

**Literate in Many Tongues: An Exploration of the Textual Practices in  
the Lives of Yemeni Women.**

By

Khadeegha Alzouebi

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

At

The University of Sheffield

School of Education

July, 2008

## ABSTRACT

This life history study explores the textual practices of four Yemeni women from Northtown, a town in the North of England. The study takes a social and ideological view of literacy, one that regards literacy as a social practice occurring within ‘webs of people and institutions’ (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2000:14). It explores the ways in which literacy and language practices are linked to the womens’ lives, social worlds and to their narratives. I have used life history methods that draw from feminism, critical theory, post-modernism and post-colonialism to co-construct the informants’ stories. This investigation models a research method that grows out of a feminist approach of reframing power relationships, knowledge construction and individual experiences. I have used narrative inquiry as the process for this research, to enable the distinctive voices of the women to emerge from the research data and for their individual stories to be crafted.

The findings illustrate that Yemeni womens’ engagement with literacy shapes not only their own identities, but also the characters of the social relationships and social institutions of which they are a part. The womens’ use of reading and writing in everyday life are dynamic and constantly being reconfigured. Their literacy worlds are linked to the social and cultural ways in which they construct and reconstruct language and literacy. The study reveals a world of literacies outside the ESOL setting, a world where literacies are far from being power neutral, a world where literacies are diverse, fluid and hybrid. The womens’ literacies are rooted in conceptions of identity, knowledge and being. Their practices proved to be historical, cultural, social and political, which are constantly being redefined by the women and by the social groups of which they are a part. Their textual practices are not static or discrete but embedded in dynamic, situated, multifaceted experiences. Such practices are also fundamentally constructed and shaped by institutions and informal relations of power.

I have also presented an autobiographical analysis of the self, not as a separate entity but as an integrated part of the research process. I acknowledge the importance of my personal, professional and intellectual autobiography in the development of this study. This investigation has highlighted some important implications for policy, research and practice. One of the implications for practice is recognising the imbalance of power across sites of the home and the learning setting and considering issues of whose literacies count and in what context. A further implication is the importance of research examining the relationship between power-situated knowledge and the ideology that serves to maintain the relative power of multilingual learners.

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## **GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATED FORMS**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all the women who agreed to participate in this study, and for granting me the privilege in gaining their trust and friendship, whose generosity of time, patience and goodwill not only made the doing of this study possible but also an enjoyable experience.

My sincere gratitude and heartfelt thanks go to my supervisors Professor Jackie Marsh and Dr. Kate Pahl for the inspiration, guidance and undaunted support and encouragement they have offered me throughout this research. This research would have never happened without your support and encouragement and for making me believe that I can do it despite the challenges of having young children. I would also like to extend my thanks to Dr. Julia Davis who in our various encounters in the department corridors unknowingly encouraged me with her enthusiasm and kind words.

My children are probably too young to understand, but I dedicate this study to them, who had to bear with me on each of the many occasions that the study took precedence over family outings. This is for you. Finally and most importantly, this research would have not been possible without the support and encouragement of my family, who provided me with the invaluable gift of time and space in helping with the children to allow me to concentrate on completing this study.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### *Introduction*

*When I look at my own experiences of reading, I look beyond the written words. I think that in every culture reading and writing have a different meaning and a different way of being used. I think that reading and writing are just as important as each other, but it's the way we are involved with them that's more important, because for women like me this relationship is so deep in culture, in experiences of multilingualism, of displacement, and of migration (Kalthum).*

I have chosen to begin this thesis with a quotation from one of the informants' stories, because I feel that this quotation offers a precise illustration of the social and ideological approach taken to studying language and literacy practices in the lives of Yemeni women in this investigation. I begin this chapter by setting the scene for the study through an explanation of its theoretical framework and core interests and by defining some basic parameters. I will then show how my personal background in several spheres of life has led to the development of this research. I will next discuss the view of literacy that underpins the study, and then explain how the focus of the investigation gradually narrowed to produce the final research questions, which will be set out in this chapter. Finally I will describe the thesis structure in order to assist the reader in navigating the following chapters.

#### *Views and Definitions of Literacy*

It is important to start by giving a brief explanation of the focus of the study and my own perceptions and definitions of literacy. In this investigation I have taken an ideological and social approach to studying the literacy practices of multilingual women in the home and ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) setting. I have used life history interviews and classroom fieldwork to explore the ways in which literacy is linked to context, to the women's lives, social worlds, and to their narratives. The ESOL classroom in this particular study is presented through the eyes of the informants, and the classroom findings are refracted through the stories of the women. I have drawn from the New Literacy Studies, which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter Two, and in particular from Street's notion of literacy (Street 1984, 1993). Researchers in the New Literacy Studies focus on literacy as:

General cultural ways of utilizing written language, which people draw upon in their lives. In the simplest sense literacy practices are what people do with literacy . . . Practices are not observable units of behaviour since they also involve values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships (Barton and Hamilton, 1998:28).

The attention of the New Literacy Studies over the past 20 years, as discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, has been directed towards the understanding that there is a need to move beyond narrowly defined accounts of literacy to ones that capture the complexity of diverse literacies in contemporary society. Integral to the New Literacy Studies are ‘approaches to language and literacy that treat them as social practices and resources rather than as a set of rules formally and narrowly defined’ (Street, 1998:1). Such social practices and resources are ‘embedded in specific contexts, discourse and positions’ (Street, 1996:1). The New Literacy Studies reject the dominant view of literacy as a neutral, technical skill, conceptualising it instead as an ‘ideological practice, implicated in power relations and embedded in specific cultural meanings and practices’ (Street, 1995:1), a view of literacy that underpins this investigation. In studying Yemeni women’s textual practices, a world of literacies outside the classroom has been revealed, a world where literacies are never power neutral, a world where literacies are diverse, fluid and hybrid. My own view of literacy is in the realm of seeing literacy in relation to social and cultural practices, where multilingual women’s engagement in reading and writing shape not only their own identities, but also the characters of the social relationships and social institutions of which they are a part. This dynamic and fluid view of literacy is a precise reflection of the textual practices that occur within the homes of Yemeni women.

Literacy is a set of social activities involving the written and spoken language, along with the social demands for use and interpretation of that language. From this dimension literacy is a process, a set of cultural practices, a product and a cultural activity. As such I view literacy as a social practice that is rooted in conceptions of social identity, knowledge, and being. By social identity I mean the social positions that people take up or are manoeuvred into by the actions of others and I discuss this concept further in Chapter Two. Issues of identity require attention to both situational position and positioning at broader social and cultural levels in terms of race, gender, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Another lens from which to view literacy and language is an ecological framework which focuses on identity in relation to textual practices. Holland and colleagues, in their anthropological work studying cultures and practices, described a practice view of identity, which saw identities as in practice, drawing on figured worlds, and using artefacts to open up figured worlds (Holland et al, 1998). These practices are historical, cultural, social and political. They are also constantly being redefined by individuals and by social groups (Gee, Hull and Lankshear, 1996). Therefore it is important to recognise that when literacy is acquired, the values and uses associated with literacy are also acquired. This way



individuals become active agents who construct meaning while developing perceptions, values, goals and purposes about ways in which literacy is used (Carrington and Luke, 1997; Gee, 1990; Luke, 2004; Muspratt, Luke and Freebody, 1997). Barton and Hamilton (2000) explain that much of our social life is mediated by literacy, our everyday activities are mediated by literacy, and as individuals we act within a textually mediated social world. They link literacy to a more general understanding of the social practices of diverse communities, emphasising how literacy is embedded in people's daily lives. These everyday literacies or 'vernacular' literacies as Barton and Hamilton (2000) call them, are learned informally, rarely separated from use, and reflect the logic of practical application. Moreover, the vernacular literacies, which I discuss further in Chapter Two, are more than an individual activity; they also serve as a vital community resource. The current study investigates the dynamics of a textually mediated community of practice. In taking a social literacies approach to literacy in this thesis, I draw from the New Literacy Studies to consider social literacies in the diverse socio-cultural contexts of the women's homes and in their ESOL class (English for Speakers of Other Languages). In doing so, I highlight an ecological view of multilingual literacies as connecting across domains, which I have discussed in Chapter Two.

This study draws heavily from the New Literacy Studies (Gee, 1991; Street, 1996), which represents a new tradition in considering the nature of literacy, and what it means to think of literacy as a social practice (Street, 1984). The term has been used in relation to a number of scholars who looked at literacy in everyday life (Street, 1984; Gee, 1996; Barton and Hamilton, 1998). They drew on research from the communication and anthropology field to look at the role of literacy in people's lives. There are many scholars associated with the New Literacy Studies and in Chapter Two I present a detailed review of this research. Literacy practices are inextricably linked to geographical spaces (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). Literacy practices are also described in different domains of practice. Barton and Hamilton define a domain as:

Structured, patterned contexts within which literacy is used and learned. Activities within these domains are not accidental or randomly varying: there are particular configurations of literacy practices and there are regular ways in which people act in many literacy events in particular contexts. (Barton and Hamilton, 1998:10).

These spaces signify different domains where literacy is practised. The domains of literacy in this study include the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) class and the homes of four Yemeni women, and by looking at different sites and domains an ideological view of literacy as connecting across domains can be brought to the fore. I have also attempted to identify the distinctiveness of hybrid literacy practices in the fluid domains of the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) setting and homes of the women through life history

interviews and classroom fieldwork. This approach looks at literacy in the everyday life of four Arabic speaking women, while also accounting for power imbalances across sites. Through the informants' stories and classroom fieldwork it became evident that there is an implicit privileging of certain practices, contextual features and instructional strategies, which are all tools for gaining power. In exploring a socially situated view of literacy, I have taken account of power relations and attempted to scrutinise these power relations in exploring the struggles that Yemeni women encounter in their narratives being heard, and in particular their literacy practices being recognised.

A view that underpins this study is that literacy is a social practice, which occurs within 'webs of people and institutions' (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2000:14). This investigation has demonstrated that literacy is not and cannot be confined to the walls of the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classroom, it does not occur in a vacuum; rather the context shape the experiences, understandings and creations of literacy. This study is also influenced by the view that literacy is plural (literacies), dynamic and influenced by relations of power. In viewing literacy as a socially situated practice, it appears in multiple forms which have sociological, cultural and ideological significance, and so for me it makes more sense to refer to literacies in multiple manifestations (Lankshear, 1997; Street, 1993; Valdes, 2004) not only in terms of their linguistic, cultural and historical diversity, but also in terms of demands made by a variety of media and semiotic systems involved in multimodal communication (Kress, 2003). This multiplicity of literacy supports the concept that competence cannot be absolute but only relative to specific contexts, communities and practices. The term 'multiliteracies' signals 'multiple communication channels, hybrid text forms, new social relations and the increasing salience of linguistic and cultural diversity' (Schultz and Hull, 2002:26). I decided to use the term 'multiliteracies' in this thesis as a way to focus on the realities of increasing local literacy diversity and global connectedness. Multiliteracies also take into account the nature of new communication technologies. Meaning is made in ways that are increasingly multimodal—in which written-linguistic modes of meaning interface with visual, audio, gesture and spatial patterns of meaning.

The New London Group (1996) claim that literacy pedagogy should connect with the changing social environment through what they call 'multiliteracies'. They argue that the multiplicity of communication channels and increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in contemporary society calls for a 'much broader view of literacy than portrayed by traditional language-based approaches' (p.60). The New London Group maintains that the pedagogical use of multiliteracies will enable students to gain access to:

The evolving language of work, power, and community, and [will foster] the critical engagement necessary for them to design their social futures and achieve success through fulfilling employment (1996:60).

Through this view, literacy takes on a broader definition and it is already becoming increasingly common as McLaren (1988) comments that:

Mainstream theories of literacy conceive of being literate as possessing only that requisite fund of knowledge – that privileged form of linguistic currency – necessary for students to succeed materially in an industrialized capitalist society... the non-standard literacies of minority groups and the poor (that is, different dialects, non-standard English) are regarded as deficits or deprivations rather than differences (McLaren, 1988: 214).

This gives rise to a view that the acknowledgement of multiple literacies in education is potentially empowering for marginalized learners. In this thesis I present a theoretical overview of the literacy practices experienced by multilingual learners through an approach to literacy that the New London Group call ‘Multiliteracies’. The multiplicity of communication channels and increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in the world today call for a much broader view of literacy than portrayed by traditional language-based approaches. Using the term ‘multiliteracies’ in this thesis overcomes the limitations of traditional approaches by emphasizing how negotiating the multiple linguistic and cultural differences in our society is central to the pragmatics of the lives of multilingual learners. I maintain, similar to those of the New London Group, that the use of multiliteracies approaches to literacy will enable me to explore multilingual learners’ literacy practices in the emerging cultural, institutional, and global order; where there is a multiplicity of communications channels and media, and the increasing saliency of cultural and linguistic diversity..... The notion of multiliteracies supplements traditional literacy pedagogy by addressing the related aspects of textual multiplicity. What one might term ‘mere literacy’ remains centred on language only, and usually on a singular national form of language at that, which is conceived as a stable system based on rules such as mastering sound-letter correspondence. This is based on the assumption that we can discern and describe correct usage. Such a view of language will characteristically translate into a more or less authoritarian kind of pedagogy. A pedagogy of multiliteracies, by contrast, focuses on modes of representation much broader than language alone. These differ according to culture and context, and have specific cognitive, cultural, and social effects. Multiliteracies also create a different kind of pedagogy, one in which language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes.

This study has explored how the informants' literacy worlds are linked to social and cultural ways in which they construct and reconstruct language and literacy practices. This study also identifies with language and literacy practices as being situated within wider social practices of everyday life, while also accounting for power imbalances across sites. My overall position accords with what Street (1993) referred to as a 'socially situated' view of literacy; the basic tenets of which are:

- Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices.
- Some literacy practices are more dominant, visible and influential than others.
- Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relations.
- Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.

Examining literacy practices within this framework has provided important insights into the ways in which literacy is practiced and valued in the Yemeni community and it is hoped that these insights will support educators in designing a literacy curriculum and instruction that is more relevant and authentic to that community. This study attempts to capture the complexities and contradictions of the literacy debate as a form of cultural and social process. It also explores the importance of understanding language and literacy as social practices and plays a central role in processes of categorisation, which seems to regulate access to the production and distribution of literate knowledge. In exploring language and literacy practices in this way, I hope to place the debate of language and literacy practices in the context of social construction of inequality, and avoid the essentialization and reification of language (which tends to reproduce the forms of marginalisation and oppressions that I have opposed for so long). I have maintained an approach to language and literacy practices which understands it not as an object or as a system, but as a social practice.

My understanding of an 'ideological' literacy is one I associate most with Street's model of literacy that:

... Recognises a multiplicity of language uses and literacies; that the meaning and uses of language and literacy practices are related to specific cultural contexts; and that these practices are always associated with relations of power and ideology, they are not simply neutral technologies (Street, 1994:139).

In working from a model of literacy that is always related to specific contexts, literacy takes place in stratified multilingual societies in which the process is concerned with relations of power and ideology. These practices are always embedded in particular social forms of activity.

which are fundamentally constructed and shaped by both institutions and informal relations of power.

A theoretical perspective, which is discussed further in Chapter Two, that values home everyday literacy experiences has provided a powerful means to investigating the literacy practices of multilingual women in this study. Moll and Moje et al. have found that home literacy experiences are rich and often untapped (Moll et al., 1992; Moje et al., 2004). Moll et al.'s concept of funds of knowledge also provides a powerful way into listening to multilingual women. Likewise Moje et al., have argued that by being hospitable to home literacy practices, create 'third spaces' where these experiences can be drawn upon in specific ESOL curricular areas (Moje et al., 2004). While home and the ESOL setting are often seen as separate spheres by practitioners, multilingual learners operate in both spaces. These spaces can be reconstructed to form a third, different or alternative, space where textual practices take place. I use the term 'funds of knowledge' to describe the information, epistemologies, methods of thinking and learning, and literacy practices related to the women's everyday life. This concept has helped me identify the funds of knowledge possessed by the informants in order to explore the pedagogical implications (Martin-Jones and Saxena, 2003) that can only come about by knowing the Yemeni community deeply and personally.

I have found the New Literacy Studies framework for multiliteracies most useful for the current study as it encapsulates two significant shifts in how I view literacy. Firstly, it provides a bridge between community-based literacy and school-based literacy and encourages a real world approach to literacy through the use of knowledge across disciplines. It also acknowledges that literacy goes beyond print language and incorporates the multiple modes of meaning found in new information and communication technologies. It is hoped that this study will be seen as a response to the cognitive, psychological literacy models that have dominated reading and writing instruction for decades. I hope that this study can be a further contribution to the social and ideological approaches to literacy developed by New Literacy Studies theorists, researchers and practitioners, for example by illuminating the contextual nature of literacy and the way literacy is inextricably embedded within particular socio-cultural contexts. After all, Street (2001) has stressed that an important task of literacy research is to make visible 'the complexity of local, everyday and community literacy practices' (p.22) which I hope this study has been able to do. And so I offer this study as an investigation into an under researched aspect of literacy with the hope of making the complexity of local, everyday community literacy practices visible (Street, 2001).

## ***Background to the Study***

The proposition that has driven this investigation is that a thorough understanding of the uses of reading and writing in the everyday life of multilingual women, gained through an ethnographic study of literacy, would aid in understanding the women's cultural and social ways of using literacy. I have found this to be dynamic and constantly reconfigured. I have been able to understand the role of literacy in the women's lives more precisely, and have been able to identify how their literacy practices transformed their values and identifications. In researching the textual practices of multilingual women, I hope that I can contribute to the paucity of research on multilingual literacies and to divert attention away from literacy driven by the 'autonomous' model (Street, 1984) in which marginalized individuals are classified and put into 'literate' and 'illiterate' categories with little control to how they are being labelled. Researchers who view literacy from a socio-cultural perspective do not consider literacy to be a formally learned series of autonomous skills, but rather as literacies learned through participation in social activities (Street, 2001). The notion of literacy for many researchers, educators and policy-makers continues to be located within a cognitive framework which sees the social as a separable influence on the cognitive. Colleges and educational establishments tend to espouse the autonomous view of literacy which is neutral and unaffected by context. An example is a statement in a document published by the DfES in relation to the Home Office White Paper '*Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain*' (2002) which stresses the importance of language skills in the ESOL Curriculum:

The curriculum is context-free and we plan to develop learning programmes in a specific citizenship context so that a simple programme can be followed by those who need to develop an understanding in both language and citizenship (Home Office, 2002:33).

Contrary to this, I have adopted an ideological view of literacy in order to focus on the informants' textual practices and their connections to social worlds, which have also helped unfold a fruitful theoretical space. I have used this theoretical space to draw on culture to explore the literate identities of the informants.

## ***Researcher Stance***

Growing up in a multilingual and multiethnic, working class council estate immersed me in a discourse of marginal education that made it challenging for me to succeed in school. As a young multilingual woman I found the mainstream cultures of school literacy uncomfortable

and unrecognisable. Growing up, literacy to me was more than just decoding words on a page. Literacy was shaped by culture and context, and these cultures and contexts that I inhabited in my life, home and community influenced the way I approached literacy at school. I found that school literacy ran parallel to institutional norms, which aligned with those valued in my school and tended to be rewarded in the classroom. This created confusion in my learning. I soon discovered that access to power and cultural capital allowed mainstream literacies to reflect the values of the dominant culture. The diverse and fluid literacies that I was immersed in, in my home and in my community, did not matter as long as I did not bring them into the classroom. My home literacies were not aligned with those valued in school and at times I felt I had to make choices between my identity within my home, the community and the identity valued and rewarded in the classroom.

I have learnt when seeking answers or explanations as to how certain research has been conducted that the process invariably involves reflecting on the ways in which we give form to knowledge. Ethnographies of multilingual women still require further exploration but in my research journey it has primarily meant questioning taken for granted assumptions about what can constitute 'data' and that has meant reflectively thinking about the way I behaved with and have represented those with whom I have worked. In speaking Arabic and doing research with Arabic speaking women I realised that talk is a way of performing a social self with others and how our relationships in many ways provided a productive space from which the 'data' could emerge. This research journey has involved negotiating this space, which is a productive location where I, as a novice researcher, have attempted to produce knowledge. This knowledge no doubt has been informed by a view of the self as a social phenomenon, where identity is relational and my subjective experiences are part of the world I inhabit. I support an autobiographical analysis of the self, not as a separate entity but as an integrated part of the research process and as part of the transparency of the investigation. Throughout this study, I have reflected openly and honestly, and have found this helpful in developing insight and self-awareness. I am influenced by those who emphasise the centrality of reflexivity throughout the research process (Denzin, 1997), and so I acknowledge the importance of my personal, professional and intellectual autobiography in the development of this study (Alzouebi and Pahl, 2006). Throughout this investigation I have engaged in reflection and self-scrutiny in order to address some of the dilemmas of the research process. I discuss my position within the investigation and how the research process has changed me as a novice researcher and educator. As an undergraduate student I was often cautioned about engaging personally with the process of the fieldwork and rather encouraged to declare myself behind a veil of objectivity. I was expected to stand apart from the social and political issues, and in a way depersonalise the process of the fieldwork. I struggled with these ideas, as I felt that for the reader to accept my

research as being valid, the way I influenced the choices made throughout the relationships in the field, the content and analysis of the data, there had to be a discussion of honesty, openness and transparency in acknowledging how the research experience has changed me and how the fieldwork and analysis has affected my relationship with my informants. For me to deny or to even hide this knowledge, I feel would create a gap in my research, something Coffey (1999) refers to as the 'silent space' (p.8), after all 'ethnographers rarely leave fieldwork totally unaffected by their research experience' (p.7). Instead, acknowledging, documenting, learning from the transition of 'objective' to 'involved', and applying this information to the research findings has helped enhance, enrich and increase the validity of my research. The subjectivity of myself as a researcher and my interests and involvement in the informant's lives can be described as the lens or analytical filter through which their literacy worlds pass. As Denzin explains 'we are our own subjects, how our subjectivity becomes entangled in the lives of others is and has always been our topic' (Denzin, 1997:27).

### ***Methods***

I drew on the women's stories to elicit an understanding of their literacy practices, and I have come to realise how their life stories productively revealed the unspoken and can tell something of the process involved in being, becoming and belonging. Investigating the women's textual practices through the critical lens of a social literacy framework has helped me bring together different stories of lived experiences grounded in the literacy worlds of the women. I have attempted to bring to the field of New Literacy Studies experiences and identifications, which are often overlooked or absented from an understanding of how multilingual women experience literacy.

Since beginning the research, I have become more politically conscious and my sense of social responsibility has been brought to light because my interpretations are of other peoples' experience. The ethnographic approaches by which I obtained the women's stories are significant, as they have helped me 'reflect broader social relationships' (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2000:12). The ethnographic approach in this study contributes to an understanding of how multilingual women are positioned in intercultural encounters, and to an understanding of language and literacy uses outside institutional encounters. It explores and describes resources in language and literacy practices, which are often invisible to the institutional agencies that develop and implement policy. In exploring the literacy worlds of the women and when translating them into a format for public knowledge, I constantly reflected on how I came to know and view the knowledge I am reproducing. While seeking to serve an academic audience,



and at the same time remaining faithful to the form of knowledge gained through the informants stories and classroom fieldwork, I was cautious of not silencing this particular form of knowledge. I was constantly fighting to evade interpreting the women's stories into a discourse and knowledge that can only be understood within a dominant Western research framework. And even though I focused on making my role transparent through reflexivity, I feared making myself more central to the research discourse and pushing the voices of the women to the margins. My experiences of working with and studying Yemeni women have engrossed me in a reflective dialogue, and the research process has been enriched by the warmth and approval I have received from the women, which provided further context for my understanding of diverse everyday literacies in the Yemeni community.

