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Learning and gender in everyday life

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the learning that happens in everyday life, beyond the formal learning environments of schools, colleges, and universities or even beyond community and adult education. It draws on posthuman concepts of 'learning affect' and 'new worlds' to conceptualize this as 'invisible education', affective and transformative, unrecognized but powerful and formative. Such invisible education has a powerful impact on formations of gender, class, race, sexuality, and disability and is thus a key field of enquiry with important consequences for gender equality. The paper will draw on a diverse range of grant funded qualitative, research projects to focus on such invisible education and to explore how diverse iterations of the category 'woman' are learnt in everyday life. The research includes longitudinal research with activists. interviews with young women in low paid work, and interviews and participant observations with women living in a women's refuge. Most of the research was undertaken in the UK, but the paper also draws on insights from comparative research conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Beirut. The paper concludes that everyday learning shows that 'woman' is not a fixed binary category, and that women drew on 'the willful' and on invisible education to resist gendered categorisations.

Background

Invisible Education

In Quinn, 2024, I introduce and develop the idea of 'invisible education' as in the learning that is always happening in daily life. As a concept invisible education is not intended to replace or supersede 'informal learning', or the scholarship that goes with it (such as Hager and Halliday, 2006) but it is potentially more expressive and generative. It carries within it the idea that this is learning that is unseen, unrecognized, and often purposefully denied as it threatens the dominant order. 'To call it invisible education, rather than simply, 'informal learning' is a polemical act, underlining its force, but also suggesting a category that is more hidden, diffuse, and open-ended and open to fresh insights' (Quinn, 2024, p. 2) It is also education in the sense

that it is comprehensive and formative in the way formal education is meant to be, but often is not. Moreover, whilst informal or non-formal education measure themselves against the formal, invisible education breaks those bounds altogether. I theorise the concept using Stewart's (2007) idea of 'learning affect' and Barad's (2007) of 'new worlds'. Stewart sees learning affects as not so much as 'forms of signification, or units of knowledge as they are expressions of ideas or problems performed as a kind of involuntary and powerful learning and participation' (2007, p. 40). Thus 'invisible education is an involuntary but meaningful response that can happen when engaged in everyday life and activities and the questions and problems they provoke' (Quinn, 2024, p. 8). Barad claims: 'Matter is agentive and intra-active-generative not merely in the sense of bringing new things into the world but in the sense of bringing forth new worlds' (2007, p. 170). I argue that these new worlds which are constantly being created in life are learning worlds suffused with learning affect, so that the potential for invisible education is always immanent. As this paper also demonstrates, invisible education is not always a positive force, it may also be a source of misinformation, or a carrier of destructive practices and values. The idea of invisible education springs from a critical posthumanist perspective which sees all forms of matter as vibrant, existing in relationality and not distinct. Rather than being composed of bounded entities, with humans as fundamentally different, superior and at the top, the world is understood in terms of 'agentic assemblages' (Bennett, 2010, p. 23-24). 'Assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts. …Each member and proto-member of the assemblage has a certain vital force…but there is also…an agency of the assemblage.' As well as deconstructing 'the human' as neither normal nor essential, but a figure formulated through a white, masculine. lens, and historically excluding others such as women and slaves; critical posthumanists also prioritise engagement with the structures and inequalities produced by humanism; including formulations of gender (see Bozalek, and Zembylas, 2016). This paper proceeds from these theoretical perspectives.

