. There are significant concerns regarding workload and the well-being of teachers. Teachers from the Global Majority face these very issues, but this can be magnified by other matters related to their identity, making it a much more challenging and complicated space for them. This research aims to explore the lived experience of being an English ECT from a Global Majority background.

### **ARE YOU PART OF THE GLOBAL MAJORITY AND AN ENGLISH ECT? IF SO, I WOULD BE INTERESTED IN YOUR EXPERIENCES**

#### **What does it involve?**

1) Informal interviews across the two years as an ECT (either in school or your choice) (approx. 2 interviews a year)

#### **AND/OR**

2) Your input of your experiences of being an ECT English teacher on Padlet. All entries are anonymous and would encourage honest and open conversations about what it's like.

Monthly/Termly contributions would be great.

### **Why is it beneficial to take part?**

(1) Share your own experiences of being an ECT and contribute to conversations about the lived experiences of Global Majority teachers.

(2) Through your shared stories, we can offer alternative ways of thinking about GM teachers.

(3) Be involved in a project that aims to disrupt, decentre, decolonise and re-think practice in Early Career Teaching.

**Project Lead: Salya Akhtar**

**Contact: [salya.akhtar@mail.bcu.ac.uk](mailto:salya.akhtar@mail.bcu.ac.uk)**

Get in touch if you are interested in being a participant

## A5: Participant Consent Form

October 2023

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



**BIRMINGHAM CITY**  
University

**Study Title:** – Global Majority Teacher  
Becoming(s) in Early Career Teaching in subject  
English

Initial box

*Name of Researcher: Salya Akhtar*

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| 1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet (October 2023) for this study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.                                                                                                             |  |
| 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw without giving any reason and without my legal rights being affected. I have up until <u>31<sup>st</sup> August 2024</u> to withdraw my data as beyond this date, my data will have been processed and so cannot be withdrawn. |  |
| 3. I understand that relevant sections of my data collected during the study may be looked at by individuals from Birmingham City University and from regulatory authorities where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records.      |  |
| 4. I agree for the information I provide to be used as anecdotal evidence through anonymised quotes in research reports and publications. Any personal data will be anonymised and kept confidential.                                                                                                            |  |
| 5. I agree to take part in the Padlet part of the research. A QR code will be shared for you to access and contribute towards.                                                                                                                                                                                   |  |
| 6. I agree to take part in the Face-to-Face informal conversations (twice a year)<br>Please provide email address so can arrange a time and place:<br><br>_____                                                                                                                                                  |  |

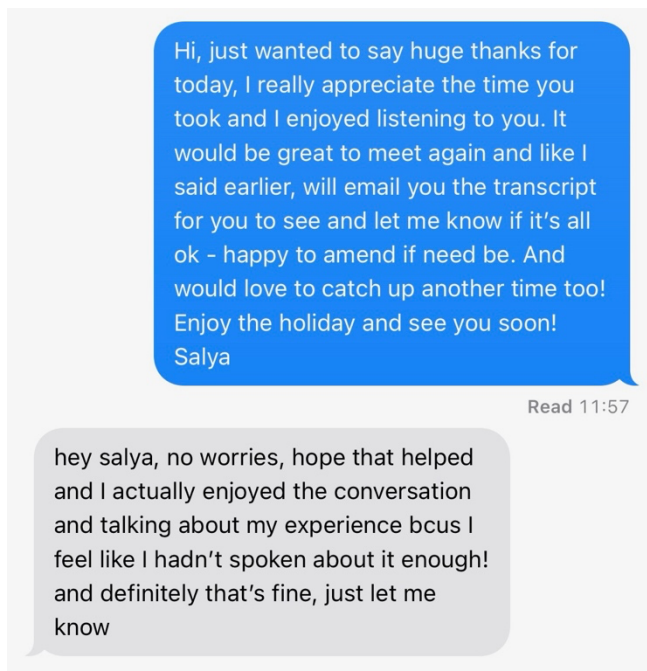
**Name of Participant**

**Date**

**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_

## A6: Iqraa message



## A7: Kareena message



## A8: Annie message

**From:** xxx <[xxxxx@mail.bcu.ac.uk](mailto:xxxxx@mail.bcu.ac.uk)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, May 9, 2024 6:54:02 PM  
**To:** Salya Akhtar <[Salya.Akhtar@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:Salya.Akhtar@bcu.ac.uk)>  
**Subject:** Re: Meeting Transcript

Hello Salya,

Thank you for asking. The meeting went well but cannot retake at this point. I am happy with the transcript. Please let me know if you need arrange a new meeting in the future.

Best regards,  
xxxxx

Sent from [Outlook for iOS](#)

---

**From:** Salya Akhtar <[Salya.Akhtar@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:Salya.Akhtar@bcu.ac.uk)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, May 9, 2024 6:51:47 PM  
**To:** xxxxx <[xxxxxxxxx@mail.bcu.ac.uk](mailto:xxxxxxxxx@mail.bcu.ac.uk)>  
**Subject:** Re: Meeting Transcript

Hi xxxx

Hope you're ok. How did the meeting go today? Can you let me know if you are you happy with the transcript of conversation I sent to you on Tuesday. I can make changes if you want to.

Let me know please, hope you're enjoying the sunshine!

Thanks  
Salya

## A9: Asad message

**From:** xxxxx <xxxxxx@mail.bcu.ac.uk>  
**Date:** Thursday, 11 July 2024 at 22:32  
**To:** Salya Akhtar <Salya.Akhtar@bcu.ac.uk>  
**Subject:** Re:

No problem Salya,

10am on Monday sounds amazing. I'll let you know if anything changes for any reason.

I'm more than happy to share my experiences and carve the way for other Asians/Muslims looking to join this profession In'Sha'Allah.

Jazak'Allah for your kind words, it really means a lot.

Kind regards,  
xxxx

---

**From:** Salya Akhtar <[Salya.Akhtar@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:Salya.Akhtar@bcu.ac.uk)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, July 11, 2024 10:29:17 PM  
**To:** xxxx <[xxxx@mail.bcu.ac.uk](mailto:xxxx@mail.bcu.ac.uk)>  
**Subject:** Re:

Thanks xxxx,

We can meet about 10-11 – won't take too much of your time if you need to get things done.

What we can do is have this initial conversation and then if you want to share some more, we can meet again. It will be good to just talk!

Let me know where would be best to meet – I'm quite flexible انشاءالله

If there is anything you want to share in particular then please do! It should be guided by you and your experiences and we can go from there.

So glad people like you are in the profession!

---

**From:** xxxx <[xxxx@mail.bcu.ac.uk](mailto:xxxx@mail.bcu.ac.uk)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, July 11, 2024 10:24:38 PM  
**To:** Salya Akhtar <[Salya.Akhtar@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:Salya.Akhtar@bcu.ac.uk)>  
**Subject:** Re:

Hi Salya,

Thank you for your message.

I am available 10am on Monday if that works for you. How long do you need me for as I have to be somewhere in the afternoon. If it's best to have a few hours to get sufficient amount of data I am happy to do it when I'm off (the week after). Let me know what you think!

I am more than happy to help out especially with a subject that is close to home.

Kind regards,  
xxxx