### *The Evolution of the Research Focus*

A feature of research conducted within a narrative and ethnographic paradigm is that rather than being 'set in stone' from the outset as most positivistic qualitative research is, the exact focus of the study tends to evolve over time. This has certainly been true for this study and I shall now document the changes. When I first began to think about this research, I envisaged that there would be a wide range of literature on the literacy practices of multilingual learners, but since discovering that so little research exists in this area, as discussed in Chapter Two, it certainly made sense to confine the focus to the textual practice of multilingual women through the use of narrative interviews and classroom fieldwork.

I also became aware over time that some adjustments of the research questions were necessary. The four main questions, which are outlined below, have remained largely unchanged throughout the course of the study, but at a later stage I felt that a fifth subsidiary question was also needed. As I refined my thinking I decided that the aim of the investigation would be covered in addressing all five-research questions. Throughout my M.Ed. and MA studies at the University of Sheffield, I began to develop an interest in the textual identities of ethnic minority women. During preliminary fieldwork, I also realised that although the four main research questions covered the aim of the research, an issue of enormous importance presented itself that I had not foreseen as a focus prior to the commencement of the fieldwork, namely the impact of the womens' textual practices on their identities, and so a fifth subsidiary research question which is described below, was formulated to cover this aspect of the study.

## ***The Research Aim and Resultant Guiding Questions***

The overarching aim of this research is:

To investigate literacy as a social practice in the lives of Yemeni women

This aim has been translated via a process of refinement over time into the following five guiding questions:

- *What is the nature of the textual practices encountered by Yemeni women?*
- *How are Yemeni women positioned with regards to social and ideological approaches to language and literacy practices?*
- *What impact do the textual practices of Yemeni women have on their identities, intercultural encounters and the social institutions of which they are a part?*
- *In taking account of power relations, what are the struggles that Yemeni women experience in their literacy practices being recognised and their narratives being heard?*
- *How does ESOL practice draw on Yemeni women's textual experiences to inform classroom practice?*

## ***Conclusion: Outline of Thesis***

In the first chapter I set the scene by introducing the core substantive areas of literacy discuss my researcher stance and detail the evolution of this specific study. I move on in Chapter Two to provide a theoretical framework through contextual information on literacy, and then connect the concept of literacy to the field of the New Literacy Studies. In Chapter Three, I explore my researcher reflexivity and researcher positionality with a particular focus on ethnic minority researchers. In Chapter Four I present a detailed historical background of the Yemeni community in Northtown. My attention, in Chapter Five, turns to methodological matters, as I look firstly at narrative interviews and then at aspects of classroom fieldwork. In this chapter I also explore aspects of the design of the study such as ethical issues and in the second part of the chapter I detail the specific data collection and analysis techniques used. Chapter Six provides contextual detail about the translation process in addition to the translation dilemmas in narrative research. In Chapter Seven, I introduce the key emerging themes which were identified as running through and across the womens' narratives and represented narrative

strings. These narrative strings were then pulled together into six key threads in this thesis, representing the collection of the womens' stories. These common threads were identified as central to the womens' narratives as shown in Chapters Nine and Ten. In Chapter Seven, I discuss the stages of and issues surrounding the design, data collection and analytic techniques used. In this chapter I also consider site access, sample and temporal issues, validity and reliability. I then move to Chapter Eight, to present the informants' stories. In Chapter Nine I begin the data analysis process by mapping the informants' literacy practices using Kenner's (2000) diagrammatical outline of children's 'literacy worlds', which I have adopted and adapted in order to provide a conceptual map of the domains of literacy practices within the women's lives. The aim of this chapter is to map the informants' literacy experiences across different geographical spaces they inhabit, which are represented by separate layers on the diagram that signify different domains. This process helps to highlight the multi-layered language and literacy environments in which the women live and provides a thorough representation of their literacy worlds, as presented in Chapter Nine. I then move on to Chapter Ten where I frame the analysis of the research data. This chapter provides a detailed analysis of the informants' textual practices. In Chapter Eleven, the final chapter, I turn my attention to the Conclusion stage of the thesis, where I discuss the findings of the investigation followed by a detailed presentation of the implications of the findings for policy, practice, and research. This chapter is a reflection of and on the research journey, where a thorough discussion of my stance as a novice researcher is presented. In this chapter I also highlight ways forward for other female researchers from linguistic minority backgrounds.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Theoretical Framework

#### *Literacy Paradigms*

In the first part of this chapter I provide contextualising information about the concept of literacy as a social practice and discuss various literacy paradigms. I go on to examine this concept, which is shown through events and practices (Street, 2000). This chapter looks at identifying the events mediated by written texts in the informants' lives and analysing these events, as described in Chapters Nine and Ten, in order to understand their associated practices. Literacy as a social practice has been a significant influence both in terms of the theoretical framework and methodological approach taken in this study and this is discussed further in the conclusion to this chapter. In this chapter I adopt a theoretical framework which helps to broaden and extend an understanding of the meaning of literacy in different contexts to provide a powerful analysis of the link between literacies in specific contexts and the informants' values and meanings in relation to literacy, which are presented in Chapters Nine and Ten. In order to keep the reader's attention to the core interest of the study, I shall begin by reviewing research that has focused on literacy as a social practice paradigm. I will then broaden the discussion by presenting a sustained and engaged account of the multilingual literacy field. In the second part of the chapter I refocus on literacy literature as it draws from theories of identities and culture. In the last part of the chapter I will broaden the discussion again as I consider how the literature looks at aspects of literacy from the disciplines of ethnography and anthropology to inform the current investigation.

In my study of multilingual women I investigate their textual practices as a way of helping to rethink what is meant by 'literacy' and cautioning against the assumption of a single literacy, where we may simply be imposing assumptions derived from our own cultural practice onto other people's literacies. A social theory of literacy is also a recognition of the broad range of meanings and uses of literacy in peoples' lives. Brodkey (1986) provides an interesting account of a social theory of literacy:

People in the literacy field use a farming metaphor of the silo and the field to differentiate between a narrow educational focus of literacy as skills and a wider conception of literacy that is limited to fundamental skills, skills that are cut and dried, that are pre-determined and stockpiled. The vibrant, ripening fields of growing hay that stretch out over the contours of hills and that are integrally connected to other life forms represent a different conception of literacy-literacy as social practices, practices that permeate and are connected to the surroundings. The silo, being vertical, linear and contained, signifies literacy defined solely as hierarchal sets of skills to be learned and stockpiled; whereas the

fields are varied, indefinite and horizontal in the way that social practices, which involve relationships, vary and grow according to the community or cultural context (Brodkey, 1986:201).

Recognition of such literacy also helps to broaden the focus of literacy education as fundamental skills to looking at how people are already using literacy in their lives and building upon that. My approach to literacy is inspired by Street's (1994) model, which is an:

Ideological model of language and literacy, that recognises a multiplicity of language uses and literacies; that the meaning and uses of language and literacy practices are related to specific cultural contexts; and that these practices are always associated with relations of power and ideology, they are not simply neutral technologies (Street, 1984:139).

And so literacy:

Can no longer be addressed as a neutral technology as in the reductionist autonomous model. It is already a social ideological practice involving fundamental aspects of epistemology, power and politics; the acquisition of literacy involves challenges to dominant discourse, shifts in what constitutes the agenda of proper literacy and struggles for power and position (Street, 1993:9).

A social theory of literacy is also rooted in social contexts and is based upon the belief that literacy only has meaning within its particular context of social practice (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). It also recognises that there are different literacy practices in different spheres of life, that literacy practices change over time and that different literacies are supported and shaped by different institutions and social relationships. This theory of literacy has evolved through the work of researchers looking at the way people use literacy and the contexts of this utilization. Various studies have examined and described informal and formal uses of literacy within the home, community and educational system (Heath 1983; Street, 1984, 1993, 1995; Tannern, 1982; Bloomaert, 2004; Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Barton, 1994; Barton and Ivanic, 1991; Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic; 2000; Baynham, 1995; Crowther, Hamilton and Tett, 2001). De Castell and Luke (1986) looked specifically at literacy practices within schools and found that markedly different skills, abilities and attitudes defined literacy at different times within the history of a specific schooling. These studies illustrate the range and diversity of literacy practices within the contexts of place and time. Barton and Hamilton (1998) describe the ways in which literacy is a resource for the exploration of everyday reading and writing practices of minority groups, local communities and organizations within a community. These studies maintain that people have different ways of using literacy and give different meanings to literacy in their lives.

Literacy practices are inextricably linked to geographical spaces (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). Literacy practices are described in different domains of practice. These spaces signify different domains where literacy is practised. Barton and Hamilton define a domain:

Domains are structured, patterned contexts within which literacy is used and learned. Activities within these domains are not accidental or randomly varying: there are particular configurations of literacy practices and there are regular ways in which people act in many literacy events in particular contexts. (Barton and Hamilton, 1998:10).

Literacies are associated with specific domains of social life (Barton and Hamilton, 2000). Domains such as the home, Mosque class, schools, ESOL class or workplace. Within each domain, literacy is used in particular ways and is shaped by the interventions of those who act in the domain (Alzouebi and Pahl, 2006). Domains present 'particular configurations of literacy practices' (Barton and Hamilton, 2000). In each domain distinct functions and meanings are attached to literacy. Different domains make use of specific forms of texts, which are embedded in particular forms of communication and social interaction. In other words, they are part of particular practices. The boundaries between domains are not clear-cut. Texts that move between contexts also cut across the boundaries between domains (Brandt and Clinton, 2002).

Another theoretical thread looks at how third space theory can contribute to an understanding of literacy practices. In the field of prison literacies, Wilson proposed that third space theory, from Homi Bhaba, could help reconceptualise the way in which literacy practices of prisoners were neither inside, nor fully outside the prison space (Wilson, 2000). She argued that 'third space' from Bhaba and also Gee's concept of Borderland discourses has resonances for communities that occupy in-between spaces. Wilson states that:

His description of 'borderland' as a place between home and school used by children marginalised by mainstream ideologies is akin to the liminal space described by Bhaba and the third space which I have identified as relevant to prisons' (Wilson, 2000:67).

Wilson described the prison third space as a discursive site within which to locate prison literacies, where texts and artefact can be located neither within the prison nor in the outside world. Drawing on third space theory from this study, I explore how the ESOL setting can offer the possibility for discourse from home and classroom to surface jointly created texts. I argue that the ESOL setting and the home can be seen as offering a threshold space where multilingual women can enter the ESOL domain, and the home domain and these very different discourses can mingle. Here the ESOL setting and the home setting can be seen as providing a threshold space, lying between home and classroom, where both discourses are recognised and validated. The ESOL setting can then become, through work drawing on both domains, a third space where both discourses, of home and ESOL setting are present and can be recognised.

The view taken of ‘third space’ in this study, which I discuss, further in Chapter Ten, is a space for recognising multilingual textual practices, often marginalized in classroom settings. I have found this third place important because it provides opportunities for success in traditional classroom learning while also making a space for textual practices that often go unrecognised or ignored. Research has demonstrated that when third spaces are identified and valued there is increased learner engagement (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Alvarez, et al., 1999; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Tejeda, et al., 1999; Heath, 1983; Hudicourt-Barnes, 2003; Lee & Fradd, 1998; Moll et al., 1989; Warren, Ballenger, Ogonowski, Rosebery, & Hudicourt-Barnes, 2001).

While the home and the ESOL setting are often seen as separate spheres by practitioners, ESOL learners operate in both spaces. These spaces can be reconstructed to form a third, different or alternative, space where textual practices take place. Some scholars refer to this in-between, or hybrid, space as ‘third space’, explicitly emphasizing the role of the physical, as well as socialized, space in which people interact. Soja (1996), for example, called for a reconceptualization of human interaction around the concept of space, arguing:

The spatial dimension of our lives has never been of greater practical and political relevance than it is today. Whether we are attempting to deal with the increasing intervention of electronic media in our daily routines; seeking ways to act politically to deal with the growing problems of poverty, racism, sexual discrimination, and environmental degradation; or trying to understand the multiplying geopolitical conflicts around the globe, we are becoming increasingly aware that we are, and always have been, intrinsically spatial beings, active participants in the social construction of our embracing spatialities (Soja, 1996:1).

As I have explained previously, the theoretical framework that I have deployed in this study is that which takes a social literacies approach drawing from the New Literacy Studies to consider social literacies in the diverse socio-cultural contexts of the women’s homes and the ESOL setting. In doing so, I highlight an ecological view of multilingual literacies as connecting across domains, which I have discussed in Chapters Nine and Ten. An ecology model of language and literacy is a useful metaphor in this study because it recognises multiple languages and literacies, taking on the different textual practices Yemeni women draw on in their daily lives, but also accounting for institutional policies and practices that impinge on those everyday practices. I have found this approach challenging because it asks for both attention to identity and learning but also an understanding of the relationship between language, literacy and social environments. Pahl (2007) argues that as researchers we have to account for institutional policy interaction in sites as diverse as homes, classrooms, community centres and neighbourhoods. Therefore a key aspect of thinking in the field of the ecology of literacy and language is the

concept of social practice. Hornberger's *Continua of biliteracy* (2003) model offers an ecological account of biliteracy as it describes complex and intersecting relationships across the field of development, content, media and contexts, across a number of sites and domains (Hornberger, 2003). I have found this ecological view of literacy to be about connecting textual experiences with wider social practice. Pahl (2007) argues that by understanding the concept of ecology as one connected with studying the web of everyday practice and interaction, a lens can be created to look at that ecology in relation to language and understand its workings. An ecology of language and literacy approach means that attention has to be paid to ways in which changes in literacy and language practices take place. Therefore by focusing on textual experiences, and their connection to other social worlds, a fruitful theoretical space has been unfolded in this study.

Adopting literacy as a social practice approach helps to understand the lived experiences of linguistic ethnic minorities in a more holistic way, as shown in Chapters Nine and Ten. This also contributes to an understanding of how linguistic ethnic minorities are positioned in intercultural encounters and the effects of this on individual motivation, personal and social investment and the construction of social identities (Pierce, 1995). A study of social literacies will also help enhance our understanding of language and literacy uses, outside of institutional encounters, to provide descriptions of practices in languages and literacies that are often invisible to the institutional agencies which develop and implement policy (Roberts, 2003). Studies of literacy practices can also help in documenting the social dimension of literacy learning within different sectors of education. Pheasey's (2002) research, which looks at learners' perceptions of literacy, affirms the notion that being literate includes a wide range of knowledge and skills about surviving in contemporary society. Battell (2001) outlines changes in learners' lives during their participation in literacy programs and asserts that 'non-academic' outcomes are integral to literacy education. These 'non-academic' outcomes have also been looked on as 'vernacular literacy' (Barton and Hamilton, 1998:86). Barton and Hamilton (1998) explain:

Vernacular literacy practices are learned informally and are rooted in action contexts and everyday purposes and networks, drawing upon and contributing to vernacular knowledge (Barton and Hamilton, 1998:86).

Looking through the lens of vernacular practices, literacy learning and use are integrated in everyday activities and the literacy elements are an implicit part of the activity. One of my arguments in this study is that the acknowledgement and uses of 'vernacular practices' within an educational setting are a key means towards the equalization of power relations amongst multilingual learners and ESOL practitioners.



It seems the way literacy is defined determines how people with or without literacy are perceived. Brodkey (1986) argues that 'all definitions of literacy are political through differentiation of a literate self and an illiterate other since the culture's ideology of literacy defines what is meant by reading and writing' (p.48). Rockhill (1988) speaks of the need to acknowledge and deconstruct the ideological trap 'illiteracy' that creates the polarities of literates/illiterates, us/them, and haves/have-nots. Many studies have been criticized for the presentation of 'illiteracy' as an isolated phenomenon, presenting 'the illiterate' as a lost soul, as handicapped, and as blight on the economy. Fingeret and Jurmo (1989) in their study of participatory literacy programmes remind us that poverty causes illiteracy, and not the reverse, but instead illiteracy often serves as a scapegoat for other social ills associated with it, and that rather than attack the basic maladjustments of society, illiteracy has been the recurrent target. Blackledge (1999) also argues that there has often been an assumption among educators and policy-makers that the homes of ethnic minority families provide a poor learning environment than the homes of middle-class, white families. Ethnic minorities tend to also be massively over-represented among the 'functionally illiterate' in Western developed countries (Cummins, 1994). But public discourse often excuses schools and society from responsibility for ethnic minority underachievement, and attributes school failure to ethnic minority students' own deficiencies (lack of academic effort) or deficiencies of their families (parental inadequacy).

The conceptual framework which I have used in this study also draws from the concept of 'funds of knowledge', which I discuss further in Chapter Ten, a term derived from Moll's work with Hispanic families in Arizona (Moll and Greenberg, 1992). Moll's study refers to the information, skills and strategies which families and households use to maximise their well-being and life chances. As Moll and Greenberg (1992) point out:

We perceive the students' community, and its funds of knowledge, as the most important resource for reorganising in ways that 'far exceed' the limits of current schooling' (p.345).

Since Moll's original work, the term 'funds of knowledge' has entered the discourse of both researcher (e.g. Martin-Jones and Saxena, 2003) and policy-makers. For example a DfES document for teachers of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds stated that:

Schools have much to gain from the experiences and understandings of pupils, their families and communities. Drawing on their *funds of knowledge* enriches a school in a range of valuable ways (DfES, 2004:8).

In the current study I have identified 'funds of knowledge' through the informants' stories and classroom interactions, as a range of literacy practices, skills and knowledge both explicit and

implicit, which the informants draw on in their daily lives. The study is aimed at drawing out and making visible the funds of knowledge possessed by the informants, and identifying ways in which they can be highlighted in order to support their learning.

### ***Literacy Practices and Literacy Events***

In this study I have taken a social practice view of literacy that starts from examining the literacy practices of multilingual women and this can be done through ‘literacy events’ (Street, 2000). Understanding literacy from this view can be inferred from ‘events’ that are mediated by the written text (Barton, 2002:2). I have used the term ‘literacy event’ to describe the informants’ reading and writing activities. Literacy ‘event’ is defined as ‘any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretative process’ (Heath, 1982:29). Street (2000) describes literacy ‘events’ as being a helpful concept, because ‘it enables researcher, and also practitioner, to focus on a particular situation where things are happening and you can see them happening’ (Street, 2000:21). Street (2000) explains that ‘this is the classic literacy event in which we are able to observe an event that involves reading and/or writing and begin to draw out its characteristics’ (Street, 2000:21). Throughout this investigation I have used ‘literacy practices’ to refer to a broad concept of both behaviour and conceptualisations related to the use of reading and writing. Street (1993) notes that ‘Literacy practices’ incorporate not only ‘literacy events’ as empirical occasions to which literacy is integral, but also ‘folk models of those events and the ideological preconceptions that underpin them’ (Street, 1993:12-13). The phrase ‘literacy practice’ (Street, 2000) is also a means of focusing upon ‘social practice’ and conceptions of reading and writing. Street (2000) emphasises that a more careful use of the term ‘literacy practice’ can help move forward both research and practice and ‘this phrase has most salience in attempting to analyse and not just describe what is happening in social contexts around the meanings and uses of literacy’ (Street, 2000:16).

In order to have a better understanding of my informants’ literacy practices, I draw on Kenner’s (2000) diagrammatical outline of children’s ‘literacy worlds’ (p.5), which she constructed to represent the literacy worlds of bilingual children in her study. I have used the diagrams as a mapping exercise of the women’s experiences of texts in different geographical spaces they inhabit which are represented by separate layers on the diagram that signify different domains of literacy practices within the women’s lives. It is also important that I have a good understanding of my informants’ perceptions of ‘literacy practices’, which means that I have to

ask questions, I have to listen to them and try to link their experiences of reading and writing within a cultural and social context. For this reason it seems meaningless to just ask about 'literacy', as done in many surveys and questionnaires, because what gives meaning to literacy for a group of learners, may be a totally different kind of literacy for another group of learners. Hence it was difficult for me to predict what gives meaning to literacy for my informants without engaging them and discussing their perceptions of literacy, and asking about their literate lives. Literacy is not and should not be regarded as a set of functional skills, as represented in literacy literature. Rather it is, as Street (2000) states 'a set of social practices deeply associated with identity and position' (p.23).

By approaching literacy in this way and not relying on the notion of literacy as skills, levels and points on a scale, (which still continues to dominate contemporary discourse in research literature) I gained a more enhanced understanding of the construction of literacy. Rockhill (1994) explains:

The construction of literacy is embedded in the discursive practices and power relations of everyday life - it is socially constructed, materially produced, morally regulated and carries a symbolic significance which cannot be captured by its reduction to any one of these (Rockhill, 1994:247).

The challenging importance of a social practice approach to literacy is that it recognises the power dimension in literacy where institutions demand practices, which infer status and material goods. The view of literacy is also more concerned with what learners can do (De Castell, 1998). This approach helps identify more potential points for intervention in an effort to facilitate literacy development for multilingual learners. It can also offer an integrated framework in which the provision of literacy programmes can itself be understood as a set of literacy practices. I take the position that an individual's understanding of literacy is an important aspect of one's literacy practices, which tend to guide learning (Barton, 2002). Kulick and Stroud (1993) have noted how research has failed to take account of how learners themselves 'actually think about literacy and how they apply their literacy skill in their day-to-day lives' (p.3). Kulick and Stroud (1993) argue that a 'lack of this fundamental knowledge has led those interested in the transition to literacy to downplay the creativity and cultural concerns of the people being taught to read and write' (Kulick and Stroud, 1993:3). As a result, the emphasis in some studies has been on the 'impact' of literacy on learners and on the neutral and universal character of the providers' models of literacy. Learners who find themselves trapped within this approach find it difficult to learn anything new or see anything different in the world of literacy, since we see 'only our own reflections when we look at others, our own literacy when we look at the literacies of other people' (Street, 1993:3).

## *Literacy, Language, Culture and Identity*

I am working within a framework in which literacy is a culturally defined construct and therefore it makes sense that literacy has close links to cultural identity. When literacy is being taught from a dominant culture perspective, majority cultural values will be transmitted as part of the ‘package’ of literacy (Street, 1987). Some would argue that in order to acquire literacy in the majority language, at times it may be necessary for the learner to adopt some of the cultural behaviours and values of the majority, and risk sacrificing cultural group identity. De Castell and Luke (1987) contend that this process is calculated by majority groups, so that in literacy classes, reading and writing are secondary concerns, and the primary purpose of institutionally transmitted literacy is rather the creation of a shared socio-cultural world view: ‘the construction and dissemination of a culturally neutral ideology’ (de Castell and Luke 1987:25). Programs like this tend to treat literacy as a universal, culturally neutral process that can be broken down into different skills. And so when skills sufficient for cultural transmission are taught, the bicultural skills essential for multilingual learners to succeed in majority settings tend to be ignored. Street (1993) adds to this argument by explaining that:

Research into the role of literacies in the construction of ethnicity, gender, and religious identities makes us wary of accepting the uniform model of literacy that tends to be purveyed with the modern nation state: The relationship of literacy and nationalism is itself in need of research at a time when the dominant or standard model of literacy frequently subserves the interests of national politics (Street, 1993: 1).