Gender and the everyday

The place of learning in everyday life has not been greatly foregrounded in lifelong learning literature. Although adult educational initiatives in museums, pubs, football grounds and many other non-educational realms have often figured (see for example Evans, Kurantowicz, and Lucio-Villegas, 2022) the everyday life of people in the home or in nature is less examined. The everyday is not absent altogether. There is a rich body of work on adult literacy that pioneers the focus on the everyday (see Hamilton, 2006, Jones, 2018). Activism is another form of everyday activity that has its own body of literature, including social movement learning (see Hall, Clover, Crowther & Scandrett, 2011) and community activism (see Clancy, Harman, and Jones, 2022). Nevertheless, there is scope for much more research on the everyday in the lifelong learning field. Other gaps also exist. Sociologists have long had an interest in everyday life, (see Neal and Murji, 2015) but sociologists of education much less so. Posthuman researchers in education are very interested in gender (see for example Taylor and Hughes. 2016) but have paid little attention to lifelong learning. All in all, there is space to look at the everyday learning of adults through a posthuman lens. This paper occupies this space and specifically diffracts it through the lens of gender. In doing so it recognizes that the everyday is not an undifferentiated space, a blank upon which gender and learning is written. As Hamilton (2006, p. 135) cogently puts it:

the everyday world is by no means a wild moorland of learning …. It is colonised by powerful knowledge-making institutions and practices that jostle with one another to

organise and enclose aspects of social practice: the mass media, medical and legal practices, religious organisations, businesses and consumers, workplaces, the family. Education is just one specialised domain within this landscape.

Ways of thinking about gender spring initially from everyday diverse engagement in this striated landscape, and not from abstract academic theory; although the theory may then illuminate what is happening on the ground. The everyday comes first, generates ideas and debate: theory is lived before it ends up on the page. Christina Sharpe's *Ordinary Notes* (2023) for example shows how the ordinary everyday generates openings and closings, in this case around blackness and gender and produces new theoretical understandings. Both femininities and masculinities are shaped by race, colonial history, class, disability, sexuality, age and their intersectionalities. Feminist new materialists demonstrate how gender is also shaped by being part of the material world and in intra-activity with all forms of non-human matter including animals, plants, trees, metals, stone, water, weather, machines, things, digital environments (see for example Bennett, 2010). This way of understanding the world is prefigured by indigenous thinkers, even if this is not always acknowledged (see Tallbear, 2017). Indeed, posthumanists still have much to learn from scholars in the Global South such as Accioly (2022) who draw on ancestry and indigenous ways of knowing. In respect to femininities and masculinities, they both emerge from and construct everyday lives including but not restricted to the following matters: the spectrum of violence including state-sanctioned violence, sexual and racial harassment, rape and domestic abuse, fights for control of our own bodies, the continuum of sexuality including lesbian, bisexual, trans and non-binary lives and the compulsory nature of heterosexuality, shaping structures of class, movements of capital and poverty, colonization, incarceration, war and forced migration, inequalities of labour at work and in the home. The paper takes the position that gender is something that is learnt primarily in everyday life, although it may be re-enforced and reproduced by practices in formal educational contexts, or sometimes challenged and reshaped.

Through everyday life the gendered category of 'woman' is perceived, learned, and lived differently. Judith Butler (1990, p.25) famously argued that 'there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender', and, as this paper will show, neither is gender stable nor unitary. Lange and Young (2019) is one of the few papers in the adult education field that addresses the significant role of informal learning in producing gender, focusing on the issue of violence. However, their emphasis is on dominant and stereotypical constructions of masculinity and femininity and their effects. In contrast, this paper will argue that everyday living does not essentialise womanhood, but rather exposes 'woman' as a category with multiple meanings. 'Gender-critical' feminists claim that lived experience is binary, biological, and immutable, and that not proceeding from this position threatens to undo women's rights, to deny the reality of women's bodies and to erase lesbian experience (see Jeffreys, 2014). However, when everyday life is explored, being a woman emerges as embodied yet anything but fixed; even though the consequences are very often negative. Paying attention to the embodiment of women does not end in essentialism, as I shall explore. Being a man is no more biologically straightforward, but this paper will focus on the category 'woman' and on different iterations of that category. Invisible education emerging in everyday life can help to both form and shift ways of doing gender. In this paper I will draw on some examples from my research. The new theorization of invisible education enables the data to be explored in a different way. The paper is also a new engagement with the research data because it diffracts it through a lens of gender, to explore how gender and learning intermingle in everyday life.

Learning the category 'woman' in everyday life

In this part of the paper, I will use the data to demonstrate how an important part of invisible education in everyday life is learning diverse iterations of the category 'woman'. Simultaneously these gendered categorizations shape what can be learnt and how. These categories are embodied and affective and formed in relationality to others including non-human forms of matter.