Literacy theorists such as James Gee elucidated the reciprocal relationship between language and identity. Gee (1996) has remarked that ‘social languages, whether spoken or written include different styles, registers, vocabularies, and grammars, which necessitate socially situated identities’ (Gee, 1996:42). He gave an example of the ongoing linguistic and identity work that a group of Native Americans performed in order to be recognised as ‘real Indians’, including avoiding conversations with strangers, and struggling to ‘fit in’, or not ‘elevate themselves over other real Indians’ (Gee, 1999:15-16). Gee’s study emphasises the social negotiation involved in identity production. In other words, identities are continually constructed not only by one’s creative self-making, but also by other’s perceptions of one’s self. Bakhtin, Vygotsky and Holland (1998) contrast positioned and figured elements of identities, where positionality signifies one’s understanding of his or her position in systems of power, hierarchy, or affiliation (Holland et al, 1998:128). Holland et al (1998) regard positionality as ‘inextricably linked to power, status, and rank’; it is ascribed by locally relevant social structures such as race, class, gender and age. As discussed in the Chapter Ten, identity for the

women is recognised as entailing figured elements, and aspects that relate to culture, which include symbols and socially shared meanings. Holland et al (1998) claim that in what they call the ‘space of authoring’, actors might use ‘figured elements of identity to surmount the negative social positioning they experience’ (p.55). Holland et al (1998) suggest that one way in which multilingual learners can develop figured elements of their own identities and counteract powerful social positioning is through the adoption and use of powerful, compelling cultural resources and artefacts. Pahl (2002a and b) has built upon Holland and Bartlett’s use of habitus in relation to figured worlds in order to help her describe the multi-modal practices of young children at home in her research on London families. Drawing also upon Kress for multi modality and Street for literacy practices, she describes the ways in which young children take from and adapt family narratives as they do drawings, create three dimensional objects and write graffiti on walls. Through these narratives, embedded in material and linguistic form, the identity of family members is constructed and adapted over time. Pahl (2002) develops a sophisticated analysis of how such practices relate to concepts of textuality, figured worlds, identity and power.

In employing a social practice approach to literacy, it is important to look at how literacy is rooted in conceptions of the informants’ identities, and how their literacy practices are embedded into their identities as multilingual learners. Crowther, Hamilton and Tett (2001) explain that ‘the learner’s level of literacy, the nature of the printed material that the learner reads and writes, and the role that literacy plays in their community all contribute to how that person is perceived by him or herself and by society’ (p.96). And so becoming literate involves not just learning how to read and write but also learning how to use literacy to examine critically one’s position in life in terms of socio-economic status, gender, educational background and race (Auerbach, 1989; Freire, 1993; Friere and Macedo, 1987; Giroux and McLaren, 1992; Street, 1995). Within this literacy framework, there is not just one literacy but many (Street, 1993) and so an individual may need to practice many kinds of literacies to fulfil his or her roles in society (Street, 1993). The literacy needs of the home or the community may be entirely different from the kinds of literacies required at work or at the ESOL setting. According to Lankshear and McLaren (1993) these literacies:

Are socially constructed within political contexts; that is, within contexts where access to economic, cultural, political, and institutional power is structured unequally. Moreover, these same literacies evolve and are employed in daily life settings that are driven with conflicting and otherwise competing interests (Lankshear and MacLaren, 1993: xviii).

My view of literacy is informed by Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of social constructivism, which takes the view that an individual’s literacy development results from social interactions within

specific cultural contexts. More specifically, Vygotsky (1978) sees the community as playing an integral role in literacy development, arguing that it is the people most central in our lives who influence the way we perceive the world, and therefore how and what we learn. From literacy as a social practice viewpoint, literacy learning should occur in meaningful contexts, and efforts should be made to connect multilingual learners' experiences in the literacy setting with their learning experiences outside the learning setting (De Castell et al, 1986). De Castell et al (1986) provide a historical perspective, arguing that in order to understand literacy, the substantive context of personal, social and political values in which literacy occurs must be explicitly addressed; literacy does not simply consist of a universally defined set of skills constant across time and place. The same person may be regarded as 'illiterate' in one culture, while appearing to be 'literate' in another culture (Blackledge, 1999). Because a number of cultures co-exist within our society, it is more likely that a range of versions of what constitutes being literate will be encountered by different learners (Ferdman, 1990). In seeking to understand the literacy practices of multilingual learners, it is important to identify the social functions, meanings and values attached to literacy in that particular community.

### ***Multilingual Literacy as a Social Practice***

Studies focusing on the literacy practices of multilingual communities include two influential studies by Street (1984) and Scribner and Cole (1981). Street, as a social anthropologist, carried out ethnographic fieldwork (in Islamic villages) in Iran observing both commercial and more traditional literacies. Street utilises the idea of literacy practices and contributes the important distinction between autonomous and ideological theories of literacy. Research in England, which looks at the primary uses of literacy in multilingual communities, also includes studies by Mukul Saxena (1991); Arvind Bhatt, David Barton, Marilyn Martin-Jones and Mukul Saxena (1996), Mike Baynham (1993) and Eve Gregory (1996), which are discussed in more depth at a later stage in this chapter. In addition studies by Hodge and Jones (2000) Jones, Martin-Jones and Bhatt (2000); and Saxena (2000) broaden and extend our understanding of social meanings related to literacy practices in different contexts and taken together they provide a very powerful analysis of the link between literacies in specific contexts, broader social practices and peoples' values and meanings related to literacy. I have made use of '*Multilingual Literacies: Reading and Writing Different Words*' by Martin-Jones and Jones (2001) extensively in this study because I feel that it helped to deepen my understanding of literacy as a social practice and its relationship in multilingual and multi-ethnic settings. For me, this volume is a stepping stone in making theoretical advances by not only bringing bilingualism and literacy together but also in

opening up new possibilities for diverse ways of researching multilingual literacies which has inspired the current study. Throughout this investigation I have drawn on the compilation of ethnographic studies included in this book to emphasize the coexistence of multiple languages and literacies in the lives of my informants. Martin-Jones and Jones (200) proposed the term 'multilingual literacies' which I have used at length throughout this study as it highlights multiplicity of the communicative repertoires of multilingual women. I also have found this book provided a rich collection of research on multilingual language use and literacies which have helped me structure the theoretical framework of my study. The compilation of studies present rich and detailed accounts of multilingual literacies which have been a guiding light in my investigation of the literacy practices of my informants and have enabled me to highlight the importance of recognising the diversity and specificity of Yemeni women's literacy experiences in their homes, communities and learning settings. As a multilingual female novice researcher myself, I also felt that I was able to engage with the authors to broaden and extend my understanding of multilingual literacies with the vision of empowering multilingual learners.

All of the above studies illustrate the fact that there is not a single literacy but many different literacies (Street, 1984; Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Lankshear and McLaren, 1993; Street, 1995). There are also different literacies associated with different languages and cultures. Lankshear and McLaren (1993) argue that 'literacies are configured into different sets of practices and can often be named such as workplace literacy, schooled literacy, and personal literacy. These literacies are associated with particular aspects of cultural life' (p.23). Different literacies are associated with different aspects of life but these boundaries are not fixed and there is often an overlap, such as when people bring work home or write a personal email at work (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). Heaney (1996) explains that various institutions such as family, religion and education support and structure literacy activities in particular aspects of life. Some are more formally regulated by rules and procedures and others more by the pressure of social conventions and attitudes. De Castell and Egan (1987) explain that 'socially powerful institutions such as education tend to support dominant literacy practices, whereas other, vernacular literacies are less visible, less valued and less supported' (p.23). This indicates that literacy practices are 'patterned by social institutions and power relationships and certain literacy practices are more dominant, visible and influential than others' (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2000:12). Reder (1994) argues that literacy studies are essentially interdisciplinary in that underlying the theories of literacy and social practices are other dimensions of and educational theory. Reder (1994) explains that any theory of literacy implies a theory of learning. This investigation highlights the importance of understanding the nature of multilingual literacy practices and the nature of literate identities. Reder (1994) suggests that we need to draw on linguistic minority insights of literacy, their theories about literacy and

education and the strategies they use to learn new literacies, in order to make the crucial links between people's literacy practices and their education (Reder, 1994).

In this investigation, I am more concerned about documenting the everyday literacies in the lives of Yemeni women and exploring the relationship with more dominant literacies and discourses in their lives. I am drawing on the reality that the acquisition and use of languages and literacies are 'inevitably bound up with asymmetrical relations of power between ethnolinguistic groups' (Auerbach, 1989:23). De Castell and Luke (1987) argue that a social practice account of literacy practices moves away from a conception of literacy as an 'individual attribute towards an understanding of literacy as a community resource realised in social relationships' (p.26). This is in sharp contrast to the more traditional or what Street calls the 'autonomous' account of literacy as a 'set of technical reading and writing skills to be acquired and used by individuals without any reference to the multiplicity of configurations of literacy as socially, culturally and historically situated' (Street, 1984:9). It is important to note that literacy practices are dynamic and changing and need to be understood historically in order to understand the ideology, culture and traditions on which current practices are based. Auerbach (1989) explains that the literacy practices of linguistic minorities are rooted in specific historical processes; 'a post-colonial order, international labour migration, movement of refugees, minority rights movement, or in global social and political changes' (Auerbach, 1989:42).

The methodological approach I am taking, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five, fits in (comfortably) with the New Literacy Studies, because it advocates a broader understanding of the importance of looking beyond texts, and more to what people do with literacy, with whom, where and how. This means focusing attention on the cultural practice within which the written word is embedded in the ways in which texts are socially regulated and used. Over the past century there has been a move from the dominance of writing and the written word to a relatively recent dominance of the image. That is, from the book as our main meaning-making technology to a dominance of images on screen that are interactive, that have animation, texture and dimensionality as dominating technologies. The influence of both the image and computer screens has shifted the way we make meaning. As Rowsell (2006) explains today meaning-making is more complex with more mediums, materials, and modalities from which to make meaning. Over the past decade, there have also been several studies that have identified major shifts in our reading and writing habits that range from the kinds of texts that we use to how we use them (Alvermann, 2002; Cope and Kalantzis, 2000; Gee, 2003; Hull and Shultz, 2002; Jewitt and Kress, 2003; Goodson, Knobel, Lankshear and Mangan, 2002; Kalantzis and Cope, 2005; Knobel and Lankshear, 2003; Marsh, 2005; Moss, 1999; Pahl, 2002; Pahl and Rowsell, 2005; Street, 2005). Therefore the approach to literacy taken in this



investigation is a shift from literacy as deficit, something people do not have, to the many different ways that people engage with literacy, recognising difference, diversity, and challenging how these differences are valued within our society. As soon as we move away from seeing literacy not simply as a set of skills but as practices with which we are actively engaged, it becomes obvious that there are many different ways in which individuals interact with texts, and are developing new literacies all the time. In his book *'The Social Mind'* James Gee (1992) talks about how literacies are linked to different discourse communities that we are all part of. These are made up of people, things, and characteristic ways of talking, acting, thinking, believing valuing and interpreting. Reading and writing are integral part of these activities and ways of being in the world (Gee, 1992).

When a social practice approach to literacy is taken, it enables one to be reflective about the everyday practices that we are all part of, to ask questions, rather than to assume that we already know what literacy is. This approach to literacy places at centre stage learners' own definitions of literacy because there is no one definition that is valid for everyone, for all the time (Gee, 1992). This means exploring my own starting points, which are discussed in Chapter One and the informants' starting points and assumptions about literacy, which are also discussed in detail in Chapters Nine and Ten. The sense of there being different literacies is very clear in multilingual communities (in particular in the Yemeni community), where different literacies can be associated with different languages. This also involves us looking beyond educational settings to everyday practices and informal learning, and to other settings in which literacies play a key role. Literacy does not only take place in the classroom but also in the learners' homes and in their life outside the classroom. This view of literacy acknowledges a shift from a psychological or cognitive model of literacy, to one that includes the many practices associated with reading and writing, as Street puts it:

It is a shift from literacy as an autonomous gift to be given to people, to an ideological understanding of literacy, placing it in its bigger context of institutional purposes and power relationships (Street, 1995:23).

### ***Literacy Empowerment and Multilingual Women***

We are all prisoners of our ignorance. By opening new worlds of information and ideas for us, literacy is one of the chief means of human liberation. (Pattison, 1982:39).

Most of us seldom think about our own literacy nor do we even remember how we learnt to read and write when we were children. We have grown up knowing that we have these skills and as a result we have a sense of dignity and confidence in ourselves. Although we may take our own literacy for granted, we cannot remain unaware of other people who have little experience in becoming readers and writers in mainstream society and who find themselves labelled as 'illiterate'. Smith (1988) points out that throughout the world the majority of victims of 'official illiteracy' are women, who for various reasons such as poverty, limited access to literacy programmes, and often no opportunity to be officially schooled. Giroux and McLaren (1992) argue that poverty; gender discrimination and racial inequality have meant inequality in the education system and workplace. These, along with disintegration of family and violence against women, are some of the barriers ethnic minority women face and which have prevented them from accessing literacy programs. Almost all of the women in my study, as highlighted in their stories, are burdened with family responsibilities such as children and extended family members to care for. They lack support and encouragement from wider society. However, I strongly believe that when these women and others like them are able to overcome some of the barriers and find the courage to begin a journey of learning and personal development, they will no doubt acquire a stronger sense of accomplishment in terms of their learning. I often hear time and time again talk about 'illiteracy' becoming a public concern for all, and a real concern for non-literate/illiterate women who are said to continue to struggle to maintain a sense of belonging and usefulness as mothers and wives within a print oriented literate society. These women are thought to have a sense of dependency and powerlessness and I find this all too much of cliché. Rather than viewing literacy as skills to be developed, we need to recognise that:

A social practice approach to literacy enables all of us, within and beyond education, to appreciate the variety and creativity of everyday literacy practices, to question received wisdom about literacy, and encourage us to find out more about practices in other settings and to devise educational responses to these growing understandings (Hamilton, 1998:23).

Giroux and McLaren (1992) argue that although the intention of giving multilingual women a meaningful and purposeful reason for learning to read and write is a reasonable one, it also raises a concern about the kind of message being conveyed to them concerning the purpose of becoming 'literate'. Opportunities need to be developed for multilingual women to discover reading and writing as recreation and learning and as a means to thinking critically about what they are learning and experiencing. Reflection and critical thinking are the first steps to changing beliefs and to changing one's situation (Hamilton, 1998). Stromquist (1990) reminds

us that literacy programmes must balance the interests, skills and knowledge that learners seek and need with the opportunity for them to build self-confidence and control over their own learning. The experience of being empowered and being in control of one's own situation is unknown to some of the women in this study who have at times been labelled as 'illiterate'. And so those faced with the responsibility of developing literacy programs 'must go beyond nutrition, health and family planning and move into consciousness-raising and mobilization' (Bashin, 1997:107). Bashin (1997) remarks that multilingual women need knowledge 'not so much to read and understand the world but to read, understand and control their world' (p.107). In a study by Blackledge (2001) of the literacy practices and attitudes of Bangladeshi families in Birmingham, reveals that multilingual women are disempowered by mainstream school practices in which they are considered 'illiterate'. He argues that this disempowerment is due to the school's failure to recognise the linguistic and cultural resources, which these women employ to support their children's literacy development. Blackledge (1999) reports that the women were regarded by the school as 'illiterate' because their home and community literacies did not fit with the literacy of the school. He found that the teachers were not incorporating the families' languages in the education of their children, or providing advice or resources to enable the women to become involved in their children's schooling (1999:192) In refusing the Bangladeshi women entry to the dominant-culture market, Blackledge (1999) argues that 'the school acted as gatekeeper, and exercised coercive relations of power, so that the women remained disempowered in their attempts to support their children's education' (p.192).

### ***Concluding Thoughts***

In summary, a social practice approach to literacy argues for the importance of self-consciously researching local cultures and perspectives on literacy, and building this knowledge into learning programmes, using it as a basis for discussion and investigation of literacy issues with multilingual learners. This does not necessarily mean incorporating everyday literacies into formal teaching by directly using or modelling them in formal educational settings, since this 'inevitably recontextualises and thus changes their meaning' (Blackledge 1999:21). The basic issue is that of acknowledging and respecting the existence of diverse literacies and understanding that classroom literacies are not the only literacy. Rather they are a 'specialised and powerful set of practices which may complement and enhance the practices of the home and community, but which are also capable of violating or devaluing them' (Blackledge, 1999:26). Heath (1983) in her study of the daily activities and conversations of "ordinary folk" in Trackton, a black community and in Roadville, a white community; argues that the imposition

of a standardised curriculum that is not sensitive to local difference, in many cases increases the distance between home and school literacies and may lead to the alienation of multilingual learners. Multilingual learners are involved in a whole set of everyday cultural literacy practices, in which they engage with other people who are significant to them and to their families. Educators and researchers need to find ways of exploring and helping multilingual learners to develop a sense of their own expertise and authorship, to take control of their literacies, and put them to work to benefit themselves and their communities.

In this chapter I have set out the core substantive interests and theoretical underpinnings of this investigation, and have also conducted a broad based review of literature that has informed the current study. The literature I have consulted is from various disciplines in order to demonstrate how a wide range of studies have provided insights, that have informed this study. The unifying feature of the research I have discussed is that literacy is regarded as a social practice. I now turn my attention to Chapter Three where I begin with an examination of researcher positionality, what this may encompass in relation to my study and whether positionality can be recognised as two distinct positions. I then go on to attempt to establish the influence of my own positionality upon the selection of the research topic and research informants. I also explore my own positionality within the area of multilingual literacy research and how I am positioned by the informants in this investigation. The impact of my positionality upon the research process will also be examined.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Negotiating Positionality

#### *Defining the Self*

I begin this chapter with an examination of researcher positionality, what this may encompass in relation to my study and whether positionality can be recognised as two distinct positions. I then attempt to establish the influence of my own positionality upon the selection of the research topic and research informants. I also explore my own positionality within the area of multilingual literacy research and how I am positioned by the informants in this investigation. The impact of my positionality upon the research process will also be examined. In this chapter I present a critical analysis of my role, through a reflective presentation of the various ways that my researcher status is evaluated and negotiated during the fieldwork. Working within this framework, this chapter addresses the relationships between the researcher and informant in terms of access, rapport and explores how ethnicity, culture and the language of the informants have influenced their interaction and participation in this study. In the latter part of the chapter I examine the impact of such dynamics on the study in terms of how the research topic was conceptualised and framed and the possible impact on the interpretation of findings. Finally, I consider the role of ethnicity, culture and language in relation to this investigation.

As social beings we are located in space and time. Researchers (like anyone else) are influenced by the particular understanding about, and interpretations of the world to which they have been exposed. As Kanuha (2000) argues, there is no way to distinguish between what is ‘subjective and perceived and in people’s heads, and what is out there in the world’ (p.46). We must not pretend that it is possible for the researcher to forget her/his personhood, her/his histories, and all that it entails. Therefore, reflexivity should be an inherent part of the research endeavour (Narayan, 1993). We should challenge the dogma, with its historical roots ‘in the dominant enlightenment worldview’ (Christians, 2000:134) that good practice, moral practice, is value-free, neutral and objective and uncontaminated by the presence, in any way, shape or form, of the researcher (Haniff, 1985). We should also reject the tradition of hiding ourselves by using discourse which ‘neutralise, minimize, standardise, contain, control, and disengage our subjective or personal experiences’ (Haniff, 1985:134).

I often tell stories about my study to myself and to others, by thinking, talking and writing about it. It does not only help me to see things more clearly because it is important to make them explicit, but it also gives me the opportunity to learn from the feedback of other listeners and readers and to reconstruct my own understanding. I am also going through a learning process during this investigation for which the telling of the story of the investigation on various occasions was crucial for the research process and possibly research results. I am learning about the relation between learning, narrating and research and about my position as a researcher in life history research and I present a critique of this process in *Dilemmas of translation and identity: Ethnographic research in multilingual home* (Alzouebi and Pahl, 2006). Theoretically I am also learning to construct a framework and to account for it as theoretically based knowledge. My concern with positionality and the need for reflexivity arises out of a family history of displacements, which I discuss in detail at a later stage in the chapter, and that dislocation is not only a legacy but also a norm in my family. For instance, when I began this investigation I worried about how I would be positioned in the research. I continue to struggle with questions like, am I too involved, uninvolved, too invested; who is my reader; why is this work important; how much of me must be in the research and why? How must I belong to the work to call it my own and how must it belong to me? In such discontinuities I find my roots through reflexivity towards the research process.

Feminist researchers such as Harding, Oakley, and Stanley assert that we must begin in the same world as those being studied. That is, in order to understand fully the depth and richness of the informants' literacy experiences, I must begin with informants' accounts of their lives with all its richness, contradictions, and inconsistencies; thus, 'a neutral or disengaged position, from which the professional sociologist has traditionally launched his/her investigations, no longer exists' (Smith, 1995:19). We are not immune to this reality; we should not and cannot strive to be neutral observers of our informants' experiences and so I cannot situate myself outside of the practices and processes of both the research and the institutions that have provided the sites of study (Beoku-Bett, 1994). Instead, researchers and informants both shape and are shaped by their positions in the world and in specific institutions. Therefore:

Research practice cannot be disembodied. It is impossible to take the researcher out of any type of research or any stage of the research process. The person of the researcher is always there, whether they be cast as 'villain', contaminating research design, data collection, analysis and reporting; as a 'hero' (Goodson and Sikes, 2001:28).

This discussion requires a description of how my social location as the researcher has influenced my choice of research topic and method. I am Arabic speaking, British, multilingual, female, from a Jordanian background and as such, often find that I am caught

between various worlds, juggling the identity of being a researcher, a mother, a sister, a daughter, a student and a translator. These layers of experiences are central to my individual identity. I have struggled with the feeling of living multiple lives in this study, (Alzouebi and Pahl, 2006). The multiple realities I discuss are reinforced by my experiences with the Yemeni community, my traditional family values, and my student-researcher stature. For example in the Yemeni community I am perceived as ‘independent’, that is, going against traditional Yemeni culture by entering higher education and thus moving away from traditional Yemeni values and attitudes. On the other hand, in the feminist community I may be unwelcomed because of my traditional Arab family values which may be perceived as working against the emancipation of women. Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) explain that:

Despite the need to belong and to merge their dual identities, the author often feels like the ‘other’ in both worlds, never fully belonging (p.23)

As an ethnic minority researcher I struggle to engage with the disconnections that are apparent between the demands of my research communities, with whom I share lifelong relationships. Collins (2001) explains that there are various ethical, cultural, political and personal issues that can present difficulties for ethnic minority researchers who, in their own communities, ‘work partially as insiders, and are often selected for this purpose, and partially as outsiders, because of their Western education or because they may work across clan, tribe, linguistic, age and gender boundaries’ (Collins, 2001:29). Simultaneously, I am affiliated to my university as an insider within a particular paradigm but also as an outsider because I am often marginalized and perceived to be representative of either a ‘minority or a rival interest group’ (Collins, 1998:29). Collins (1998) points out that:

Sometimes when in the community (in the field) or when sitting in on research meetings it can feel like inside-out/outside-in research. More often, however, indigenous research is not quite as simple as it looks, nor quite as complex as it feels! Indigenous research is a humble and humbling activity (Collins, 1998:29).

In positioning myself as an insider I am claiming a genealogical, cultural and political set of experiences. If I am considered as ‘insider’, I am frequently judged on insider criteria; my family background, first language status, politics, age, gender, religion as well as my educational background. Writing this thesis is personally enlightening for me because the story is my own. Although my own experiences of dislocation heighten my personal fragmentation, this fragmentation is also a space shared with other researchers (Collins, 1998). In the process of writing this thesis I have not only learned to cope with the continuous discontinuities of my

life, but I have also learnt that all research, for me, must first begin with a careful examination of my own positionality.

### ***Researcher Identity and the Decision-Making Process***

The sometimes competing self-identities of the qualitative researcher and the impact of these identities on decision-making in the research process need to be looked at closely. I believe that while culture provides the backdrop to identity, various aspects of the cultures to which a researcher belongs may result in varying personas that influence the decision-making process. I have reviewed literature from a number of disciplines and have found much written about the difficulty that researchers face in the question of how to cross the cultural gaps that are frequently perceived as barriers in research (Haniff, 1985). I often read researchers referring to ‘those’ whom they perceive as inaccessible because of perceived differences from mainstream culture. Therefore I feel that an examination of one’s sense of personal identity and the predispositions that prepare one for certain roles should be an explicit task of the researcher. Culture provides the backdrop against which the individual researcher will act (Haniff, 1985), but the complexity of this concept suggests great caution as we try to become aware of what cultural features and affiliations actually influence us as researchers. In this investigation, I have become increasingly aware of the contribution of the differing levels of my own cultural identity to my researcher ‘persona’. First, my own cultural frame of reference is an overarching cultural identity as a person of Arabic-heritage, whereas other cultures with which I identify include Arabic and British cultural frameworks. These aspects of my identity have led to various personas I explore in this chapter. My preference for narrative models of inquiry have also led to a persona that can be labelled ‘researcher as advocate’, and my preference for an inclusive and just view of education has led to a persona that I label ‘critical researcher’. This is persona which has led to an identity that is interested in multilingual womens’ learning and some form of social justice for them (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994).

Peshkin (1988) framed the notion of developing well-informed subjectivity in terms of the personas of the researcher. Peshkin (1988) argued that the points of view, belief systems, and personal purposes of the researcher influence all research decisions and research acts. Furthermore since researchers, using any mode of inquiry have a point of view, and since research is not a value-free exercise, the challenge for me has been not to eliminate, but to document the effects of the personas that influence my behaviour as a researcher (Peshkin, 1988). We need to be committed to showing our place in the setting we are investigating. I



have found careful monitoring of one's position in the research process, as well as one's relationship with the informants to be a critical component for maintaining a focus on the research agenda. Beoku-Betts (1994) explains that a self-reflexive researcher maintains a research agenda to secure a forum for informants to express, to be accountable, to defend, and validate knowledge claims that contribute to, in the case of my study, multilingual women's experiences of literacy.

Beoku-Betts (1994) explains that as the vision of knowledge and of the research process shifts, so does the role of the researcher. This investigation is inspired by social literacy and critical theory approach, as discussed in Chapter Two, where my role as the researcher is continuously shifting, because the aim of this study is to move towards 'forms of political action that can redress the injustices found in the field site or constructed in the very act of research itself' (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994:140). Thus, by promoting the stories of multilingual learners, I hope to encourage self-reflection, because the critical research process is tied to practice and to social change. This fits in with the idea of 'ethnography of empowerment', which is concerned with understanding the 'transition from disempowerment to empowerment' (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994). In any study that seeks to give meaning to informant voices, it is important to appreciate that the interpretation and process of inquiry is influenced by the researchers' social and cultural identities.

A significant amount of literature has been devoted to the insider-outsider debate in qualitative research. Many contemporary researchers are focusing on their desire to look beyond this methodological dichotomy. However, these studies are generally reflective narratives and they are dispersed among many fields of research including anthropology, education, ethnic studies, family research, feminist studies and sociology (Oakley, 1981). Through this debate I will address the difference between the work conducted by those who are seen to share membership with the social group studied, and those who do not. This debate is particularly concerned with research conducted on ethnic minority communities and focuses on issues of power and authority in the field. Working within this framework, the debate addresses the relationship between myself as the researcher and the informants in terms of access and rapport in various ways. Merton (1972) defines the researcher's position as an epistemological principle centred on the issue of access, which can take two forms. It is either a monopolistic access, in which the researcher possesses exclusive knowledge of the community and its members or the researcher has privileged access, in which she or he has a claim to the hidden knowledge of the group. The outsider as a 'professional stranger' (Agar, 1996) who is often seen to be detached from the commitments of the informants is seen to more readily acquire objectivity and as Kauffman (1994) explains in her study of positionality in relation to white researchers studying

black communities 'unrestricted by the prejudged practice and theory, and therefore, can raise questions unlikely to be raised by insiders' (Kauffman, 1994:42). Merton (1992) frames access in terms of an 'insider' doctrine and 'outsider' doctrine. In this framework, the insider is an individual who possesses intimate knowledge of the community and its members due to previous ongoing association with the community. The general assumption in the literature is that this intimate knowledge offers insights that are at times difficult or impossible to access by an outsider. Olson (1977), writing about family functioning described perceptions of insiderness and outsidersness in similar terms to Merton's framework of the insider/outsider. Insiderness was gained from family members most often utilizing self-reporting methods. Olson (1977) saw the dichotomy of insiderness and outsidersness as 'two mutually exclusive frames of reference' (p.70). Surra and Ridley (1991) writing about interpersonal perceptions in close relationships and families expanded this conceptualisation by arguing that insiderness and outsidersness are points on a continuum. A researcher's place on that continuum is circumscribed by the relationship between the researcher and the phenomena being researched (Surra and Ridley, 1991).

Haniff (1985) explains that 'insider' and being 'native' are difficult concepts to define because there is so little 'distance' between the researcher and the researched. As she states: 'an insider may be of more determinant than an outsider and a native more foreign than a foreigner' (p.112). Nevertheless, Haniff (1985) argues that insiderness is crucial in research because outsidersness is, 'by its very nature, limiting in terms of understanding hidden meanings and achieving a deep level of trust with the informant' (p.112). She summarizes the insider position by stating:

It is only when we are perceived and accepted as an insider that we can truly understand the meaning of the lives we study. An insider or native must take this status seriously. Its methodological implications are profound; for it is this group who can either do most harm or the most good (Haniff, 1985:112-13).

Haniff (1985) attaches a valuable attribute to the pursuit of insiderness. However, defining the advantages of insider and native researcher seems to be overly simplistic. I examine why some researchers utilizing an insider perspective place unique value on insiderness, based in part on the concept of epistemological privilege, and the possible motivations of transition from a community member to a researcher of that community. The idea that the relative position of the insider can reveal a new perspective, a hidden meaning, or a unique understanding that is not otherwise achievable by an outsider is found in most literature. Many researchers argue that, either implicitly or explicitly, insiderness privileges the researcher, although the form of this secured positionality differs depending on the objectives of the research project and the level of

access to informants (Beoku-Betts, 1994). Many researchers cite a variety of interrelated strengths to insiderness, which I have categorised into four broad values: the value of shared experience; the value of greater access, the value of cultural interpretation, and the value of deeper understanding and clarity of thought for the researcher. However each of these strengths also has challenges that the insider must negotiate and come to terms with.

Early feminist researchers such as Oakley (1981) were drawn to qualitative inquiry and ethnographic research, in part because of the idea that women possess a common set of interests, concerns and social values, and that these shared experiences therefore formed the basis 'for dismantling the hierarchies, fictions, and avoidances of research based positivist frameworks' facilitated more complete interpretations of data based on a shared understanding of women's experiences in society (DeVault, 1996:37). This assumption was similar to that of Zinn's (1979) who argued that minority researchers had special lenses through which to understand the social reality of their community. Zinn (1979) also points out that minority researchers are more likely to grasp certain aspects of racial phenomena that would be inaccessible to members of the dominant culture (outsiders) and that this enhanced perception would allow the inside researcher to break down 'self-protective behaviours' formed as a result of interactions with outsiders from the dominant culture (Zinn, 1979). Contemporary feminist researchers such as Collins, Cannon, Hooks, and Walker however, have argued that this assumption is overly simplistic and does not take into account the complex nature of relationships between the researcher and the informant. In other words, insider research is practised within one's own community. However the way that community is defined remains a process of negotiated achievement (Oakley, 1981). Riessman (1987) encapsulated this idea when she stated that 'gender is not enough' in establishing a 'harmonious relationship with informants' (p.42). This realization has subsequently been applied to the idea that being 'black is not enough' (Beoku-Betts, 1994) and in studying other underrepresented communities, such as Zavella's (1993) research with Chicano informants and earlier studies by Styles (1979) in his research on gay bathhouses; 'I did not possess any special access to the life of the baths merely because I am gay' (p.148).

Feminist literature, in particular, holds the idea that shared experiences provide a privileged means of establishing a rapport between the researcher and the informant (Oakley, 1981). Few contemporary authors totally reject the idea that there is no value in shared experiences among women and other groups because, as Riessman (1987) explains in simply being an insider, there are experiential commonalities that can form the basis for building trust and forging a strong relationship. However, these experiences should not to be confused with the need to work towards achieving insiderness and nurturing an ongoing level of trust. Hall (1998) distinguishes

between an understanding of cultural identity as a shared cultural framework and as connotative of essential differences of 'what we have become' (p.114). In this latter meaning of identity as a 'production', Hall (1998:225) notes that this signifies the dynamic 'interplay of history, culture and power we face in the challenge to define ourselves not by means of the other, but with the other. Moore (1994) adds that 'experience is not used to authenticate and essentialize positions of identity and knowledge but is constructed as intersubjective and embodied and 'irredeemably a social process' (Moore, 1994:3). Experience also needs to be understood in relation to contrasting origins and histories, shaped by common aspirations: 'identities are the names we give to the different way we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narrative of the past' (Hall, 1998:225).

Some studies such as those by Haniff (1985) and Ohnuki-Kierney (1984) described the insider as holding special value in terms of being able to interpret the culture of the community. Ohnuki-Tierney (1984) stated, for example, that 'native anthropologists are in a far more advantageous position in understanding the emotive dimension of behaviour' (p.584), which she argues is for outsiders to interpret. She cautions, however, that the intensity by which an insider may identify with these emotional dimensions can undermine the ability of the researcher to find patterns of emotions. On the same level, insiderness also provides an avenue for interpreting culture-based cues in the data collection process (Haniff, 1985). Haniff used these cues as a means of putting her informants at ease in her study of Caribbean women because there was a shared understanding of the normative rules of the community and this implicit understanding was reported to contribute to minimizing class differences. Also, the ability to utilize insiderness to create a rapport free from tension, according to Haniff (1985), contributes to the legitimacy of the research in the eyes of the informants. The interpretation of cultural cues may also relate to other forms of communication that are facilitated by a shared knowledge of normative rules, values and belief systems, such as non-verbal cues and the use of unique terminology (Haniff, 1985).

A further strength cited in the literature concerns the idea that insiderness facilitates greater access at the start of one's research to certain groups within the community, and to critical information. This is perhaps the most universally accepted strength given to being an insider. Ohnuki-Tierney (1984) argues that there exists 'a definite advantage' to being part of a community at the beginning of a research project because this positionality is said to reduce the need for preliminary negotiation that an outsider must conduct to gain access to the community and to work with informants. However, she cautions that this does not mean that the researcher has somehow achieved an inside understanding of the community's culture. Related to this form of access is the assertion by Haniff (1985) that being an insider contributes to 'the

establishment of initial levels of trust and can lead to more open exchanges with informants' (Haniff, 1985:62). Therefore, it cannot be overstated that educating oneself about the history and culture of informants is crucial to gaining inside status. Displaying ignorance of history and culture can close doors quickly when tackling certain topics with particular communities. Without a comprehensive understanding of the history and culture of my informants, I risk inaccurately interpreting the data and contributing to the silence, distortion, generalization, and even marginalization of the diversity of their experiences (Collins, 1991; Hooks, 1989).

As a researcher I had to be attentive to my use of language throughout the fieldwork process (Alzouebi and Pahl, 2006). Like personal appearance and body language, language is also a social status maker. It connotes 'a privileged-education or socialization-that can drive a wedge in or cement the informer-researcher relationship' (Bakhtin, 1981:210). I found the representations of language to play a crucial role in the operations of hegemony and particularly in the researcher-informant relationships (Bakhtin, 1981). Taking the interview data back to the informants to review was helpful in addressing language barriers. I recognise that language is a site of political struggle for marginalized groups because the alternatives are either to be silenced by 'hegemonic forces' or to speak truth to power (i.e. those forces that oppress) (hooks, 1990). Hence language is a symbolic power that 'defines and validates experiences' (hooks, 1990:78). I found that the research process and the decisions can also either enhance or suppress the language of the informants, and subsequently, 're-affirm or deny their account of experience' (hooks, 1990:78).

Deutsch (1981) viewed this form of debate as inadequate in explaining the complexities of the insider and outsider dichotomy by noting that 'we are all multiple insiders and outsiders' (p.174). She argues that 'only by moving beyond a dichotomous cause and effect framework that focuses on which position is more important, can researchers begin to explore the more critical issues of how the positional status of the researcher may influence the phenomenon being studied' (Deutsch, 1981:174). This perspective attempts to create a framework for understanding the researcher's position of insiderness as 'a process of achievement rather than simply ascribed or bestowed upon the investigator' (Deutsch 1981:23). More recently, De Andrade (2000) has called for a rejection of the idea that insiderness is either achieved or ascribed, but is instead a 'process of ongoing evaluation' (p.23). Griffith (1998) argues that 'different knowledge is embedded in both the researcher's biography and the social relations of power and privilege in which the researcher is located' (p.363). Insiderness therefore appears to be a result of an individual's biographical profile, political activities, research agenda and the relationship with the community under study. Griffith (1998) describes the researcher's social

location and knowledge as ‘always located somewhere’, yet continuously ‘moving back and forth between the positional boundaries of insiderness and outsidersness’ (Griffith, 1998:363).

### *Where do I fit in?*

To do justice to the research and to my informants it is vital for me as a researcher to examine my own positionality, particularly as a multilingual female affiliated with a British institution who is conducting narrative research with Yemeni women in South Yorkshire. I ask myself, have I been influenced too deeply by post modernist discourse about presentations of selves and identities? I often ask myself about why I seek other multilingual women and investigate their marginality, hybridity, resistance, and struggles? And then why did I choose to situate myself in the field of narrative research? And how am I positioned in this research?

From consulting literature in various disciplines, I found it very difficult to find a term that best describes my positionality; a term that I felt represented the role I play in this investigation. In reviewing the literature on researcher positionality I came across various terms such as ‘insider’, ‘outsider’, ‘native’, ‘indigenous’ and ‘marginal’ researcher, which I feel did not fit. I then came across the term ‘outsider within’ by Collins (1998). After reading Collins (1998) definitions of ‘Outsider within’, I felt this term seemed to fit, because it seems an apt description of researchers, like myself who find themselves caught between relations of unequal power. This unequal power stems from the interaction of hierarchies of race, class, gender, and language, and my position needed to be made explicit. I have used the term ‘outsider within’ to describe how my social placement in specific historical contexts of race, gender, class and language inequality may influence the research process.

Collins (1998) uses the term ‘outsider within’ to describe the social locations or border spaces occupied by relations of unequal power. As a female ethnic minority researcher I claim my identity as an ‘outsider within’ by my placement in these social locations. Thus as Collins (1998) explains:

Outsider-within identities are situational identities that are attached to specific histories of social injustice-they are not a decontextualized identity category divorced from historical social inequalities that can be assumed by anyone (p.25).

Collins (1998) also notes that:

Many assume an equivalency of oppression, where claiming the identity of an Outsider within' and invoking its initial oppositional intent becomes a shortcut through all of the difficulties of building coalitions under such adverse conditions (p.35).

It is important, as mentioned previously to provide a critical analysis of my role (so far) as the 'outsider within' in my fieldwork. Reflections are presented on the various ways that my researcher status as an 'outsider within' is evaluated and negotiated during the initial fieldwork in Chapter Five. These negotiations reveal the manner in which the informants define the boundaries of the group, the attributes they associate with it, and the meaning of group itself. This interpretation of 'outsider within' status involves complex and ongoing definitions and negotiations of group membership, which highlight the way that researchers and informants are simultaneously engaged in the construction of identity (Collins, 1998).

It is also important to explore the hidden dilemmas of being an 'outsider within'; common assumptions made about this status are that it offers a distinct advantage in terms of accessing and understanding culture. However I have found these advantages to not be absolute and one must be aware of ethical and methodological dilemmas associated with entering the field, positioning and disclosing, shared relationships and disengagement (Merton, 1972). The assumption that being an 'outsider within' provides the researcher with greater access and deeper understanding is often true (Collins, 1998), but the degree of achieved insidership is related to a number of critical factors that are determined by the circumstances of the moment. There are a number of dilemmas about my positionality that raise several critical issues for me as a researcher. On a broad level, there are issues concerning the conceptual definition of insidership and its relationship to outsidership, and the search to understand why insidership is considered revealing in an epistemological manner that is considered inaccessible to an outsider (Merton, 1972). Related to this are questions concerning whether insidership can provide a unique perspective that cannot be exposed by an outsider, and whether insidership actually diminishes a broader, unbiased understanding that an outsider could bring to the study (Merton, 1972). Methodological and ethical dilemmas faced by the insider are often hidden because it may be assumed that there is 'a measurable advantage inherent in seeing things from the inside and because achievement of insidership is, at least in part, a product of the researcher's own perceptions of achieved access and the interpretations of those being investigated' (Merton, 1972:89). And so, any researcher, however positioned must negotiate the maintenance of objectivity and accuracy. This, of course, rests on the assumption that some manner of objectivity is possible (Narayan, 1993). Narayan (1993:86) states that 'even if the researcher

totally rejects the pretense of objectivity, there remain points in research where accuracy in portraying the community and its membership is important to the researcher'. As an individual already existing within the Yemeni community I may be seen to 'have' advanced cultural knowledge of the community. Narayan (1993) states that 'this advanced knowledge can serve as a source of understanding that informs the researcher as he or she attempts to develop a moment of objectivity in the text or an accurate depiction of reality' (Narayan, 1993:24). However, no matter where one is positioned, I believe that it is important to resist the 'comfortable perquisites' of insiderness (Deutsch, 1981:190). Possession of advanced knowledge should not lead to a disregard for questioning one's own inside knowledge. Even though I share cultural, linguistic and ethnic minority identities with my informants, I still had to negotiate objectivity and accuracy before I entered the setting with the same rigor as any other researcher.

I strongly believe that as researchers from ethnic minority backgrounds we not only serve as agents of social change for our communities, but we also tend to be held accountable for how we represent and validate the knowledge claims of the communities we study (Collins, 1991, 1998; Hooks, 1984). This is why I firmly believe that the critical race theory should be incorporated into educational research. Hooks (1984) explains that:

In a time of changing population demographics and an increasing awareness among ethnic researchers of the processes by which the diversity of ethnic experiences has been misrepresented, distorted, or marginalized into non-existence by generalization, the need to be truly interdisciplinary in our methods and in how we conceptualize minority learners in general and minority female learners specifically should not be ignored or minimalized (Hooks, 1984:26).

I had to take care to develop and maintain an 'informed reflexive consciousness' (Allen, 2000:7) to contextualize skilfully my own subjectivity in data interpretation and the representation of experiences in the research process. I am also required to be 'reflexively attuned' to dynamics of the informant-researcher relationship, with the goal of 'minimizing the hierarchal constellation of power in this relationship' (Collins, 1998:92). Self-reflexivity promotes the 'reconciliation of personal motivations for conducting research with a specific population and the extent of accountability owed to the population studied' (ibid, p.92). As a multilingual female with an interest in studies on ethnic minority women, for me it was important to recognise that my informants are not mere subjects of research but active agents in 'defining who we are and have been, and what we do as a diverse yet collective group' (Collins 1998:29). As I engage with my informants, through the research process, my attention is directed towards how I am accountable to them. Accountability is a critical issue for ethnic minority women conducting research on issues with other ethnic minority women, as Stephens and Rouse-Arnett (2003) explain:



Those of us who are privileged to be the conduits of Black women's experiences—not necessarily the authors of such experience—and who are accountable to Black communities, are also responsible for debunking racist and sexist stereotypes of Black women while being careful not to perpetuate multiple oppressions in their own words (2003:210).

As a researcher I place ethical issues at the forefront of my research agenda. Coles and Knowles (1993) commented:

Ethical issues infuse [life history] research projects at every point of their implementation. With the advent of more intrusive research methods and the requirements of personal investment in research, consideration of ethical issues takes on a new prominence. Researchers need to attend to issues such as confidentiality, consent, Access to data during and after study, negotiation of control, and equity of influence (Coles and Knowles, 1993:489-490).

Given the traditionally passive nature of the research informant role in research, it is important to consider how to help informants, particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds to feel comfortable assuming more active roles in the design and conduct of inquiry. I often ask about how we communicate the value of our informants' input in the investigation in order to also address ethical issues. One way is by disseminating the knowledge produced and ensuring that the study reaches the people who have helped to make it. It is important that as researchers we commit to sharing the knowledge produced, not merely producing brief reports of the findings in the form of pamphlets or leaflets but by engaging the informants in a continuing knowledge-sharing process. In support of this view Smith (1999) argues that:

The term 'sharing knowledge' is used deliberately, rather than the term 'sharing information' because the responsibility of researchers and academics is not simply to share surface information but to share the theories and analysis, which inform the way knowledge, and information are constructed and represented. By taking this approach it is possible to introduce communities and people who may have had little formal education to a wider world, a world which includes people who think just like them, who share in their struggles and dreams and who voice their concerns in similar sorts of ways (Smith, 1999:23).

Also we cannot assume that people will not be interested in, or will not understand the research process, the research design and the findings; as Smith (1999) adds:

To assume in advance that people will not be interested in, or will not understand, the deeper issues is arrogant. The challenge always is to demystify, to decolonise (Smith, 1999:24).

It is important to remind the informants of their authority over the text, that they hold the power to decide what to disclose. It is also important to maintain high levels of ethical and moral responsibility towards those we are engaged with in research. Importantly informants are editors of their own texts. I am guided in my investigation by a belief in the authority of my informants, and while I value their authority in the texts, I also believe that the informants and I are editors of texts. I believe that:

The extent to which the researcher can know what information is essential and what lines of inquiry to pursue is debatable...The informant must be given a certain degree of authority to determine the events to identify for discussion or further exploration (Cole, 1991:201-205).

It is important to ask about how careful we are about protecting the confidentiality of our informants. Aside from assigning pseudonyms to the data, we need to ask about what efforts are taken when entrusting personal information to others, beyond any information given on informed consent forms, how much do our informants know about what happens to the data during and after the study. I often wonder about how informants typically feel when asking researchers for detail about the security and use of the data. Certain data collection methods approach the values, beliefs, practices and customs of particular communities as 'barriers' or 'problem' areas in research with which researchers need to be familiar in order to carry out sensitive investigations that do not cause offence. However I believe that all research methods need to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviours as an integral part of the whole research process, as Smith (1999) asserts:

They are factors to be built into research explicitly, to be thought about reflexively, to be declared openly as part of the research design, to be discussed as part of the final results of a study and to be disseminated back to the people in culturally appropriate ways and in a language that can be understood (Smith, 199:25).

Feminist researchers have rejected the notions of the 'expert' or, at least, have challenged the concept of distance between the researcher as 'knower' and the subject of research as 'known' (Smith, 1999). A feminist perspective begins with the premise that the people at the centre are the experts; that is, they are best placed to reflect on problems, and analyse their oppressive circumstances and to find solutions to their problems. Smith (1999) states:

It galls me that at times Western researcher and intellectuals can assume to know all that it is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us. It appalls us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations (Smith, 1999:28).