'Woman' as a politicised category

My first exemplar considers how 'woman' comes to be consciously politicised through everyday engagement with activism. In research funded by British Academy/Leverhulme, *The Significance and Survival of Tent City University* (Quinn, 2016), I focused on the Occupy Movement and in particular on Tent City University, the university set up by the Occupy movement at its camp in central London in 2011/12. Inspired by the protests in Tahir Square, Egypt, Occupy Wall Street began in 2011, followed by other protest camps, including Occupy London. This was established by St Paul's Cathedral on the edge of the financial district and included the informal learning space Tent City University and the associated building the Bank of Ideas. The aim of Occupy was to draw attention to the fact that 1% of people hold the majority of the world's wealth. Tent City University attempted to deconstruct the traditional university by being open to all, having a free library and employing a range of speakers and workshops, some led by academics, some by activists and participants, including homeless people. Occupy has hardly been ignored by adult educators. Many papers consider its significance as an alternative form of pedagogical experimentation (see Neary and Amsler, 2012, Earle, 2014 and Hall, 2012). In contrast my research took place some years after the camp had folded and my focus was whether and in what ways the alternative university still lived on in the lives of its participants, and how the university had been part of their overall lifelong learning lives.

I conducted a series of long in-depth interviews over two years with six men and two women who had been involved in Occupy London. Three of the men and the two women were interviewed twice. They were aged from early twenties to late seventies, all white from both working class and middle-class backgrounds. All but two were originally from the UK, but there was a lot of international mobility within the sample. There was no aim to gain a representative sample. but the sample was purposive in enabling age diversity to be explored and was somewhat typical of the white male domination of Occupy. The project also explored their ongoing activities via attending physical meetings, tracking websites and blogs, studying campaigning activities internationally and nationally, and reading academic publications, curricula, reports, and policy documents and other material provided by participants. In tune with the activist practices revealed in initial interviews the research moved from an initial life history approach to one which was more concerned with relations and networks. Ethics was an interesting question as I was researching with people who might potentially be involved in activities the state would want to monitor and possibly punish. I anonymised participants, but they would have been glad to use their own names because they were proud of what they did, and they also assumed their details were on file. In analysing the data, I used a posthuman approach thinking in terms of epistemological, symbolic, and material 'trails' or waves across life, these trails were not fixed, were affective and symbolic as well as physical, and every participant might pass along them at different moments. Each trail was associated with different ways of thinking about learning and knowledge. The trails identified were: Formalised Activist Classrooms, Activism as a Way of Life, Academic Activism, Activism as a Philosophical Practice and Disillusioned Retreat from Activism.

In this paper I will focus on the trail of Activism as a Way of Life*,* and data gathered with Anna, a white woman in her sixties, over the process of two long interviews, a

total of six hours one face to face in her home, one on the telephone and documents and links to social media she had shared with me. Learning to be a woman and what kind of woman could not be separated from her everyday life and her activism. Her invisible education about gender was shaped by a discourse of 'care' from an early age. but this was not individualized or restricted to the home, but rather to communities both local and global: 'It's part of my history and what I learnt as a child to have a social conscience and it's also my reality'. In a striking image she also presented it as embodied and as matrilineal: 'it came in with my mother's milk'. Anna understood her life in terms of 'waves' across time and place and in relation to global others. She had learned how to conceptualise inequalities through an ongoing process of activism across her life, refining her perspectives so that gender as well as every other aspect of her life became consciously politicised. This process included entanglement in a dangerous group and being involved in formal and non-formal education at various points. Intergenerational chains with other women were a key motif: learning from older women in the civil rights movement in the USA, passing her knowledge on to younger women in Occupy, and ever gaining more sophisticated understandings through everyday learning.

> JQ: So, do you think the things that you've learnt across your life have all mainly been in informal situations?
>
> Anna: Oh absolutely! Without a doubt1 Yeah!

Anna deconstructed the mode of the male activist pedagogue, which could slip into mastery and domination as I saw in action in one of my other research participants. In Occupy she felt her embodiment as an older woman was an important corrective to the dominance of young men: 'I was pleased to fight back, just by my presence you know, my voice'. In the aftermath of Occupy she insisted on dialogue in activist events, on breaking down hierarchies in meetings, on producing affective networks:

> So, you go, and you sit there passively whilst they've got twenty-five speakers boring the pants off you and you're standing in the wind and the cold…the beauty of getting people together is being able to talk to eachother and not be passive victims of other people's speeches (laughs) which don't do anything, they don't create a network, they don't create human contact.
>
> (Interview 1)

Whilst active in global movements like Occupy, she was always aware of the political nature of everyday domestic struggles. One of the documents she shared was a YouTube video Angry Birds where she and a sister dressed as chickens and lobbied the Houses of Parliament to protest the government's privatised regime of assessments for disability benefits. This was inspired by the injustices experienced by their third sister who is mentally ill, but she also attributed the pranksterish approach to the influence of fluid and creative aspects of Occupy. Her activism and her experience of gender seemed inextricably linked to affective invisible education; to the questions and problems generated in everyday life.

Demet Gülçiçek (2022) has developed the idea of a 'mood of commitment' when thinking about women's activism, doing so through an analysis of archival material from the women's movement in Turkey in the early twentieth century. It is a useful idea in thinking through activism as a form of invisible education which includes learning about gender. She defines it as:

commitment as a mood, an affective lens, a dedication for a greater cause *both* as a highly uplifting and stimulating mood, *and* as a stable rhythm enveloping those engaged in a certain political movement (online first).

One of her important insights is that this is simultaneously an excitable mood but also produces a form of 'inertia', in that it does not go away. The notion of mood is not divorced from intellectual and ideological belief, but rather it explains how these beliefs can be sustained and circulated in everyday life. As such it fits well with my theorization of invisible education as one of ongoing learning affects and new learning worlds. It also chimes with my research finding that activism does not end when the protest does but rather survives through what I call 'imagined social capital' (Quinn, 2010), the benefits of symbolic links with those we may not know personally or who may even be fictive or imagined. For Anna, Occupy lived on as a shared mood of joy, a demonstration that politics could be otherwise, which she could draw on for solace and inspiration. Gülçiçek notes 'how an urgent call for commitment sticks around and lingers' (online first) and indeed Anna is never not in the mood to care about equality and to fight for it in her everyday life. As she says, 'I was brought up with the feeling that you stood up for things that were right, and you fought against things that were wrong.'. Gülçiçek discusses how different forms of activism circulate around 'objects of desire'. For Anna these objects of desire are attuned to the bodies and the senses:

Anna: We fight for bread, but we fight for roses too…it always meant a lot to me… you need the roses because I know from my experience if you don't have them things get very…ugly.

JQ: And what are the roses for you, you know in life, what would you say?

Anna: Well art, pleasure, nature, arts of all kinds um…love. things like that

JQ: Yeah!

Anna They are the important things, what we want, what we fight for! (Laughter)

(Interview 2)

Feeling and fighting are joked together in her activism and in her doing of gender.

'Woman' as a punitive category

Here I will draw on research conducted in a women's refuge in an English city with women, children, and staff (Quinn and Blandon, 2014). The focus of the small study, funded by Youth Music was the engagement by women and children with music sessions delivered by the community music organization Plymouth Music Zone, and the question was whether and how engaging in music might help in transition from domestic abuse. The research involved six observations of music sessions including six mothers and ten children, in depth interviews with four mothers including one who had been rehoused, two children aged nine and twelve, four refuge workers, the music leader and a professional filmmaker who had made a film about the music project. All but one of those who participated were white. As I shall discuss, the difficulty in finding a greater number of participants was revealing in itself. Ethical issues were at the forefront of working with such vulnerable people, especially ensuring confidentiality so that no-one would know where the refuge was or who was staying in it. This could very easily be a matter of life or death as all the women had been subject to violence. Women housed in the refuge had learnt about gender in their everyday practices in the home. Woman was a punitive category which led to abuse, confinement, ridicule, restrictions, and it was inextricably linked to negative constructions of mothering. As one woman said in interview: 'you've gone through a life where you're always in the wrong and always being told what you are doing is