The research process, then, needs to remain open to those who are being researched in an attempt to break down the distinction between researchers and those who are researched by encouraging women's participation in the process of gaining and creating knowledge (Gaventa, 1993). DeVault (1995) explains that this sort of research is not always easy to carry out, for even as researchers attempt to reduce the barriers of privilege that exist between researchers and informants by engaging in reflexive research practices, 'their privileged positions are reinstated by their universities, in which professional status and education are used to manage and coordinate relations of power' (De Vault, 1995:102). Nevertheless, we must strive to engage as equals with informants and to render explicit those aspects of the research process in which our positions influence our work with informants who are differentially situated. I believe that such goals can be best achieved through reflexive practices and processes (Riessman, 1987).

### *Personal Reflections*

On reflecting on how my 'outsider within' status was negotiated in the course of doing the research, and by calling attention to the multiple negotiated dimensions of 'outsider within' status in literacy research, it is important to highlight how ethnicity, gender, language, and class, as mediated through outsider within status, are constructed and become a central dynamic in the research process. In this way, I bring the dominant conceptual perspective of ethnicity, gender, language and class as social constructs into alignment with the methodological trend of examining the role of researcher in this investigation.

There was a dimension of risk built into this research project; one that I had not really thought about and only became aware of later in the research. As an ethnic minority researcher, information about me, my family, and my place in the community became part of the research process. Disclosure also reinforced the duality of my role in the community. My role as a researcher, and thus an outsider, enabled informants to ask questions about my education, experiences and identity. At the same time because of my community membership, this information was significant to the informants in different ways. This information was not about an 'other' or an 'outsider'. It was information about an insider, a community member. This dynamic status made the research relationship equalizing in a different way than that advocated by most feminist methodologists with outsider status (Smith, 1987; Oakley, 1981). My dynamic status gave the informants information that would not have been available to them in other outsider research situations and, in this way, I felt it empowered the informants. I found that there were multiple ways that my membership would be read. This demonstrates that my researcher identity was not one-dimensional but multiple and this needed to be negotiated. The

multiple forms and levels of researcher status highlight the complex ways that groups are defined and group membership extended (Naples, 1996). I perceive these processes as directly related to the construction of racial and ethnic minority identity. In this investigation I feel that my status as an ethnic minority researcher is continually being evaluated. These processes are not limited to research involving the negotiation of insider status only. Naples (1996) explains that with outsider researchers as well as insider researchers, 'participants will respond to perceptions of difference and/or similarity, and define the boundaries of the group accordingly' (Naples, 1996:26). People's social positions, cultural traditions and other factors influence their identities and different levels of distinction between insider and outsider. However, these notions of difference between insider and outsider are also subject to change. The fact that I was born into an Arabic community means that Yemeni women see me as an 'insider', but I feel that my position is on the margins of Arabic society. I am both someone inside (an Arabic speaker), and someone outside (outside Yemeni culture). So what motivates me to become engaged in researching my own social identity group? I have identified two reasons for studying 'my own kind of people' that represent common themes found in the literature of native anthropologists and feminist scholars. First, the nature of my identity and life experiences as a marginalized female motivates me to seek more meaning about my own social identity. As Kanuh (2000) put it, my aim is to produce; 'more knowledge, more analysis, and ultimately more understanding of others whose life experiences were similar to mine' (p.441). A second motivation for me is the sense of being constricted within the boundaries of traditional theoretical explanations and conceptual frameworks that rarely spoke to 'the stigmatized social identity and educational experience of minority women' (Collins, 1986:34). My academic pursuit in seeking a greater understanding represents a journey to discover new modes of analysis concerning the community with which I identify with most closely.

The experiences of being a woman or being black or being Muslim can never be a singular one, and will always be dependent on a multiplicity of locations and positions that are constructed socially, that is, intersubjectively (Moore, 1994:3).

My interest in multilingual literacies and the combination of my personas have led me readily to people, most often ethnic minority women, who are from an Arabic speaking background and whom I perceive as being disadvantaged in relation to educational achievement. Because I assumed that shared cultural commonalities and shared historical identities would make it relatively easy for me to gain entry and to build rapport, and tended to assume that I would be accepted by the informants as 'one of us', rather than 'one of them'-that is, I expected to be accorded an insider rather than outsider status. However, aspects of my identity, such as my educational background and fluency in English, often set me apart from my informants. To some extent, the women I have studied are 'those' who would be seen as 'outsiders' to

educational mainstream; for me, they become 'these women', with whom I myself identify. Although I cannot be sure that the informants perceive me as an 'insider', I believe that the shared points of cultural commonality and language allow me to attain an emic rather than etic view. The dominance of women in my study is another feature that fits with my identity as a female researcher, with an interest in women's studies. The fact of shared gender affords the possibility of greater 'intimacy and reciprocity' (Oakley, 1981:203), as well as certain shared cultural assumptions about gender roles and the acceptability of certain behaviours within the Arab culture. Collins (1986) asserts that when given the full opportunity to choose the topics that one studies or investigates, ethnic minority women researchers may experience an internal struggle. This struggle stems from discovering a 'lack of fit between one's own experiences and those experiences that are described, theorized, analyzed within the literature and subsequently perpetuated by colleagues' (Collins, 1986:36). This lack of fit places the minority female researcher in a unique situation. My consultation of the literature suggests that the topic of one's research interest is often tied to researcher identity. Therefore in any study it is important that we examine our own identity in order to fulfil personal and societal needs, as well as reflect unique personal experiences that are related to identity. Collins (1986, 1991) suggests that the ethnic minority female researcher is often left to 'decide whether or not she should assimilate and pursue a mainstream path that will aid her in being perceived as legitimate in the eyes of her colleagues by working from a perspective other than her own' (Collins, 1986:142). The alternative is to 'integrate her personal and professional identities' by placing her sense of self first, and to use both her reality and academic preparation to supplement the domain of her field by adding to it her own perspective' (Collins, 1986:139).

I have always seen myself more prone than my male colleagues to ponder issues of power and equality. Indeed as Visweswaran (1994) notes 'questions of positionality more often confront female rather than male fieldworkers' (p.36). Feminist researchers are concerned as a matter of methodology with biases, silences and distortions in representations of culture, and are sensitive as women to the 'power laden ballast that weight on cultural interpretations' (Visweswaran, 1994:23). My enduring academic interest in multilingual women's lives, whether because of class, culture, ethnicity or language flows from autobiographical experiences. As a child of refugee parents, I learnt early on in life how such categories of belonging and not belonging are determined. This inclination to wonder about the lives of those who fail to match mainstream criteria, transformed initial encounters with Yemeni women into curiosity.

Collins (1989) explains that the tradition of embracing a multifaceted struggle informs the philosophical content of black womens' studies in research. The marginalization of minority women in ethnic studies and women's studies follows historical patterns that predate postmodernist concerns with 'otherness'. Despite the historical patterns, the 'subjugated

knowledge' (Collins, 1989) of minority women, 'with its ability to articulate the intersectionality of race, gender, and class constructs, can serve as corrective to the singularity of race or gender-based paradigms' (p.206). Collins (1986) explains that 'ethnic studies can interrogate the rhetoric of inclusion adopted by the predominantly upper-class white women's studies establishment and expose the gap between white feminist theory and practice' (p.203). Therefore it seems important that we begin to fully adopt and utilize ethnic minority studies, increasing the presence of ethnic minority women in educational research. The process of exclusion in women's studies is most noticeable in the way feminist theory and literature is presented. Feminist theory is frequently presented from the perspectives of white women. In some literature, ethnic minority women's work is often labelled 'experiential'. Collins (1989) argues that although ethnic minority women are not generally considered to have produced theory, Eurocentric feminist theories are used to critique ethnic minority women's scholarly and creative work. This allows, as Collins (1989) states:

White feminist voice-over authority over ethnic women's works, while white feminist theory operates as a virtual hegemonic discourse, containing or ignoring differences based on race, class and language (Collins, 1989:46)

Collins (1986) uses the term 'outsider within' to describe ethnic minority women researchers due to their visible yet marginal position in society. It is not simply race and gender that push ethnic minority woman to the margins, but rather society's exclusion of their interests, concerns, perspectives, and interpretations from the 'mainstream'. For Collins, and other Black Feminists, the 'Outsider within' status is not a disadvantage. On the contrary, this status is said to provide a unique insight and perspective that if used properly, 'can be the impetus for excitement and creativity within one's research' (Collins, 1986:141). In academia, ethnic minority women face many challenges. Young (1984:86) reports that 'within education, ethnic women are often expected to participate in non-rewarding professional activities, are professionally and socially isolated in their departments, have academic talents that are under-utilized, and suffer from subtle institutionalized racism'. The ethnic minority women's 'outsider within' status becomes critical early on in her academic career.

I examine the challenges that as a minority ethnic female I face when doing qualitative research with other ethnic minority women in Chapter Five. I also explore the dynamics of race, class, and gender in the informant-researcher relationship between ethnic minority women, which I discuss in Chapter Five. In thinking about how to conduct ethical research with ethnic minority women which is empowering for the community and those involved in the research process, it is important as Fine (1994) explains that qualitative researchers confront the ethical dilemmas inherent in the studies on ethnic minorities. Fine (1994) argues that without a 'radical rethinking

of the researchers' relationship to the subjects of the research, we simply further the process of othering or marginalizing those whose lives we study. The same concern can be expressed regarding my study of multilingual learners. Further, when the disadvantages of poverty, undecided immigration status and unemployment intersect, the power differential between researcher and the informants is intensified. Fine (1994) argues that researchers can guard against the 'Othering' process by a rigorous investigation of the impact of the identities they bring to the research. However I found that even when most careful attention is given to identity, inherent contradictions can occur. Fine (1994) has suggested that researchers should be aware of the extent to which the process of giving voice to 'those' less often heard is an example of 'trading on race/class privilege' by re-presenting of the 'Other', voices that would otherwise be 'discarded' (p.79). This observation challenged me to recognize the balance between doing research that empowers 'others' and, by that very process, 'collaborating in the exercise of power over those for whom the research speaks' (Fine, 1994:203).

In consultation of the literature I found that researchers commonly representing ethnic minority experiences are mainly white, middle class men. Some have gone as far as to say that research findings about language, race, gender and ethnicity are generally by-products of statistical controls for race and ethnicity (McLoyd, 1998). Jones (1991) notes that researchers tend to use traditional theories that do not reflect holistically ethnic minority experiences. And so as Jones (1991) argues it is important to understand how researchers negotiate and transcend boundaries that emerge in the researcher-informant relationship. In this study, I have been able to translate the Arabic conversations and stories into contributions to academic research, and it is because of such conversations and stories that I have been able to share my experiences of this aspect of the investigation with the purpose of encouraging other women researchers, particularly ethnic minority women, to write about overcoming challenges in research in pursuit of truth and knowledge that is about, by, and for ethnic minority women.

### ***Concluding Thoughts***

In highlighting how ethnicity, class, language and gender are mediated through researcher positionality, I have explored how these become a central dynamic in the research process. In this way I have brought the dominant conceptual perspective of ethnicity, gender, language and class as social constructs into alignments with the methodological trend of examining my role as the researcher. The importance of examining one's own identity in order to highlight matters of positionality has been particularly important for me (Alzouebi and Pahl, 2006). In highlighting such challenges and through a rigorous investigation of the impact of the identities I bring to the

research, I hope I have guarded against the ‘othering’ processes of the informants. In this chapter I have attempted to describe the dilemmas encountered by myself as an ethnic minority female. I have realised that it has been a struggle to come to terms with defining one’s positionality. However as I have confronted my own positionality. I see researcher status not in terms of an ascribed or achieved status, but one of a continual process of introspective inquiry.

As I confront my own positionality in this study, I see at least two main issues that represent underdeveloped areas of analysis in terms of researcher positionality. Firstly, as De Andrade (2000) notes there remains a need to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the status of researcher as both object and subject within qualitative inquiry. De Andrade (2000) explains that it is more epistemologically beneficial to view researcher status not in terms of an ascribed or achieved status, which gives the impression that one can reach a final level of understanding, but as a ‘continual process of introspective inquiry that researchers can use to monitor their access to the community’ (De Andrade, 2000:276). This is closely tied to Cerroni-Long’s (1994) idea that no particular position is privileged to see the ‘real truth’, but that ‘social experience and its perceptions are continuously created by the social actors’ (p.23). The second under developed issue I found in the literature devoted to examining researcher positionality is the emphasis on the role of insiderness in interpreting the experiences of under-represented women in literacy research. There are various reasons for this, but one explanation as Collins (1989) notes is the feeling among us ‘natives’ that we must ‘extend analysis beyond the pre-determined boundaries of prevailing frames of discourse’ (p.82). I now turn in Chapter Four to give a historical account of the Yemeni Community in Northtown providing a detailed account of the settlement of the community in the 70’s and 80’s and a comprehensive look at the current community. I also provide a context for my research by consulting the literature on Yemeni people in England.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### A Historical account of the Yemeni Community in Northtown

#### *A Yemeni Journey*

In this chapter I present a historical account of the settlement of the Yemeni community in Northtown, a town in the North of England, providing a detailed account of the community in the 70's and 80's and a comprehensive look at the current community. I also provide a context for my research by consulting the literature on Yemeni people in England. I acknowledge the important contribution that the present study makes to the paucity of literature on Yemeni communities in England. It is also hoped that this study will play a part in the process of greater recognition and understanding of one of the longest established ethnic minority communities in England, and in particular add to expanding the literature on the Yemeni community in the North of England. In the second part of the chapter I provide a discussion of the migration patterns of Yemeni women and a detailed look at their unique role in the establishment of the Yemeni community in Northtown.

The paucity of research and literature on the experiences of the Yemeni people in England has been neglected amongst larger scale studies on the migration of people from South Asia and the Caribbean. One reason, which has contributed to what Fred Halliday (1992:123) calls the 'invisibility' of the Yemeni community in England, is the size of the community in comparison to South Asian and Caribbean communities. The experiences of the Yemeni people have gone under the term of 'black', which was typically used to refer to most people of an ethnic minority background. There also seems to be little information on the experiences of the Yemeni community in England and in particular their experiences of migration after the Second World War in the land-locked industrial cities of England. In light of the paucity of such literature, it is interesting to note that those studies of migrant communities written before or during the period of post-war migration (1948-1962) when the size of the Yemeni community was more comparable to that of the black and Asian communities did pay more attention to the Yemeni presence in England's ports and towns. The studies of Little (1948) and Collins (1957) included two of the first attempts to describe the Yemeni presence in England and are my starting point here.

Fred Halliday's (1992) *'Arabs in Exile: Yemeni Migrants in Urban Britain'* is the first full-length study of Yemenis in England. Halliday begins with an analysis of Yemeni settlements in England's maritime cities at the beginning of the twentieth century and then moves on to cover

post-war Yemeni settlement in the industrial heartlands of England. Halliday writes that his 'approach combines historical record, social and political analysis and personal observation' (1992:4). In *'Arabs in Exile'* Halliday engages in a large number of informal dialogues with Yemeni communities in England and he draws upon these conversations in his study. Halliday reported that Kenneth Little's *'Negroes in Britain: A Study of Racial Relationship in English Society'* (1948) was the first book to describe Yemenis in England. Little's (1948) study is of particular importance because he was first to highlight the strength of the bond amongst the Yemeni settlers in the face of British 'racial attitudes' and the restrained nature of their relationship with the host population. The Yemenis in England were described as being a 'close-knit and internally fissured community' referring to the Yemeni community as 'a village-like grouping transposed from their original context into a difficult and often hostile environment' Halliday (1992:14). Historically, the Yemeni community in England was a community living within its own socially, linguistically and ethnically defined borders, and interacting in particular ways with the society's borders around it (Halliday, 1992).

The arrival of Yemenis into British industrial employment in the post-war period is a result of the general increase in demand by the industrial sector which accounts for the flow of so many other migrants, and the special 'push' factors in Yemen which I will go on to explain. It is not absolutely definite when Yemenis first came to England, but through consulting the limited literature, it seems that Yemeni migrants first began to arrive in England in the early 1940s. Many migrants were, so far as is known, farmers who had spent their childhood in the villages of the mountains of Yemen. They came to England by arrangements with relatives or fellow villagers already living in England and financed the trip by borrowing money from their families and friends. When they arrived in England they were met by relatives or friends who arranged their accommodation and helped them find work (Halliday, 1992). Searle and Shaif (1992) note that this trend of 'chain migration' helps to explain the pattern of migration specific to the Yemeni community. The men from one village would live in a house together and would all work in the same factory. The kind of employment to which Yemeni migrants remained in is characteristic of migrant employment patterns in post-war England. However, the employment of Yemeni men was reported to be more restricted than that of other ethnic minority groups; it follows a certain pattern. Yemeni men were found in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs of the kind progressively abandoned by the British in the previous two decades and in which migrants were generally found. Halliday (1992) argues that once in employment very few were able to move up the employment ladder. Even when they became skilled migrants it was impossible to become foremen or supervisors; there was a general resistance by British employers to having migrants as foremen because of hostility from British unions (Searle and Shaif, 1992). In the case of Yemeni migrants this was made more difficult by the fact that in

most factories they formed a minority of the workforce; these factories would therefore not have a Yemeni supervisor. Yemenis, like other migrants, often preferred to work night shifts and to do so on a permanent basis, hence they would sleep during the daytime. Yemeni migrants who worked in British factories for many years still had very little contact with some aspects of British society. In particular, they had normally acquired a very sparse understanding of the English language, as Halliday explains the ‘immigrant could fulfil his goals without doing so and had, therefore, no reason to learn English. He did not need it to find and keep a job or a house, or to shop. In the few situations where English might be essential, in filling out documents or in dealing with law courts or the police, community interpreters could be used’ (p.67). There was, moreover, a circular process at work, because the migrant spoke little English, he naturally chose to live and work in situations where English was not needed. Once housed and employed within a ‘Yemeni’ community, he had little reason to use English, and little occasion for doing so. The Yemeni industrial migrant is thought to have lived in a more enclosed community than other migrants.

The growth and character of Yemeni migration into England can best be understood by looking first at its background. The main reason behind the growth of Yemeni migration into England is that Yemen is among the poorest countries in the Arab world and it is a country where its people seem to have migrated for centuries. However beyond this general poverty the development of Yemeni migration in the past century has many specific features that help to explain its particular character. The extent of the Yemeni migration has surpassed that of any other country in the Middle East. For the villages and towns left behind, this migration has also meant high costs. In the first place, there is the emotional cost to the migrants and their families of separation for years on end. It is not difficult to read the faces of elderly Yemeni people in the local neighbourhoods that show a deep sadness born of years of emotional separation and no doubt there would be the same sadness for their families left behind. The pain of migration, and the sadness it occasions at home, are a recurring theme in Yemeni poetry.

Halliday (1992) explains that labour migration of this kind also represents a misallocation of resources:

If the human skills and energy used to gain a wage outside Yemen were deployed inside; the country would benefit greatly. But while there exists a substantial Yemeni industrial work force outside Yemen, there is far less industrial employment inside. The contributions, which these migrants make to, the domestic economy is via remittances; but far the remittances enable their country to redress the imbalance between itself and the outside world, to lessen the gap between itself and the countries, which absorb its labour. In many cases, the injection of foreign currency is used to pay for the import of consumer goods, and in this situation no restoration of the balance is taking place. In fact a new dependence is created, in that the economy of villages whose men are working abroad

becomes tied to the flow, and when remittance decline or cease the village loses its lifeline (Halliday, 1992:15).

### ***Diaspora Identities: Yemeni Experiences***

The Yemeni community in the North of England have been displaced and dispersed in multiple ways, and the experience of uprooting has had an impact on the Yemeni people in terms of their cultural identity. This planned and at times forced movement of a people, 'the overweening, defining event of the modern world, the mass movement of raced populations', to use Toni Morrison's (1997:10) expressions, has produced multiple identities that cannot be traced back to a single origin or homeland, but are produced from a range of cultures and experiences. Cohen (1997) argues that in this way, the making of diasporic identities calls for a reconception of the notion of community. The term community in itself, as Kobena Mercer (1988) observes, 'is better understood as a verb than a noun' (p.69). A 'community' was once understood to be related to a given territory and its influence dependent on the number of its members and the strength of the ties between them. Mercer (1988) explains that 'community cannot be totally defined in terms of ancestral claims nor distinctly mapped in some specific geographic space. Rather it is the 'cultural and political decisions of members of diasporic communities that are more important than their ancestry and geographic positions' (Mercer, 1988:26). What Mercer (1988) suggests is that diasporic communities are defined by their connection and exchange despite distance. Diasporic communities challenge classic assumptions that culture can be located and limited to some specific space and that when people move out, they leave their community. In this way it seems that the 'Diasporas' relationship to its roots, the original homeland, is an ideological one' (Cohen, 1997:55).

The work of Searle and Shaif (1992) suggests that the racialisation of migrant workers came to determine much of the differential and indeed discriminatory treatment that they faced throughout their lives in England. In the article '*Drinking from one pot: Yemeni Unity at Home and Overseas*', Searle and Shaif (1992) provide a brief history of the Yemeni community in Northtown. The article is written in a dialogic format, with Searle interviewing Mr. Shaif, the chair of the Yemeni Community Association. For Shaif, the uneven development of capitalism between Yemen and England, fostered by British Imperialism, created both the push (in Yemen) and pull (in England) factors of migration:

The 1950s and 1960s were a period of industrial boom in Britain. As a result, many Yemenis, encouraged by the British, came over here to fill the labour shortage. They were looking for a better standard of living than that which British colonialism was giving them. This created a large influx of Yemenis to Britain at that time (Searle and Shaif, 1992:66).

During the 1970's and 1980's there was a decline in the size of the Yemeni community in England as a result of the economic recession and the closure of many industrial steel work factories, and so, many migrants returned home to the Yemen. Migration from Yemen to England had also reduced with the exception of some women and children who came to join their families. The economic recession which hit the engineering sectors of Northern England, Birmingham and Manchester in which most Yemeni men had been employed, meant that many Yemeni men lost their jobs and ended up going to the Gulf and other oil producing Peninsula countries to find work; although some found it difficult to use the industrial skills they had acquired in England (Halliday, 1992:167). A small number of the Yemeni community returned to the Yemen. The number of Yemenis in Northtown was said to have fallen from 8,000 in 1972 to 2,000 in 1990, of whom most were unemployed (Halliday, 1992). The impact of unemployment on the Yemeni community was so dramatic that three-quarters of the community left, rendering the majority of the rest without employment on a long-term basis. The economic recession and high unemployment rates instigated sharper discrimination and promoted a climate of heightened racist intolerance that, in common with other ethnic minority communities, which the Yemenis felt with particular force. Insults and attacks on the streets and discrimination at work had been constant features of life in England since the migration of the 1950s (Halliday, 1992). However, a number of changes took place which were to have an impact on the Yemeni community forever. During the 1950s and 1960s where it was possible for unskilled Yemeni labourers with little knowledge of the English language to find work, this was no longer the case in the 1980s; their lack of recognised skills and particularly their limited spoken English served to lock them out of new employment opportunities. The decreasing size of the Yemeni community, the high unemployment rates, and the heightened racist intolerance that was experienced among many of the Yemeni people who remained, were added to other significant difficulties faced by the Yemeni community. There was a general deterioration in relations between the local white population and ethnic minority communities, a process in part the result of economic conditions. Halliday (1992) notes that a trend began to emerge of general racist hostility and particular events at that time had an impact on the Yemeni community. An example is the conflict over the writing of Salman Rushdie '*Satanic Verses*' in 1989, when the Yemeni community became the subject of racial hatred, in addition to the Kuwait crisis and Gulf War of 1990-1991. The Yemeni community and Yemeni property came under attack, the Yemeni School bus in Northtown was damaged and Yemeni mosques, community centres and cafes were vandalised.

Shaif's (1992) critical analysis of the uneven development of capitalism is consistent with the often-quoted remark of Sivanandan (1983:74) 'we're here because you were there'. For Shaif (1992), Yemenis, 'like black labourers more generally, constituted the most exploited workers in the hierarchy of capitalist production' (Shaif, 1992:67). He explains that Yemeni migrants had to take the worst jobs possible, those that had been 'vacated by the British workers in the steel industry' (p.67). In fact, Shaif argues that at the time of the recession, Yemeni workers were hit harder by redundancy than other ethnic minority workers (p.67). He refers to the discrimination endemic in British trade unions and local working class organisations. Shaif pays particular attention to the development of Yemeni community organisations in Northtown. He argues that 'their growth was linked to the development of the nationalist movement in Yemen and had little to do with the trade unions and working class organisations in the North of England, which didn't bother reaching them' (p.71). Shaif explains that in Northtown the struggles against various exclusionary practices did not begin until 1971. For Shaif, the period before 1971 was one of experience rather than struggle:

There were two different forms of struggle in Sheffield, and in Britain as a whole. The first period was from 1955 until 1971, which lacked any form of political organisation or leadership. It involved experiencing racism at work, exploitation at work, bad housing, experiencing all aspects of poverty, rather than struggle, of getting to know and understand the oppression of being black and working class in Britain (1992:70).

Shaif cites the following reasons for the absence of struggle between 1955 and 1971:

[T]hey knew they were seen as foreigners, as migrants, and if they started fighting and struggling and shouting straight away, they thought they would be sent back. There was always that fear. Remember, many had received no formal education. They were illiterate and didn't know their rights here in Britain. They didn't know how this country worked. They didn't know the history of working class struggles here and what they had achieved. They didn't know about trade unions-they had come from a peasant background, remember- and they didn't know about the National Health Service.

But by the 1980's, Yemenis here had become a lot more confident. They had seen one and a half million people expel the British and make the revolution succeed in the Yemen. They had seen the Yemeni people kick out the Imamic regime which had been ruling for hundred of years, and which had the support of Saudi Arabia and the imperialist powers. So now, they felt able to carry the struggle forward here to improve their living conditions, and that of other black and working-class people in Sheffield-even though the Yemeni revolution didn't have the support of the British people and many of the more reactionary regimes in the Arab world. However it was the new generation of Yemenis young conscious and Sheffield-bred' who built the community organisations, as they exist now (Shaif and Searle, 1992:70).

Yemeni migrants in particular were often characterised as being passive victims of racism through obligations to their families left behind in the Yemen, having fears of repatriation and lacking knowledge of their rights in England (Halliday, 1992). Although this lessened

resistance for some individuals, the general pattern of second and third generation of the Yemeni communities in England is of resistance to their marginalisation. Shaif states:

It wasn't the fathers, it was the sons and daughters who began to mobilise the resistance that was necessary. They refused to be obedient; they set out to challenge the system. They weren't like their fathers in this respect. Their parents, despite being hard working-class people, had been obedient, had been reluctant to say no and fight back. They felt that their lives and those of their families would be in danger if they made that challenge. So they didn't challenge the council, the employers, the unions or the government. Their children felt none of these constraints (p.72).

This new generation would go on to lead many of the most pressing struggles that were born out of the grim situation of mass unemployment. In the course of the early 1990's, there developed a number of countervailing trends that helped enhance the Yemeni community's relation to British society and its own sense of cohesion. Halliday (1992) explains that 'the growing interaction of the Yemeni community with local, institutions and the funding of a variety of programmes helped to strengthen the Yemeni community' (p.157). Even though the work of the Yemeni community in Northtown seemed to have little impact on the local Council, or on the social and economic programmes being funded, a heightened awareness developed within the local City Council with regards to the disadvantage faced by members of the Yemeni community and of their responsibilities to that community. Halliday explains that 'Yemenis found themselves for the first time able to deal with institutions in British society on a community level basis' (1992:141). This involved the setting up of the Yemeni Community Association in a number of cities; the organisation of educational employment programmes; the Yemeni Literacy Campaigns (See Ahmed Gurnah, in *Multilingual Literacies: Reading and Writing Different World*, 2000); a study by local Council officials of the social and economic difficulties faced by members of the Yemeni community; and the involvement of Yemenis in the recording of local, and migrant history (Searle and Shaif, 1992). As a result, despite the reduced numbers and the decline of the earlier political organisations, the degree of organisation, activity and interaction with the surrounding society was greater at the beginning of the early 1990's than any previous time (Halliday, 1992:58). It became possible to gain a detailed picture of the presence of the Yemeni community in the North of England, through such developments which served to highlight the situation of the Yemeni community and thus to address the difficulties they face. Searle and Shaif (1992) suggest that one source of information and organization was the local City Council, which had, as part of its more energetic concern with migrant groups and racism in the city, developed for the first time close links with the Yemeni community and with its organisations. In partnership with local University and the local City Council, the Yemeni Literacy Campaign was launched and training programmes for unemployed members of the Yemeni community were set up. The

organization of a Yemeni Literacy Campaign where twelve young trainees in teaching English as a second language (all members of the Yemeni community) worked by teaching English to other members of the community and at the same time spent two and a half days per week training at the local University (See Ahmed Gurnah, in *Multilingual Literacies: Reading and Writing Different World*, 2000). These programmes helped raise the awareness of higher and further education in the Yemeni community.

There were also other signs of the vitality of the Yemeni community at this time. Three nights of the week, an Arabic school operated for two hours each evening teaching Arabic to children aged between five and sixteen years. The Yemeni community had also established links with the local Radio station. On Sunday evenings, together with a Chilean and West Indian Programmer, it broadcasted '*al-Rukn al-Yemeni*', (The Yemeni Corner), a fifteen-minute programme in Arabic. In marked contrast to the light-hearted Latin American and Caribbean programmes which ran music and chat, this consisted- very much in the style of official radio at home-of lengthy, sole communiqués on the latest inter-ministerial meetings to discuss homeland matters (Halliday, 1992:146). The developments of the Yemeni community in Northtown continued to reflect influences from both contexts-England and the Yemen. With the passage of time, the Yemenis remaining in Northtown became more and more settled and the second and subsequent generations had a greater degree of assimilation into British life (Searle and Shaif, 1992). Yet the gap between the first generation and the mass of British society remained-as racial hostility, marginalisation and employment difficulties indicated- and the influence of the Yemen, both in terms of social tradition and political change, continues to be considerable (Dein and Burman, 2004).

For me it has been important to understand how a new community settled in a foreign country holds its people together when their needs and dreams are constantly facing frictions and frustrations. It has also been important to consider whether it is relevant to raise such issues in a globalized context where the paradox is that 'immigrants are not accepted, they are merely tolerated; they remain aliens, outsiders, and intruders' (Cohen, 1997:68). Cohen states:

Diaspora raises the issues of loss, displacement, attachment, detachment, transnationalism, hence nationalism, redefining one's self, the linkage between self and other, the issues of home, of a place other than home, of another home, and therefore the question of where is home; home meaning a space where one feels physically safe (Cohen, 1997:69).

Cohen (1997) argues that in a globalized context, migrant labourers are all others: even though they are different from those othered through slavery and those othered through colonization.



Present day diasporas have faced a phenomenon, to which Edward Said (1980) has applied the term 'imperialism'. James Clifford (1997) claims that everyone is more or less permanently in transit and that the question is not so much 'where are you from?' but rather 'where are you between?' Cohen (1997) argues that it is the extent to which the culture of the diaspora reflects that of its homeland and produces culture distinct from that of the homeland. Clearly, as Cohen (1997) states 'cultural identity is increasingly exceeding the classic categories of exclusive membership to a singular Nation-State' (p.23).

### ***The Myth of Return: Yemenis in Northtown***

The 'wish' of the Yemeni community during the initial years of settlement to retain a separate identity but to also to integrate, rather than to assimilate certainly is consistent with the observation made by Halliday where the Yemeni community felt that they would benefit from being noticed as little as possible. Dahya (1967:144) writes; 'the Yemeni migrants restrict what the host society considers appropriate for them; that is, the migrants do not appear-in the eyes of the host society-as competitors and therefore avoid conflict situations' (Dahya, 1967:144). The avoidance of conflict however, was not the sole or even the main reason for 'voluntary segregation'. For Halliday, the very strength of the 'sojourners' mentality, and the limited contact with British society, meant that it was taken as understood by most Yemenis that their prime point of political and social contact was the home country, 'Yemen in one shape or another, and not Britain' (Halliday, 1992:178). An important characteristic of the Yemeni community, which has distinguished them from most other migrant communities for a very long time, is that they were regarded as 'sojourners'; they did not consider that they had come to England to settle. Dahya (1967) states that 'although they might spend many years of their adult life here, they came to make money, save as much as possible, send it home, and then hopefully, leave again' (p.56). Halliday (1992:64) explains that the Yemeni community had much tighter links with their home country than most other migrants, but fewer links with the broader society in England, of which they were a part. The conventional patterns for the Yemeni community was initially to come to England for a period of three to five years, and then to go home for a long stay of six months to a year, before coming back to England again. Initially, very few migrants invited their families to England, and virtually all intended to return home when they retired (Halliday, 1992). Perhaps the nearest comparable grouping were the Pakistanis who seemed to send money home and maintained close ties with their families and villages. But whether they went home on visits or not, many also tried to bring their families to England and to settle here (Halliday, 1992). There was therefore a significant difference between most

migrant communities and the Yemeni community; and it was only in the late 1980s that these particular differences began to change, and some Yemenis began to conform to the migration pattern of other migrants (Searle and Shaif, 1992). Anwar (1985), an analyst of Asians in Blackburn explains that a feature of chain migration is the belief that the residence in the country of migration is only temporary. In the language of migration studies, Anwar (1979) suggests that those who come in this way are 'sojourners', not 'settlers'. The 'sojourner' is not necessarily someone who actually returns, but rather someone who believes they will return one day. Anwar has written that the sojourner mentality is 'predicated upon a belief in the myth of return' (p.167). Anwar (1985) argues that they migrate:

to make enough money to return home, and then acquire a house and some land or other economic resource. Very often they return home, once every three or four years, and most maintain the flow of remittances for considerable periods of time: but the majority were unable to return to work at home, and while maintaining the idea of return, increasingly become de facto settlers (Anwar, 1985:168).

### ***Othered Through Migration: Yemeni Women***

An important feature of the Yemeni community was the absence of Yemeni women. In other migrant communities, though the men had initially come to England on their own, once established they tended to invite their families to join them. However, until the 1980s the Yemeni community had not conformed to conventional patterns of migration (Halliday, 1992). One reason, as explained previously was the distinctive character of Yemeni migration: as Halliday (1992) explains although they worked in England for years they 'were only here, in their own minds at least, on a temporary basis' (p.93). There were also important and strong pressures within the home community in Yemen, for the women not to migrate because it was generally felt that once the wife and children left, the migrant would not send his remittances back and so the other relatives who benefited were therefore opposed to the wife going, since they stood to lose access to the migrant's remittances. In Yemen it was also government policy until the early 1980s to prevent the wives of migrants from leaving, since this would reduce the flow of foreign currency into the country and loosen ties between the migrant and the home community. Halliday (1992) explains that the:

Temporary character of Yemeni migration was itself a precondition for the continuing ties between migrant and home country, and this in turn discouraged migrants formally and informally, from bringing their wives to Britain (p.74).

However for the majority of Yemeni women who came to England at that time, they were mainly confined to domestic work. They therefore seemed to have even less contact with British society than the men. The Yemeni women also rarely visited one another, and had no communal meeting place (Halliday, 1992:74), and so had limited opportunities to learn English in even the minimal way that most male migrants did. In some ways it seems that by coming to England many of the first generation of Yemeni women had entered an even more restrictive context than the one in which they lived at home. The basic ways in which Yemeni women got out of the home and out of domestic isolation was through education, however there were implications for this which meant that women had to be taught in women only classes. Halliday (1992) states:

In the community's interaction with British society and in its initial organisational activities women did not apparently find any mean of escaping-from the double restrictions of Yemeni society and of an entrapped condition within an alien, industrial, Britain (Halliday, 1992:75).

The pattern of Yemeni migration also had an impact on the presence of Yemeni women, which was affected by the change in laws determining residence in England. Before 1962 many migrants were allowed to enter and leave England as they pleased, however the imposition of immigration controls by the British government in that year interrupted the natural coming and going of Yemeni migrants and so those that were already working in England found themselves stranded here. Since no others could take their place, they were forced to choose between losing income from England or returning to the Yemen for the rest of their lives; this was a major decision to make, but for many the economic conditions in their homeland determined the settlement of most. Halliday (1992:121) explains 'they formed a community of men, who came before 1962, those who got through the gap before it was closed' (Halliday, 1992: 121). Most interesting of all, however, was the linguistic consequence of the migration process. Yemenis who had lived in England for decades and who conducted their work and social lives apparently to their own satisfaction, could get by with limited English, a few words incorporated into Arabic, and a few phrases for engaging with the outside world. British employers would communicate with their Yemeni workforce through what some called the 'go between'; the Arabic equivalent, 'wasta' who was a familiar figure in the Yemeni communities in England and abroad, and was also responsible for a range of functions from transmitting money, to arranging for employment, to getting passports and visas arranged.

Writing of the Yemeni community in Birmingham, Dahya (1967) argues that if the Yemenis were engaged in a process of assimilation, they could have been seen to challenge the

indigenous population on issues of employment, housing, and women's rights. Dahya (1967) explains that they chose instead not to assimilate, but to accommodate; in this way they maintained their separate identity in trying to avoid conflict by a process of voluntary segregation:

The Yemeni migrants restricted their contacts with members of the host society to a minimum and fulfilled roles, which the host society considers appropriate for them: that is, the migrants did not appear-in the eyes of the host society-as some competitors and therefore avoid conflict situations (Dayha, 1967:121).

### ***Concluding Thoughts***

To conclude, it seems that this and for all the unacknowledged transition from sojourner to settler status, Yemenis constituted the 'the remotest village, a self-enclosed urban community, one as remote from the British society around them as from life in the Yemen from which they came' (Halliday, 1992:145). The proliferation of movements of people has produced new forms of identities as well as tensions as a result of cross-cultural differences. The process of dispersal and displacement in the contemporary world has formed cultural identities that are shaped and located in different parts of the world. This process has created new subjects, for when Yemeni migrants left their homeland, the conditions attached to them and reflecting their recognition by society, their belonging, what Edward Said (1980) calls 'affiliation' to something specific, are things they leave behind. Therefore it seems that the identity of the Yemeni community as a diasporic community is not already formed. It is not an identity that has been constituted in the Yemen and is transposed intact. It is a much more complex and hybrid form of identity that challenges models supposing a binary opposition between different groups, for as James Clifford argues, 'diaspora cultures exist because of displacements, inter-cultural and trans-national crossings' (Clifford, 1997:12). Yemeni women are members of a diasporic community who define themselves in terms of many identities. They see themselves as being British and Yemeni, Arab and Muslim transcending as such separate cultural identities and belonging to the Yemeni culture to which they owe unconditional loyalty. The making of diasporic communities shows that culture is not a fixed set of features, behaviours and values; nor is it transmitted unchanged from one generation to the next. Rather, as Cohen (1997) states 'culture is dynamic and continually formed and reformed through constant interaction and change, and more than ever, in the context of a globalized world' (p.188).

In this chapter I have presented a historical account of the settlement of the Yemeni community in Northtown, and have provided a comprehensive account of the Yemenis in the 70's and 80's.

I have also offered an analysis of the current Yemeni community situation. It is now time to turn my attention to Chapter Five, where I discuss methodological issues associated with life history research.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Methodology

#### *Using a Life History Approach*

In this chapter I explore the methodological issues associated with life history research. This chapter is dedicated to describing, justifying and explaining the use of life history methods. I write from the perspective of a multilingual researcher studying multilingual Yemeni women. I illustrate and comment on my experiences of anxiety and uncertainty at various times during the study. I focus on my struggles over self-disclosure, concern over the limitations of my attempt to re-present elements of the informants' lives and the importance of striving for accuracy in that representation, and how the research experience influences my thinking, actions, and professional practice in the time beyond the completion of the study. To help organise my interpretation of the informants' lives I engage in a reflexive examination by using theoretical understandings of life history methods which tend to be referred to as a 'reflective lens' for the knowledge derived from my own experience of being a researcher in a life history study. Thus, I engage, both here on paper and in my mind, in a kind of dialogue with different forms of my knowing narrative research. I draw on my own articulations about narrative methods with full acknowledgment that my thinking and knowing about narratives are influenced by others such as Bertaux (1981); Denzin (1989); Plummer (1983); Goodson (1981, 1988, 1991, 1992); Knowles (1992, 1993); Measor and Sykes (1992) and Middleton (1992). This chapter also provides a discussion of methodological aspects related to the design of the study and style chosen and then moves on to provide a detailed consideration of an ethnographic approach to educational research. The search for a methodological framework that grows out of an approach of reframing power relationships, knowledge construction and individual experiences led me to life history. More recently Hamilton (1999) has made a strong case for ethnographic approaches to be linked to literacy studies because of its interest in 'cultural practices involving written communication' (p.431).

In taking a critical approach to life history research, one that draws from feminism, critical theory, post-modernism and post-colonialism, I adopted narratives to contest dominant social practices. Life history methods are located within the larger qualitative tradition of interpretive biography (Denzin, 1989), which also includes individual biography and oral life history methods. Biographical writing has its roots in several disciplines, including literature, history, anthropology, psychology and sociology (Cresswell, 1998). Cresswell (1998) notes that over

the past two decades, there has been a renewed emphasis on the use of interpretative biography as a qualitative method, particularly amongst feminist researchers who are interested in:

Exploring women's lived experience in a way that remains true to women's voices, focuses on the contexts in which women are living or have lived, and incorporates complexity and diversity into data collection and analysis (Cresswell, 1998:26).

This investigation models a research method that grows out of a feminist approach of reframing power relationships, knowledge construction and individual experiences. Dominice's (2000) understanding of life history is a 'method of inquiry that engages the research informant in a patterned, somewhat guided exploration of one area of his or her experience' (p.56). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) recognize personal narrative as a 'powerful form of qualitative research' (p.83). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) explain that 'it is a form of first person narrative that places the writer within a socio-political context as a witness to or producer of social change' (p.76). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) add that this type of life history invites the reader into an 'unknown world and becomes a libratory text, exposing areas of needed challenge and change' (p.45). According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), when the intent is to capture one persons' interpretation of his or her life, the study is called a life history. Rubin and Rubin (1995) explain further:

Life histories focus more on the experiences of an individual and what he or she felt as he or she passed through different stages of life. Life histories can tell us about life's passages; they can also provide a window on social change. (p.27).

Armstrong (1987) explains that life history methods had their early development in Chicago at approximately the same time that 'interactionism was being given its initial impetus, and this is no accident' (p.54). He adds that 'the life history method assigns significance and value to the person's own story, or to interpretations that people place on their own experiences as an explanation for their own behaviour' (p.8). Life history is also a central structure in human meaning making; thus as Rossiter states, 'the life course and individual identity are experienced as a story' (Rossiter, 1999:59). Rossiter (1999) agrees that by telling their life story individuals make sense of and give meaning to life experiences; in their story they try to create a certain coherence and continuity to face 'the given complexity and ambivalence of life' (Rossiter, 1999:20). Ficher-Rosenthal (1995) also states that narrative data are not merely 'an expression of the meaning giving processes and of the self presentation of individuals, they are also constitutive for it' (p.29).

Life history approaches have a long and reputable history in the fields of psychology (Allport, 1942; Dollard, 1935; White, 1963), sociology (Bertaux, 1981; Denzin, 1989; Plummer, 1983) and anthropology (Kluckhohn, 1945; Langness, 1965; Watson and Watson-Franke, 1985). More recently, life history approaches have been adopted by educational researchers in order to study teachers' lives and careers, teaching, schooling, and curriculum (e.g. Ball and Goodson, 1985; Beynon, 1985; Casey, 1993; Goodson, 1981, 1988, 1991, 1992; Goodson and Cole, 1994; Knowles, 1992, 1993; Knowles and Holt-Reynolds, 1994; Measor and Sykes, 1992; Smith, Dwyer, Prunty and Kleine, 1988; Woods, 1987). In the field of educational research, life-history research has become increasingly legitimised (Reinharz, 1992), and so with the greater acceptance of post-modern research methods, stories are now seen as valid means of knowledge production (Riessman, 1990, 1993; Skeggs, 2002). Plummer (1995) describes this period as the 'narrative moment'. He says that:

Stories have recently moved centre stage in social thought. In anthropology, they are seen as the pathways to understanding culture. In psychology, they are the bases of identity. In history, they provide the ropes for making sense of the past. In psychoanalysis, they provide narrative truths for analysis. (Plummer, 1995:18).

Also, researchers such as Kanno (2000), Kouritzin (1999), McMahill (2001), Norton (2000) and Schumann (1997) acknowledge that narratives elicited from learners are a legitimate source of data in the hermeneutic tradition, complementary to more traditional empirical approaches. In Walker's (2001) view:

Narrative research has become a popular educational inquiry approach because social life is storied. Narrative in this sense is central to the ontology of social life, involving the active participation of the storyteller and listener in how they account [interpret, make meaning of] for themselves to themselves and to others. Narrative produces selves or identities [who we take ourselves to be]; they are dialogical [made with and through others] (p.21).

Riessman (1993) argues that the majority of information we give other people is not in the form of clear and logic arguments, but through stories. This information is at times in the form of gossip, descriptions, explanations and even newspaper articles; therefore information tends to be communicated in the narrative form. One reason for this may be the fact that stories make information more interesting; as Thompson (1978) states 'words breathe life into history' (p.15). Narrative represents an individuals' identity through the 'speech-act itself, the actions taken and the person's involvement with the world' (Riessman, 1993:24). It has to be pointed out that 'stories are not told, but lived in the first instance' (Riesmann, 1993:23). Rosenthal (1993) explains that as a result, the analysis of life histories can either reconstruct biographical



meaning on the basis of experienced life history, or reconstruct present meanings and temporal order. By putting the stories in such a context, narrative analysis leads to what Geertz (1973) labels 'thick description' in the form of a 'human inquiry' which allows a joint learning process in the research context. Gubrium and Holstein (1997) explain that we are undergoing a shift towards understanding narrative as 'the new language of the qualitative method' (p.24). These ideas are based on the fact that researchers are working in an atmosphere that, in the aftermath of postmodernism, has become more narrative, grounded, idiosyncratic, and storied in its focus. In this context, 'researchers are left grappling over what the story (or stories) of data are' (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997:24). The question is made more complex due to the fact that narrative is 'an interactional experience that is constantly negotiated and manipulated by both listener and speaker' (Gubrium and Holestein, 1997:24).