wrong'. Being a woman was a source of punishment and censure: in the home always being a woman to blame, by agencies like the police and social services always subject to scrutiny and to choices made on their behalf about where to go, where to live, what to do. Even in the refuge, there was censure for not being the right kind of mother, for spending all day in their nightclothes, not engaging with their children in the 'right' way, and not wanting to come out of their rooms or not being able to. It seemed the women could not win, as they were critiqued for not being playful enough, but also for not keeping control of their children. Indeed, they were even punished by their own children, as the children took out their own distress on their mothers. To add to the punishment women also criticised eachother for their parenting, or for being a woman from a minority ethnic group who did not speak English. In a revealing configuration refuge staff called the women 'pyjama mums'. Clothes have what Bennett (2010) calls 'thing power' and are significant objects in the production of 'woman.' Pomerantz & Raby (2020) for example analyse the wearing of an elite school hoodie as part of the school-body-hoodie assemblage producing 'smart girlhood'. The refuge-body- pyjama assemblage seems more ambiguous, on the one hand producing 'punishable motherhood' where the women are cast as abject by observers, but also perhaps, producing the women as what Sara Ahmed calls 'willful subjects' (2014) who defied expectations that they would be compliant and respectable. I will return to this notion of 'the willful' later.

For all the reasons above, women did not readily engage with the music sessions or with the research. It took a great deal of sensitivity on the part of both the music leader and the researcher to encourage participation and to respect withdrawal. However, for those able to join the sessions the intervention of music into this rather toxic stew helped to release some possible reformulations of how to be a woman. Being a woman and mother could mean dancing with your children and making noise in your everyday life. It could mean joyful abandonment and a new learning world. The things, the house, form part of a new assemblage, one where the body is free not cowed.:

> we have a little bit of a samba dance in the lounge…we play with the saucepans, just messing around, things we would never have been allowed to do and it does give you a real buzz like we laugh so much when we're doing it…

(Interview with a woman who had been rehoused)

For some learning how to incorporate music into their lives helped to change their perception of their positioning giving access to a potential reformulation of gender and a transition away from the punitive category.

> Has anything changed for you because of these sessions?"

> Oh yeah definitely, definitely because you do get more confidence and you do feel more relaxed and do feel more positive when you leave.

(interview)

However, the pull of the punitive category extends to self-punishment; not that this should ever imply the women sought or enjoyed the abuse they had suffered. Few women were able to summon up the energy to take part in the music sessions, even when they saw they were having a beneficial effect.

Women who attended the sessions were never rude to me but would never start a conversation either. Afterwards, in the interviews it was said that some mothers may lack confidence, are depressed, or don't trust anyone.

(Observation notes)

This perhaps is the opposite of the mood of commitment, this is the mood of fatalism which is equally profound and long lasting; a sense that punishment for being 'woman' was inexorable and inevitable. As well as being shaped by formations of gender they were also homeless, had no jobs and not much chance of one with the demands and costs of childcare. The punitive and fatalistic nature of their gendered positioning was social as well as patriarchal and they learnt this lesson all day every day.

'Woman' as a repudiated category

Here I wish to turn to a study which helped to map the everyday lives of young working -class people aged 16-18 in low paid jobs in Southwest England. The project funded by the European Social Fund sought to explore what had happened to these young people once they had left school with few qualifications and entered what were then known in the UK as 'jobs without training' (Quinn, Lawy and Diment, 2008,). These are the jobs that keep everyday life going, for example in shops, cafes, building sites, but are low waged and considered expendable, along with those who perform them. Although the 'jobs without training' category was removed when young people were forced to stay in education or training until eighteen, these jobs still exist, young working-class people are still doing them and negative attitudes towards these young people persist (Quinn, 2018), making the study continuously relevant. The project was conducted in collaboration with what was then the career advisory service Connexions. 114 young people were interviewed once, and then 68 interviewed again over the space of one year by Connexions staff trained by the research team: 27 interviews were conducted in person by the project research assistant, with some young people interviewed twice over a year, plus a focus group with young people. All the participants were white and mostly, but not all, from working class families. There were obvious concerns that the young people might be inhibited in their interviews with careers staff, but in practice they were equally frank about their negative feelings about formal schooling and career pathways as they were with the researcher.