### ***Empowering Methods: A Life History Approach***

Many researchers argue that through the use of life history methods they are able to discuss, document and resurrect previously hidden lives. I may have a similar objective, but as Witherell and Noddings (1991) explain, we need to be cautious when we suggest that lives are hidden, silenced, or invisible. Surely, such lives are not hidden to those people who live them. Tierney (1999) argues that if life history is considered nothing more than a 'liberal appeal to point out historical victims, then what will have been accomplished is little more than a return to singular creations of unitary stick figures based on realist assumptions' (Tierney, 1999:310). However, the portraits that emerge from the women I am interviewing are not those of victims, but rather of multi-dimensional women who survive and thrive in life through struggle, self-assertion, collaboration and strength. In its fullest sense, life history research goes beyond the use of narrative as rhetorical structure, that is, simply telling stories, to an analytic examination of the underlying insights and assumptions that the story illustrates (Bell, 1995, 1997; Cole 1992; Golombek, 1998). Hallmarks of narrative analysis are the recognition that people make sense of their lives according to the narratives available to them, that stories are constantly being restructured in the light of new events, and that stories do not exist in a vacuum but are shaped by lifelong personal and community narratives (Witherell and Noddings, 1991).

In Luttrell's (2000) examination of the use of life history methods she argues that a central way of making sense of our experience is through the stories we tell of ourselves and of others. The importance of telling stories about who we are is widely recognized with the practice of

‘personal writing having achieved considerable acceptance’ (Luttrell, 2000:23). In examining the purpose of life history research, Fisher, Fox, and Paille (1996) write that narrative:

Is especially useful in dealing with situations that encompass differing motivations, causality, conflict, and it allows one to connect and interpret events. Story is central to the organization of knowledge and to the process of comprehension and thinking (p.434).

Stories are situated in cultural contexts, which need to be made explicit. Witherell and Noddings (1991) explain that:

Stories and narratives, whether personal or fictional, provide meaning and belonging in our lives. They attach us to others and to our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with threads of time, place, and character, even advice on what we might do with our lives. The story fabric offers us images, myths, and metaphors that are morally resonant and contribute both to our knowing and our being known. The narrator too has a story, one that is embedded in his or her culture, language, gender, beliefs, and life history. This embeddedness lies at the core of the learning experience (p.1-3).

Importantly, experience is also essential as a means of making sense of life histories and, symbolically, the life struggle over material conditions (Brah, 1992). Life histories locate individuals within the context of structure. Illustrating the constraints of structure on people’s lives, Bertaux (1981) argues that:

The intent of the biographical project is to uncover the social, economic, cultural, structural and historical forces that shape, distort and otherwise alter problematic lived experiences (p.4).

The relationship between private and public worlds are revealed whereby people experience ‘an inner world of thought and experience’, in relation to ‘an outer world of events and experiences’ (Denzin, 1985:66). For Denzin ‘the joining and recording of these two structures of experience (in a personal document) is the hallmark of the biographical method’ (1989:28). I am suggesting that the purposes of a life history approach in this study are multiple. They are framed in relation to the research, the informants, whose stories are told, and the audience who is to read the stories. I am involved in the creation of these texts, which can be used to develop the whole persona of the informant. Walker (2001) explains:

Stories are open up to the possibility of seeing a new way of representing complexity, uncertainty, contradictions and silences. Put simply, narratives give our lives meaning—we dream, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, doubt, plan, criticise, gossip, learn and love through narrative. Arguably, to deny someone the right to tell their story is then to compromise (or deny) their human dignity (Walker, 2001: 23).

Stories are integral to human culture because culture is constituted through the ‘ensemble of stories we tell about ourselves’ (Geertz, 1975, cited in Plummer, 1995:5). Culture produces the conventions for living (Geertz, 1975, cited in Plummer, 1995:5). Whether it is in the general

community, workplace or home, culture shapes how individuals envisage their world and speak about their places in it (Berg, 1998; Berger, 1997; Brown, 1990). I have taken a critical approach to life history- that is, an approach that draws from feminism, critical theory, post-modernism and post-colonialism. This means that narratives may be used to reinforce but also contest dominant social practices. Life history methods are used by feminists as a way of enabling the voices of women to be heard. For Reinharz (1992):

Biographical work has always been an important part of the women's movement because it draws women out of obscurity, repairs the historical record, and provides an opportunity for the woman reader and writer to identify with the subject (p.128).

Life history texts enable the voices of the women in this investigation to be heard, placing them central to the research process as they reflect upon, interpret, give meaning to and construct past events and experiences within a social context (Reinharz, 1992). Life history research can be used to change women's lives. Reinharz (1992) maintains that feminist life histories 'assist in fundamental sociological task-illuminating the connections between biography, history and social structure' (1992:131). Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) main claim for the use of narrative in research is that humans are 'storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives' (p.23). Riessman (1993) concurred that 'a primary way individuals make sense of experience is by casting it in narrative form' (p.23). In Riessman's view, narrating important life events does not give the researcher direct access to another's experience, it is the self-representational that the researcher attempts to capture in the narrative. The inclusion of multilingual women's stories in this investigation is advocated as a way to legitimise women's voice in educational research. Cortazzi (1993), Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) and Goodson (1992) document influences on women's educational developments that provide opportunities for women to reflect on their own practices.

Life history research has increased in popularity amongst educators as a means of understanding learning experiences within the context of educational biographies. Life history texts enable learners to 'construct and give subjective meaning to their learning experiences' (Schutz, 1932). Life histories focus on an individualised way of understanding experiences and the social world, yet in constructing a life history a person relates to significant others and social contexts; a life history is therefore never fully individual (Rosental, 1993). Riessman (1993) argues that life history research is a means of 'highlighting the collective experiences of people's lives by locating their stories within a socio-economic and political context from the perspective of education' (Riessman, 1993:21). Such an approach identifies the everyday struggles of ordinary people, reveals the nature of inequality in society and thus has the potential to promote transformative action within communities (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Life history

research also offers a tool for critiquing structural inequalities and, in relation to education, the inadequacies and contradictions of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teaching and social inclusion policies. Life history research involves working with peoples' consciously told stories, recognising that these rest on deeper stories of which people are often unaware (Hargreaves, 1992). Riessman (1993) explains that people construct stories that support their interpretation of themselves; this includes both experiences and events that support their interpretation of themselves and also events that undermine the identities they currently claim. Whether or not we believe the stories people tell are relatively unimportant in relation to this investigation, because this study goes beyond the specific stories to explore the assumptions inherent in the shaping of those stories. Riessman (1993) notes that 'no matter how fictionalized, all stories rest on and illustrate the story structure a person holds. As such they provide a window into peoples' beliefs and experiences' (p.23).

I see life history methodology as being particularly appropriate for the purpose of this investigation because it highlights the fundamental belief that moral research practice, whether at an individual, team, institutional or national level, is grounded in personal decisions. In Tierney's (2000) view 'subjective experiences and perceptions-located within, and influenced by, particular historical contexts' (p.4). I share Tierney's (2000) view that a goal of life history research is 'to break the stranglehold of meta-narratives that establish rules of truth, legitimacy and identity' (p.546). I hold, as many others have done, that the personal is political, and that individual perceptions, decisions and experiences can come to have wider significance and implications for other people (Riessman, 1990). McKenna and Boore (2001) explain that telling stories is a primary way of making sense of the world. People use stories to create meaning from experience. Therefore the stories must be set within a context of purpose, 'a narrative, through which individuals grasp the meaning of lived experience through retelling and reframing understanding of past events' (Kourizin, 1999:21). There is an ongoing nature to these narratives, as the tellers interpret their experiences in light of their past, present and future (McKenna and Boore, 2001). Coles and Knowles (1993), on the other hand, explain that informants in life history research often remark that they find reflecting upon their life and telling their story helpful in terms of self-identity and self-development - perhaps even therapeutic. Nevertheless, for some informants it can throw up disturbing memories and awareness of their helplessness against the structural constraints of society (Coles and Knowles, 1993). It is intended that the life history methods in this investigation highlight the informants' awareness of their own literacy practices in everyday life. The stories may also help the women to trace the source of their literate identities and could offer an opportunity to reflect on issues that they may not have thought about otherwise. Dominice (2000) argues that life histories benefit educators as well as the people sharing their story:

Life history reflection can foster the dialectic between the personal and the social aspects of learning. The rationale for education biography pays attention to both learner empowerment through the inquiry process (an instance of the personal) and learner collaboration with educators and peers to produce, share, and interpret educational biographies (an instance of the situational) (Domince, 2000: xvi).

Narrating life experiences is ideal in helping researchers, informants, educators and policy makers to explore their views on literacy and also their own identity as literacy learners. For the informants, the process of articulating their views on literacy practices may serve as a wake up call to remind us, as researchers and educators, of the importance of looking at issues of culture and literacy in the ESOL setting. Also, part of being human involves narrating stories to ourselves and to others (Plummer, 1995). Humans use narrative to express emotions and convey beliefs about how 'things should be' (Berger and Luckman, 1997). Through the retelling of stories, individuals represent their identities and societies (Plummer, 1995; Riessman, 1990; 1993). Storytelling is also important as it helps people to 'organize their experiences into meaningful episodes that call upon cultural modes of reasoning and representation' (Berger, 1997:45). Witherell and Noddings (1991) state:

Finding a voice in relation to others is one of the most profound implications of life history. Thus, while we recognise that there are problems with the view that life history research can expose and undercut exclusive categories and marginalization, in the particular context of the research. The understanding of life history research as part of a movement to democratize education, parallels our concern that narrative in education should be used not so much to provide an opportunity to talk about but rather to examine the struggles over giving and withholding the right to a voice (p.123).

Witherell and Noddings (1991) argue that in the past three decades, life history research has become the focus of the evolving interdisciplinary field of narrative study (e.g. Bruner, 1990; Linde, 1993; Ochs, 1997; Sarbin, 1986), which posits narrative as the central means by which people give their lives meaning across time. As Hardy (1968) states 'We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, plan, revise, criticize, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative' (p.5). Consequently, narrative has gained increasing stature outside the fields of literature and folklore, becoming both a focus of research and a rich source of data in many areas, in particular, linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics and language education (Berman and Slobin, 1994; Chafe, 1980; Johnstone, 1996; Tannern, 1980: 1982). However, there still remains a gap in the research attention given to understanding the literacies of specific multilingual communities and it is intended that this study will contribute to bridging this gap. There is no doubt that recent developments that legitimise life history research are extremely important for the educational field, as they allow for both teachers' and learners' voices to be

heard on a par with those of the researchers (Blackledge, 1995). Reder (1994) explains that through life history, researchers can gain rare insights into learners' motivations, investments, struggles, losses, and gains as well as insights into literacy ideologies that guide their learning trajectories. Exploration of critical and feminist pedagogy also demonstrates that the telling of life histories in a new language may be a means of empowerment that makes it possible to express new selves and 'experience previously considered untellable' (McMahil, 2001:23). At the same time, researchers such as Coles and Knowles (1993) are cautious in treating narrative simply as factual data subject to content analysis. It is important to remember that life history research is not purely an individual production - it is powerfully shaped by social, cultural, and historical conventions as well as by the relationship between the informant and the researcher. Finally, in adopting a life history approach I am able to examine the literacy practices of multilingual learners and explore the notions of what it means to be a researcher in this investigation.

### ***Retrieving Marginalized Voices through Multilingual Stories***

A focus on the experiences and interests of educators in most narrative studies seems to have led to little attention being paid to the understanding of issues and experiences that are particularly important to multilingual learners themselves. Multilingual women's subjective experiences are particularly valuable as a source of information in the study of something as complex and personal as literacy. The limited number of studies that explore multilingual women's literacies led me to search for other potential sources of information. Much of the literature cited by various authors was not specific to multilingual women's textual practices and many used concepts and theories derived from white middle class male perspectives and experiences. There seems to be an obvious need for research that contributes to the development of a more coherent conceptual and empirical knowledge base specific to multilingual women's literacies.

Meek (1991) argues that women have for too long been deprived of their own narratives, and if those narratives are to be heard, she says, it will be 'where women exchange stories, where they read and talk collectively of ambitions, of possibilities, and accomplishments' (p.46). Meek (1991) points out that 'if we are to understand the relation of storytelling to literacy we must see the value and nature of narrative as a means by which human beings, everywhere, represent and structure their worlds' (p.103). Stories are everywhere; they are universal, hence no matter what cultures, traditions, values and beliefs are passed down from one generation to the next through the sharing of stories. Storytelling also has another dimension in helping the teller to

structure and make sense of their worlds. Meek (1991) explains that as we recall incidents and express our memories and feelings about our experiences, we are remembering, thinking and beginning to see these things differently (Meek, 1991). Of particular importance for the use of narratives in this study is the fact that historically, autobiography has evolved as a Western construction (Smith, 1999). Thus stories may not possibly exist as a genre in particular cultures, or when they do exist, they may be told or written in ways quite different from Western narratives (Hokenson, 1995; Wong, 1991). These differences are of primary importance in the research field, particularly when working with speakers of more than one language, because as Delgado (1989:56) states 'a story elicited in one language may be shaped by conventions of another and thus not be heard as such or may be misunderstood and so such misunderstandings tend to privilege one narrative style over another'. Delgado (1989) also reminds us that 'oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation' (p.243).

I believe that life history research in the literacy field should go beyond what particular stories are saying and examine whose stories are being heard and why, and whose stories are still missing, being misunderstood, or being misinterpreted. Smith (1999) rightly states that 'at times you find that immigrant memoirs were typically authored by Western researchers who aimed to re-write immigrant stories' (p.92). Delgado (1989) argues that research asserts that the educational system marginalizes ethnic communities, and such marginalization is justified through research that decentres and even dismisses ethnic minority communities through 'majoritarian storytelling' (p.66). Life history methods also have great potential for the field of literacy research as they permit researchers and educators to approach 'narratives as discursive constructions rather than as factual statements' (Acker, 1983:22). Such an approach will also allow us to uncover multiple socio-cultural, socio-historical, and rhetorical influences that shape narrative construction and thus to understand better how stories are being told, why they are being told, why they are being told in a particular way, and whose stories remain untold - or, for that matter, not heard - for a variety of reasons (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). Importantly, such an approach will allow us to examine our own roles in privileging certain narratives over others and in silencing certain voices while emphasizing others - thus 'moving us forward in the implementation of more critical approaches to research and practice' (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992:73). It is important to reflect upon how stories can be used as theoretical, methodological and pedagogical tools to challenge marginalisation and work towards social justice (Auerbach and Burgess, 1985). Anzaldua (1990) challenges us to develop new theories that will help us to better understand those who are at the margins of society. She also suggests that along with new theories, we need new 'theorizing methods' to conduct the research that would solve the problems posed by these theories. Auerbach and Burgess (1985) state that 'research and theory

that explicitly address issues of marginalisation have the potential to fill this void' (p.75). One of the strategies used in this investigation is to encourage the women to recall and to share their memories of literacy practices in the form of stories as a way of helping them to also make sense of their present literate situations. Coslett, Lury and Summerfield (2000) state that:

Telling stories can be a way of producing critical dialogue from the 'inside' about gender, race and class. Not surprisingly, stories, particularly life histories have been a particular rich genre for feminist researchers. Women and other subordinated groups are excluded, with exceptions in only a small number of countries, from the major sites of knowledge production until very late in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The dominant history of knowledge is a history, which reflects the concerns and interests of the elite group of men who recorded and circulated their ideas. The world these men did not know was often only recorded and circulated in forms that did not undermine official knowledge, or the language of science. Thus it is often through the fictions of novels or autobiographies that we know the facts of the world of women (p.67).

Life history methods also offer a way to understand the experiences of multilingual learners because such methodology generates knowledge by looking at those who have been epistemologically marginalized, silenced, and disempowered (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). As I work from my own position at the margins of mainstream academia, I hold on to the belief that the margins, as hooks (1990) explains, can be 'more than a site of deprivation' (p.23). hooks (1990) also adds that the site of 'radical possibility, a space of resistance' (hooks, 1990:149). In support of this view Anzaldua (1990) explains:

Theory, then, is a set of knowledge. Some of this knowledge has been kept from us-entry into some professions and academia denied us. Because we are not allowed to enter discourse, because we are often disqualified and excluded from it, because what passes for theory these days is forbidden territory for us, it is vital that we occupy theorizing space, that we do not allow white men and women solely to occupy it. By bringing in our own approaches and methodologies, we transform that theorizing space. (p.xxxv).

Life history research articulates a response to Anzaldua's (1990) challenge that 'if we have been gagged and disempowered by theories', we can also be 'loosened and empowered by theories' (p.xxxvi). If methodologies have been used to silence and marginalize linguistic communities, then certain methodologies can also give voice and turn the margins into 'places of transformative resistance' (Bernal, 2001:50). We know that many would discount the histories, experiences, and lives of linguistic communities through majoritarian stories (Bell, 1992). Bell (1992) explains that by revealing the 'deficit discourse in majoritarian stories white privilege is revealed and this often is perceived as a threat to those who benefit from racism' (p.32). However, as a strategy of survival and a means of resistance, I will continue to work to tell the counter-stories of those 'at the bottom of society's well' (Bell, 1992:33).



Yemeni women have a great deal to teach us about the struggles that they as marginalized women undergo in their efforts to define themselves within their own communities and the larger society. The process of self-definition and self-creation for women whose identities are doubly bound and fraught with conflict is challenging. In trying to balance both identities, as members of an ethnic minority community and as multilingual learners, Yemeni women are often caught between two worlds, as Bell (1992) states 'forever defined as other by both their ethnic and learner community' (p.22). In attempting to define and maintain loyalties too many, often politically, morally, or philosophically opposed communities, they may become hybridized subjects (Bhabha, 1994). In exploring how Yemeni women experience this sense of living 'in between' in the everyday world, I use a life history approach, and have done so with the understanding that research methods that focus only on current experiences may prove inadequate for documenting the development of hybridized subjectivity among ethnic minority women. Collins (1991) explains that 'some research methods may oversimplify or over rationalize the experience of ethnic minority learners and underemphasize the conflicts that arise in the formation of identity' (p.23), particularly because it does not address changes that occur in persons over time. Collins (1991) states that 'struggling with two, often opposing, selves create both a complex and rich life experience that needs to be explored to be understood' (p.32). To examine the issues of hybridity and subjectivity fully we must use methods that address the life course, that pay attention to conflict, 'direct the informant to different and possible dialectical or dichotomous aspects of their identities, seeks to uncover information that is sensitive to voice and location, and recognise the fact that lives are not necessarily experienced in a linear or cohesive fashion' (Collins, 1991:44). Collins (1991) points out that identity formation is complex and in conflict, especially for those who define their subjective selves as residing in many communities, as is the case of Yemeni women. Understanding and drawing on this reality requires a method that is sensitive and looks at the women's lives from a holistic perspective.

Exploring the literacy practices and experiences of Yemeni women exemplifies the usefulness of life-history methods in staying true to 'voice and location and enlightening and uncovering the complex and often conflictual realities that ethnic minority women face in the creation of their subjective identities' (Collins, 1991:58). It is hoped that the narratives in this investigation will aid other researchers to generate new theories regarding the literacy practices and identity formation amongst multilingual learners and provide avenues for future research. Importantly, I believe that reflecting on one's experiences and perceptions as a researcher is a responsibility one has to the research and to the informants.

## *Narrative as a Reflective Method*

The relatively recent paradigm shift to interpretive-critical and post-structural - forms of qualitative research, particularly those conducted from a feminist perspective, have placed a new level of importance on the research process and, amongst other things, have highlighted the researcher-informant relationship (Tierney, 1994). There is a rapidly growing body of literature on qualitative research methods in which researchers address: issues of reflexivity and subjectivity, as discussed in Chapter Three (Dawe, 1973; Ellis and Flaherty 1992; Heshusius, 1992; Olesen, 1994); political issues such as representation and voice (McLaughlin and Tierney, 1994); and there are also studies that focus on research relationships (Coles, 1991; Coles and Knowles, 1993). All this work has a primary purpose related to articulating researchers' moral responsibilities to the research process and to increasing their understanding of informants engaged in the research. The work represented in this chapter is another such attempt. By drawing on both theoretical and experiential knowledge of narrative research methods from the perspectives of the researcher and the researched, I am able to demonstrate the need for reflexivity in research.

Fonow and Cook (1991) explain that being reflexive is something to be learned in terms of 'degrees rather than absolutes' (p.23). Hunt (1987) sees being reflexive as an exercise in 'sustaining multiple and sometimes opposing emotions, keeping alive contradictory ways of theorizing the world, and seeking compatibility, not necessarily consensus' (Hunt, 1987:34). Hence being reflexive means expanding rather than narrowing the psychic, social, cultural, and political fields of analysis (p.38). The term 'reflexivity' as Hunt (1987:38) and others have used it, means being 'self-reflexive', or 'reflecting ideas and experiences back on oneself'- making explicit one's own understanding based on one's own experiences. Being reflexive in research, in Hunt's terms, means 'beginning with yourself' in order to be responsive to the informants in the research. In this research I have adopted a self-reflexive stance throughout.

Life history is at its root reflexive (Tierney, 1994). Reflexivity refers to the capacity to locate one's research activity in the same social world as the phenomenon being studied. According to Eakin, Robertson, Polan, Coburn, and Edwards (1996):

Researchers who take a reflexive stance do not see themselves as occupying a privileged position outside of the world they study. The research they engage in is not a neutral procedure for discovering an objective reality that exists independent of human perception and interpretation. The aspects of the environment which are noticed and singled out for inquiry and procedures used to describe and explain phenomena are 'ideological' in the sense that they are socially constructed in a particular time and place and in conformity

with prevailing rules for knowing and reaching conclusions about what is real (Eakin, Robertson, Polan, Coburn, and Edwards, 1996:162).

Fonow and Cook (1991) explain that because theories or perspectives often contain hidden or unacknowledged assumptions of how society functions, reflexivity leads researchers to make these assumptions explicit and search for alternative views of reality. We need to expand reflexivity in order to be able to analyse the nature of the research process to 'gain insight into the various theoretical perspectives about relations underlying the research process' (Fonow and Cook, 1991: 23). Therefore we need to be committed to developing and enhancing reflexive research practices that incorporate elements of 'consciousness raising', and 'rendering apparent unexamined stages of the research process' (Delgado, 1989:34). This is seen to be more important for feminist researchers where reflexive research practices help bridge women's individual experiences with 'political-structural analysis', in order to clarify the ways in which the researcher influences the nature of the research process which is instrumental in 'mobilizing women as active informants in their own emancipatory struggles' (Meek, 1991:55).

Such reflective skills are enhanced through dialogue. In many ways, this mirrors the kind of thinking required for good research practice and subjects it to the rigours of the research process as discussed in Chapter Three. Middleton (1992) explains that 'uncovering the dynamic of lives serves not only understanding and diagnosis, but enhances biographical sensitivity for both researcher and researched' (p.89). This process is thought to allow informant and researcher to develop new understandings of themselves, to creatively appreciate their own, often hidden biographical resources and aspirations, tapping into them and realizing them in new ways (Goodson, 1988). Goodson (1988) argues that life history research can bring onto the surface understanding of informants' own lived lives, which can then be used to bring about conscious change in themselves and in their position in society. Knowels (1992) states that such 'biographical reflexivity leads to social action because it is grounded in lived experience and brings a close and productive alignment between research methods, policy and professional practice, which has much to offer re-thinking of social policy' (p.16). Luttrell (2000) argues that it is important that researchers name the 'tensions, contradictions, and power imbalances that we encounter in our research, rather than attempting to eliminate them' (2000:36). Through my own self-reflective lens, I discuss several key realizations that I made through the research process and traced the decisions I have made.