The area covered by the research included seaside towns and rural areas and here I want to focus on gender and invisible education in a rural context. For Jane a young white rural woman interviewed twice, who lived and worked with her family in accommodation leased from farm owners, 'woman' as feminine was 'the other'. Jane was *not* the girl who was obedient and successful at school, the middle-class woman in the big house where the farmer lived, the colleague's urban girlfriend who came down from London sometimes to join in the shooting of pheasants. As far as formal education went, Jane sensed she had learnt nothing, all her lasting lessons took the form of education in the outdoors generating skills that would be invisible to her teachers: 'they just went on and on at me. I just wanted to be on the farm, outdoors'. The family in the big house were evoked in affectionate terms that also suggest she found them somewhat ludicrous and effete: 'that's them in their big house, eating their peaches'; incapable perhaps of engaging with the rigours of everyday life. She repudiated all these ways of being a woman in favour of being a strong working-class girl with skills and affinities learnt outside and on the farm. The agentic assemblage of body-land-animal created ways of being in the world. Instead of girlhood networks her relations were with animals:

I got this sheep dog.

A collie?

Yeah, it's got a long coat actually and she's eating absolutely everything.

Will you keep her as a working dog?

Yes, she's quite good actually. I am trying to train her and she's not too bad. I've seen her (another farmer's) dogs, and ours is nearly as good as most of hers. At least she comes to us, that's the main thing, isn't it? That's what you want. Most of hers just clear off.

(Jane, interview)

Her pride lay in mastery of skills associated with the outdoors, dog training and beating for shoots, not in any trappings of femininity. On one level her repudiation of the category woman was an outlet for her, an escape from expectations that did not fit her, or the environment in which she carried out her everyday life. However, the classed nature of her gendered positioning was not easily transgressed. She had worked for a time at a fish farm, low paid and unpleasant work where she had contracted a disease, and having no job security, lost her job because she was unable to work. The invisible education that happened every day on the farm and the capitals that Jane accrued in her particular occupation of the category woman were not worth much on the open marketplace: capitals are only worth anything when they are legitimated. Yet it seemed there was still no way she would give up this invisible education in favour of compliant middle-class femininity and formal qualifications.

Willful women

In all the categories of 'woman' discussed here, despite their diversity, there seems to be a strain of Sara Ahmed's (2014) 'willfulness'; suggesting that these iterations are never fixed and that living women with bodies (whether born or made female) resist as well as live everyday categorisations. All the women discussed here have been characterized as willful by others, by activist comrades, by teachers, by partners and authorities, and in turn they need to own this willfulness in order to resist.

Willfulness is used to explain how subjects become the cause of their own unhappiness. To claim to be willful or to describe oneself or one's stance as willful is to claim the very word that has historically been used as a technique for dismissal.

(Ahmed, 2017, p77)

Owning the willfulness in turn produces backlash, as Ahmed has demonstrated with her work on 'the feminist killjoy' (2017) and as feminists like myself learn every day. In a presentation on learning and activism I referenced Ahmed's feminist killjoy manifesto:

I am willing to cause unhappiness.

I am not willing to laugh at jokes designed to cause offense

I am not willing to get over histories that are not over

I am not willing to be included if inclusion means being included in a system that is unjust, violent and unequal

(2017, p 258-263)

I also used a photograph of an older woman on the Women's March on Washington after the 2016 election. She was holding a banner declaring 'ninety, nasty and not giving up'; inverting Trump's comment that Hilary Clinton was 'such a nasty woman'. As an older woman myself, I claimed this as something to aspire to. This seemed to provoke a rage in a senior colleague, expressed as a desire for order and compliance. 'Why would anyone want to be nasty?' he chastised. The cultural provenance of the banner and its gendered history was made invisible, and the willful subject called out for transgressing the norms of gender and age.

On a global stage willful women are perceived as dangerous, disruptive, fatal, whether it be to the amour propre of an incel (Ging and Siapera, 2019) or to the despotic reign of a religious dictatorship. Sometimes claiming the right to be an everyday citizen going about her business is seen as willful and categorically denied. Nevertheless, there is always what Braidotti (2013) calls 'potentia', which disrupts and stops women being held in place totally. This potentia is not an essence of biological womanhood, it is the capacity for energy, resistance, and vitality to act as well as be acted upon that exists despite gender iterations and even catastrophic social collapse. Having conducted research in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Beirut, I observed that in the aftermath of civil war women took the danger and were sometimes able to transpose this into invisible education and potentia. For example, Bosnian women took the terrible lessons they had learnt daily through the war, where an estimated 50.000 women were raped, and took place at the forefront of global campaigns teaching how rape functions as a weapon of war. Feeling that their suffering was invisible they insisted that it was recognized and that others should learn from it. Women in Beirut were leaders in the everyday artistic life of the city, which after the civil war and even after the huge explosion of 2020 was a global cultural hub of music, graffiti, and art. It is important not to romanticize this. Women are still being raped as a weapon of in war, Ukraine being the latest example. Graffiti cannot uphold a society in terminal collapse such as Lebanon. However, denying potentia altogether is distorting too. Women can be disruptors of the established order, dangerous on their own terms, as well as highly vulnerable to the continuing volatility of their everyday contexts. In Quinn (2024) I posit the notion of future mutabilities to replace the liberal story of social mobility. The emphasis on social mobility in formal educational contexts in fact helps to entrench inequalities as an individualistic schema where a few may move up the ladder, but the rules of the game stay the same. Social mobility is a feelgood fantasy, whilst future mutabilities, which take into account the power of invisible education, 'stays with the trouble' (Haraway, 2016). It acknowledges that things are always changing and that there is a possibility of working with change for the good, but only by facing up to difficulty and the possibility of the bad. Gender and its meanings change and multiply, but women are neither the controllers of the narratives, nor their helpless victims.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that it is possible to trace everyday learning that does not fit into the accepted bounds of Education yet is profoundly educational in that it teaches formative lessons and offers new capacities. It theorises this as 'invisible education' using a posthumanist perspective that combines Stewart's (2007) 'learning affects and Barad's (2007) 'new worlds'. It suggests that one of the things that is learnt through invisible education is gender. Taking the category 'woman' as a focus and using a range of qualitative research data the paper demonstrates how everyday life configures this category as multiple and contradictory, as well as affective and embodied. The paper traces how this invisible education can be a process of accretion. For example, through activism woman was lived as a politicised category. Gender inequalities were experienced every day, and this was translated through activism with both

global others and with intimate family members into refined perspectives and politicised understandings. Women escaping from abuse had learned to understand 'woman' as a punitive category. This generated fatalism, but some used their engagement with music to build transitions, feeling their way to a different future. They drew upon the affective and embodied power of music to reconfigure woman and mother, rather than learning new formal skills. Invisible education can also be something hidden and treasured: a refuge and a skill set that no-one knows about, such as the education the rural young woman gained in her intra-activities with nature, where normative femininity was a repudiated category. In all these instances such invisible education was not valorised by wider society or even seen, and its potential for progressing gender equality could be considered both significant and dormant. Whilst there is no essential womanhood, living life as a woman also produced all these research participants as what Ahmed (2014) calls 'willful subjects', subject to the will of others but also responding with a potentially liberating willfulness. This too needs to be recognized in thinking about gender and everyday life. These diverse categories of 'woman' discussed here are not exhaustive, there are many others that help shape everyday life and are shaped by it. Understanding this process of invisible education, affective and constantly being regenerated, is key to exploring gender and lifelong learning.

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