Luttrell (2000) explains that 'researchers of culture and consciousness who use narrative methods tend to be caught between the 'proverbial rock and a hard place' (p.12). She explains that on the one hand, researchers strive to listen and represent those they study in their own

terms, and on the other hand, it is important that as researchers we recognise our role in shaping the research encounter. In this investigation I listen and attempt to make sense of what the informants say according to particular theoretical ontological, personal and cultural frameworks in the context of unequal power relations. However, as Luttrell explains, ‘the worry always exists that the voices and perspectives of those we study will be lost or subsumed by our own views and interests’ (Luttrell, 2000:499). At times I see no way out of this dilemma. However, Luttrell (2000) advocates a different way of looking at the problem, by explaining that ‘I don’t believe that researchers can eliminate tensions, contradictions, or power imbalances, but I do believe we can (and should) name them’ (p.65). Doucet (1997) states:

The best we can do then is to trace and document our data analysis processes, and the choices and decisions we make, so that other researchers and interested parties can see for themselves some of what has been lost and some of what has been gained. We need to document these reflexive processes, not just in general terms such as our class, gender and ethnic background; but in a more concrete and nitty-gritty way in terms of where, how and why particular decisions are made at a particular stage (p.138).

### *Concluding Thoughts*

I have thought about how my own background (as an Arabic speaking female) has and continues to affect my relationships, identifications, and exchanges with the Yemeni women I am studying, as discussed in Chapter Three. I view my fieldwork as a series of ongoing realizations that have led to complex choices and decision-making processes, which I need to make explicit. As is consistent with feminist reflexivity, life history research points to the important relationship between the researcher and the informant that develops over the course of the research process. Although narrative research focuses on documenting an authentic account of an informant’s life, the researcher remains present by interpreting and telling the informant’s story and ‘thus blurring the lines between fact and fiction and leading the [researcher –author] to create the informants in the text’ (Doucet, 1997:98). Hence, we cannot hide our own biases and values; instead we need to make our decisions explicit throughout the research process. The importance of being reflexive and clear about my own position in this research (where I am coming from and how that influences the collecting and interpreting of data) needs to be made explicit. I view the research as a process which should aim to be as inclusive as possible, and as such I intend to have a ‘collaborative’ layer where informants are involved in the interpretation and analysis of the data. Goodson (1981) argues that taking real account of peoples’ understandings means taking ‘an ecological, holistic, narrative approach - making the time to listen to informants’ whole stories, not just artificially getting them to focus on the researchers agenda’ (Goodson, 1981:76). The combination of classroom fieldwork and life history

interviews in this investigation helps to ensure that the data is as rich and therefore as true to the informants as possible.

In this chapter I have attempted to justify the use of life history methods for the purposes of this investigation and have provided contextualising information in relation to the use of life history methods as being a particularly powerful method of inquiry for the examination of multilingual literacies. In recognising that life history research is not purely an individual production, but one that is powerfully shaped by social, cultural and historical conventions as well as by the relationships between the informant and the researcher, I have presented a justification for the use of a life history approach in this study. It is now time to turn to Chapter Six, where I explore the translation act and examine the cultural value of translated texts, particularly in relation to translator identity.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Translation in Research

#### *Translators as Intercultural Agents*

This chapter is a modest attempt at resisting homogenizing and simplifying the process in handling the ethics of interpreting and translating in this study. In this chapter I examine the identity of the translator in a multitude of social and cultural roles, positions, attitudes, stories and histories. I explore these identities within the translation situations experienced in this investigation. I also consult literature in relation to the translation process in research from various disciplines. In recognising that translators/interpreters in the research field are engaged in a process of intercultural communication, I explore the cultural value of translated texts, particularly in respect to the importance of translation in relation to identity (Heller, 2000). In considering translation as a process that explores the mechanisms of culture, I view the translation act itself to be extremely loaded methodologically. In this chapter I also present a discussion of the multi-layered cultural roles interpreters/translators play and the need for reflexivity which would imply the translator being located as active in producing research accounts, and so in this investigation it has meant making my identity as the researcher-translator even more visible. I consider in detail reflexivity and the way power relations influence the act of translation, and the way cultures are enacted and created by the translator/interpreter gaze. This helps to explore how texts are embedded in contexts and how contexts are culturally defined

As a multidisciplinary area, the field of translation studies not only draws from many disciplines but also informs many disciplines. Toury (1995) stresses that for this to happen successfully, however, researchers, informants, educators, and practitioners are needed to help bring the insights derived from the translation field to the attention of those in related areas. I hope this study will serve a bridge across interrelated fields those of translation and educational research. In the process I hope to contribute to and enrich both. Interpreters and translators in the research field are engaged in a process of communication, and as Bahadir (2001) has suggested it is the communication of culture-specific facts, of information related to a specific setting or matter, of data about a specific topic, person, or event. Chang (1996) states that:

Communication implies no comprehension, for I am most firmly placed in a situation of communication with the other only when I recognize that someone has come to me but does not understand why and does not quite understand what he, she or it says (Chang, 1996:225).

Bahadir (2001:1) describes the deconstructive process of translation/interpretation as 'the moment when interaction partners realize that there is no possibility of communication, can reveal itself to be the only communication possible'. Chang (1996) describes this process as:

It is this sense of apprehension or uncertainty about what is to unfold and the subsequent non-comprehension of what is unfolding that opens the space of communication from which it is always too late for one to retreat. Communication can actually take place when it appears not to take place, and it can appear to take place when actually it fails to begin (Chang, 1996:227).

Bahadir (2001) argues that engagement in the other culture implies the drawing of conclusions from one's own culture. And so having a sharpened awareness of one's own culture is a prerequisite for knowledge of the other culture (Bahadir, 2001). Bahadir (2004) holds the view that acquiring a more sensitive view of one's original culture by means of entering a foreign culture, even understanding things better after a period of alienation, is a method interpreters/translators use in order to 'instrumentalize accounts of the foreign for first reflecting upon, then criticizing their own culture' (p.6). Geertz (1988) calls this technique 'the juxtaposition of the all-too-familiar and the widely exotic in such a way that they change places' (p.106). Intercultural communication, which translating is, also means taking on roles and switching between a number of identities in different culture-specific situations. Therefore because of the multi-layered cultural roles interpreters/translators play, a critical gaze, a thorough examination, and an extended call for reflexivity are required from the interpreter/translator. Gohring's (1980) writings demonstrate that communication is always culture-specific, 'no perception of and reflection on something can be impartial' (p.71). Gohring (1980) postulates that translators/interpreters 'perform the function of an intercultural mediator by questioning given aspects in any culture and trying to break free their culturally bound position' (1980:71). Therefore, there would be little room for a discussion of the impossibility of mediating without the influence of ones' own culture. Instead, an extended call for a discussion of reflexivity in the translator/interpreter role should be made.

### *Translating Cultures*

Over time and across disciplines, culture has been defined in innumerable different ways, depending on the field of study and the historical, geographical, social and political context in which the definitions were produced. I do not claim that any of these definitions are better than others, but simply emphasise the role that cultural elements play in communication from the

interpreter's/translator's perspective. As an interpreter/translator in this study I have come to appreciate that successful intercultural communication involves a number of factors such as language (verbal communication), body gesture (non-verbal communication), the use of time, space and silence, which differ from British culture to Yemeni culture. And so defining culture with all its myriad characteristics and manifestations is a considerable undertaking beyond the scope of this chapter. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1999) listed many definitions of the term, adding that they found variations of these definitions. Tyler (cited in Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1999) provided one of the first comprehensive definitions of the term in 1871, referring to culture as:

The complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom, and many other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Tyler, 1871, cited in Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1999:46).

Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1999) consider how culture comprises 'a set of attributes and products of human societies, and there with of mankind, which are extra somatic and transmissible by mechanisms other than biological heredity' (p.46). Katan (2003) on the other hand conceives of culture as a 'system for orbiting experience' and his basic supposition is that the organization of experience is not 'reality' but rather a simplification - even a 'distortion' - that varies from one culture to another. In this view, each culture acts as a frame within which realities are interpreted. Overing's (1987) concept of translating as an activity and translation as the result of this activity are inseparable from the concept of culture. In this investigation, I have found the translational capacity of culture to be an important criterion of culture's specificity. Simon (1996) states 'culture operates largely through translational activity,' which would mean that by including new texts into a culture, that culture could undergo 'innovation and perceive its specificity' (Simon, 1996:80). An understanding of the cultural value of translated texts has grown deeper, particularly in respect to the importance of translation for identity of the receiving culture (Simon, 1996). Venuti (1998) refers to the identity-forming power of translations as the:

Ability of translations to participate, according to the necessity, both in ensuring culture's coherence of homogeneity as well as in activating cultural resistance or culture's innovation processes (Venuti, 1998:68).

Translation is also a process that explores the mechanisms of culture and I have found the translation act itself to be a concept that is extremely loaded methodologically. To explain further Spivak (1992) talks about how:



Translation and translating are concepts concurrent with an active culture which allow us in the situation of the scarcity of culture theoretic means to approach the essence of cultural mechanism in a way that the analysis of both translation and translating as well as culture are enriched (Spivak, 1992:43).

In playing the role of translator and researcher in this investigation, I learnt that translating cultures is a task motivated by my desire for a non-hierarchical encounter between the Arabic and English language, between Yemeni and British traditions and identities. However, I found in the act of translation to be a practice where this encounter continually took place. The hierarchy of cultural values determines:

Global, political behaviour, perceptions and representations of supposedly classing macro cultural forces of traditions and civilisations which are complicated by the borderline identities which emerge through post-national encounters and exchanges and perform a less combative vision for the future of global coexistence (Spivak, 1992:44).

It is possible to suggest as Toury (1995) explains, that the hybrid performance of the cultural 'in between' is defined by the communication across languages, cultures and the universe of translation that emerges between the interacting.

### ***Mission Impossible: Translation***

Much of the translation literature I consulted in this investigation points to an impossibility of a literal movement of meaning from one language to another, and that communication across languages involves more than just a literal transfer of information (Hertz, 1997; Steier, 1991). Temple and Edwards (2002) have argued that 'if there is no one meaning to be gleaned from the experiences of the social world, then there can be no one translation and it may be necessary to convey meaning using words that are not spoken by research participants' (p.4). Simon (1996) explains that the translator is actively involved in discussing concepts rather than just words, and that context is important in deciding equivalence or difference in meaning. It no longer becomes a case of finding the meaning of a text from a culture. Simon (1996) describes the situation with such an approach:

The difficulty with such statements is that they seem to presume a unified culture field, which the term inhibits; the translator must simply track down the precise location of the term within it and then investigate the corresponding culture field for corresponding realities. What this image does not convey is the very difficulty of determining cultural meaning. This meaning is not located within the culture itself but in the process of negotiation which is part of its continual reactivation. The solutions for many of translator's dilemmas are not to be found in dictionaries, but rather in an understanding of the way language is tied to local realities, to literary forms and to changing identities.

Translators must constantly make decisions about the cultural meanings which language carries, and evaluate the degree to which the two different worlds they inhabit are the same. These are not technical difficulties; they are not the domains of specialities in obscure or quaint vocabularies. They demand the exercise of a wide range of intelligences. In fact the process of meaning transfer has less to do with finding the cultural inscription of a term than in reconstructing its value (p.137-138).

Understanding the challenges of working with culture-specific references in translation, when one has information and resources at hand, sheds more light on the difficulty in dealing with them in translating/interpreting, given the complex and stressful task implied in the work of interpreters/translators. Toury (1995) holds the view that the problem of a culture-specific reference comes about because of the lack of its equivalent in the target language and culture. However, one of the most interesting aspects of the translation process in this investigation is not only being failed by a lack of culture-specific reference in the target culture which in its own right created challenges for me as the interpreter/translator in the decision-making process, but also, during the initial translation of the informants' narratives, I was required to interfere to ensure that communication between the two cultures (Yemeni-British) was achieved. An important example of translating cultures in this investigation is where I (as the translator and researcher) was translating the concept of arranged marriages in one of the stories, a cultural norm prevalent in most parts of the Islamic world and a common practice amongst Asians and Arabs. In translating this concept, particularly in Kalthum's story to ensure that this was a non-hierarchical encounter between the Arabic and English language and between Yemeni and British traditions. This communication across cultures and across languages of the concept of 'arranged marriages' was something of a translation dilemma, as I was conscious of avoiding any confusion over the two different forms of 'arranged marriages' and 'forced marriages' which have tended to lead to an increased tension between British and Asian cultures. The concept of arranged marriages is commonly simplified by the media and these simplifications tend to be greater when they are about minority groups. These simplifications can be particularly dangerous when readers lack the relevant background information. These simplifications also lead to stigmatisations and often racism. Therefore when translating this concept in Kalthum's story I was required to interfere to ensure that communication between Yemeni and British culture was achieved.

In this investigation I also decided not to translate literally the informants' interview transcriptions, but instead have focused on the meanings in the transcription and translation process. This way, with the informants I have co-constructed and reconstructed accounts of their stories. Through this process, as the interpreter I also became a 'key informant' rather than a 'neutral transmitter of messages', hence a conversation about possible differences in

perspective became possible (Temple and Young, 2004:6). In being a 'key informant' in this investigation, my own intellectual biography plays a central role in the reconstruction of the womens' stories and I have avoided situating the 'English-speaking world' at the centre of my study (Temple and Young, 2004:6). Through this approach I have avoided any attempt to examine or explore the formal aspects of the Arabic language, such as lexical choices and how sentences are constructed. In *Dilemmas of translation and identity: Ethnographic research in multilingual homes* (Alzouebi and Pahl, 2006) I explain how as an Arabic speaking researcher I am able to reproduce aspects of the language I speak, the choices of structure for the informants' translated words that they actually used themselves demonstrate to the readers that in this study, the text is not just the researchers' view of what the translator has produced, but rather it is the actual informants' perspective (Alzouebi and Pahl, 2006). Playing the dual role of the researcher and translator in this investigation has meant that it is even more important to extend calls for reflexivity in narrative research. Temple (2002) has argued that this would imply the translator/interpreter being located as active in producing research accounts; for me this has meant making my identity as the researcher-interpreter/translator even more visible.

### ***Missing Texts: Translation Literature***

Interpreting and translating are one of the oldest of human activities, even though, as Katan (1999) explains, its professional status seems to have been recognised only quite recently. Katan (1999) has considered how the process of translation has traditionally been ignored, silenced and at times even disregarded. Geertz (1993) holds the view that traditionally, 'good' translations are those which manage to convey the illusion of transparency, 'those where the translator's presence cannot be traced' (p.26). This process of silencing or hiding the translators' voice may have been the result of the marginal status attached to translation and translators throughout history. It is only since the 1980s that questions of 'visibility' and 'subjectivity' in translation have been given new attention (See Venuti, 1995). Bassnet (1994) postulates that post-colonial approaches in particular 'exemplify a new cultural turn in the field of translation studies by focusing on the discursive construction of the translator's voice and identity in the translated text' (p.46). In these cases, the translator is in dialogue with the author. as an equal, sometimes even challenging the latter's ideological stance. Bassnet (1994) spoke of how by paying attention to questions of voice and subjectivity in translation we are recognising the translator's creativity, her or his active role in shaping the translation processes. In spite of some advances within the field of translation studies, the translators' presence seems to be rarely acknowledged outside the field. Through a review of translation and cross-language

research I found few researchers make visible the effects and implications of translation in research, and even less is written about translation in narrative research.

Venuti (1998) talks about the invisibility of 'translation' as a critical term in literature discourse due in part to the practice of understanding. Venuti (1998) spoke of when 'Anglo-European culture elevated fluency; the removal of all traces of foreignness' (p.37) - as the highest value to which translation could aspire in the nineteenth century, hence the practice of translation itself effectively became a tool in dominating and subsuming both the source language and its culture. As Venuti (1998) also states:

This historically specific desire for a translation to seem invisible, a seamless and transparent passage from source to target language, is a form of domestication and therefore of domination: transparency results in a concealment of the conditions of production (Venuti, 1998:67).

Venuti (1998) suggests that by questioning this supposedly invisible process; 'occasion revelations that question the authority of dominant cultural values and institutions' because translation, like any cultural practice, 'entails the creative reproduction of values' (p.83). Venuti (1998) holds the view that the preference for a form of translation practice evolved within the ideologies of white superiority were necessary to uphold colonialism itself, and various studies (See Bassnett and Trivedi's *Post-Colonial Translation*, 1999) has explored this form of translation in detail. Derrida attempts to highlight how the meanings and identities of a text are not fixed, stable, pure, or univocal - 'the text resonates infinitely with other words, meanings, and contexts' (Derrida, 1990:34). There is thus no fixed and single meaning that the translator/interpreter can transfer. Furthermore Derrida (1990) has considered how the notion of transfer is called into question if we consider that 'signifier, signified, sign and reference mutually imply each other, such that a pure transcendental meaning does not exist, cannot be extracted, and also that differences between languages are 'insurmountable' (p.46). From my role as the translator in this investigation, I found that there are stabilizing contexts, which constrain interpretation and translation. Faced with such realizations, I often asked how I can or should proceed with the translation! I also realised that there was little point in looking for the meaning of a text solely within the confines of the written page. Phillips (1996) describes the position of 'conceptual equivalence' across languages in absolute terms 'an insolvable problem' since 'almost any utterance in any language carries with it a set of assumptions, feelings, and values that the speaker may or may not be aware of but that the researcher as an outsider, usually is not' (Phillips, 1996:291). The reader, however, produces an understanding of a text during the act of reading by reference to her/his own understanding of concepts and debates filtered through their own experiences (Phillips, 1996). Understanding my informants as social

actors has helped me appreciate that there is not only one correct way to describe their literate accounts. Young (1997) argues that the interpreter/translator, researcher and informant are all producers of accounts, and their social locations in the world influences how they come to experience and describe their accounts. Thus as social beings we all have particular histories, stories and occupy certain social positions, which means that we do not necessarily see the world from another's standpoint - although we may understand each other across differences and through dialogues (Young, 1997).

And so as the translator in this study, I have come to appreciate that there is no one correct translation, and rather than there being an exact match word for word in Arabic and in English, I am faced with an array of possible word combinations that could be used to convey the same meaning. The issues I am faced with in translating the informants' stories in this investigation are not always the same, because translation involves face-to face interaction with my informants rather than merely working with written texts. Nevertheless, the experience of being the translator (Alzouebi and Pahl, 2006) has confirmed for me the need for a reflexive examination of issues in translation in order to explore working with translators/interpreters in research. This experience has taught me what interpreting for and between cultures involves, the risks and benefits that are at stake, the amount of responsibility and freedom which can be taken on as the interpreter, and maybe I feel so strongly about the call for reflexivity because being the researcher and translator in this study, with a particular interest in ethnographic research, I felt more like an interpreter-ethnographer, and have since developed 'a native translator's self-reflexivness' (Toury, 1986:49). Clifford and Marcus (1986) consider in detail reflexivity and political questions in ethnographic representation, which I found very useful for the discussion of the roles of the interpreter and translator. These discussions include understanding the translator's right, authority, duty to speak for the other, the way power relations influence the act of interpretation/translation, and the way cultures are enacted and created by the interpreter's/translator's gaze. These issues have allowed an open dialogue to take place in this study, where the position of the interpreter/translator as a 'cultural expert' can be compared to the 'ethnographer-researcher' (Clifford and Marcus, 1986:49).

Through my work in interpretation and translation away from the current study, and specifically in judicial immigration courts, I found that on the one hand I was expected to be impartial and factual, being an outsider, but still an insider, at the same time taking part in the communication as a third party, thus 'representing and mediating between the cultures not as an exclusive or complete insider-outsider but as a third part in between' (Leiris, 1985:23). Such actual lived experiences need to lead to theoretical discussions, because similar to the ethnographer, as the

translator I found myself writing down my own reflections on the translation process, the commentaries and evaluations all played a part in forming the translation account. Appreciating my interpreter/translator role as an ethnographer has helped me take on responsibility through a conscious visibility, which has in addition helped me to reconsider the multidimensional implications of interpreting between cultures, and ‘thus redefine ethical constraints and deliberations’ (Hertz, 1997:16). Through being the interpreter/translator, I have also come to realise that I cannot ‘only’ be an interpreter; I cannot be impartial and objective. Importantly I have to position myself, I have to take a stance and as Leiris (1985) has argued ‘the interpreter and translator need to take a stance on the political conditions determining the status of colonizing and colonized cultures’ (p.44). Gohring (1980) extends this debate further:

The interpreter today has to take a stance and develop a consciousness for the political and ethical dilemma between the domesticating of the other and leaving the other as foreign (Gohring, 1980:72).

### ***Translator Identity: Only a Translator!***

In this investigation I write as a woman with many identities, including importantly identities as an interpreter and as a novice researcher. These identities, which I view as professional identities, when examined closely consist of a multitude of social and cultural roles, positions, attitudes, stories and histories. I hope in this chapter not to lose myself in the philosophical and political discussions of location. Nevertheless at the same time, I do not think I can reach clear-cut definitions of an interpreter-researcher stance; instead I explore my identity within the translation situations experienced in this study.

Bhabha (1994), Bauman (1997) and Goffman (1959) show how cultural, social and professional identities are multiple and subject to hybridisation. Since this is one of the theoretical pillars that my thesis is built on, the borderline between reflections on the social, cultural, political and ethical positions of the interpreter/translator on the one hand and the researcher on the other become dynamic and flexible. In this chapter I attempt to step out of the sphere where transparency, invisibility, neutrality, and along with these ideals, a kind of ‘dehumanization’ (Bahadir, 2004:6) represent the professional standards for researchers working with interpreters/translators. Similar reflections are said to determine the activities of both researcher and translator (Geertz, 1993). In Bahadir’s (1998) view, the interpreter is caught in the Geertzian dilemma between the ‘emic’ and the ‘etic’ perspective (Geertz, 1973). ‘Etic’ means looking from outside, without involvement into the culture to be investigated and ‘emic’ is

looking from within, as an insider. This way the interpreter steadily moves from involvement to detachment and back. Bahadir (2004) explains that this involves exploring how to observe, to comprehend, to describe, to evaluate and then to mediate as the researcher, and the informants. Bahadir (2004) talks of interpreters/translators also having to face the question of whether and how they have the capacity, right, and responsibility to observe, to comprehend, to describe, to evaluate and then to mediate as interpreter/translator, between clients, patients, migrants, doctors, lawyer, social workers, psychiatrics and so on. In a review of the translation literature, I noticed a continued repetition of the idea of neutrality and objectivity as the best way towards an ethics of the professional role of the interpreter/translator, but I hope to have moved away from this ideal and as such my reflections are based on a resistance to a one-dimensional and simplifying of the interpreter/translator role where a 'tendency to neutralize and assimilate interpreting/translating activities into a transparent totally analysable and predictable, strictly defined shape' (Bahadir, 2004:7).

Through my own experience of being an interpreter/translator not only in this investigation but also in other interpreting/translating situations of which I have been involved such as Immigration Tribunals, Local Education Authority Appeals and National Health Service provisions, I suggest that it is an illusion to expect the interpreter/translator to be as invisible as possible. Cecilia Wadensjo's (1998) studies, for example, provide an empirical basis for the impossibility for interpreters to be non-persons or even invisible, simply due to their being physically there. Bahadir (2004) argues that even when the interpreter is physically put into brackets 'by interpreting simultaneously out of a booth, a last remnant of his/her voice will remain, irremovably' (p.4). Along with the idea of invisibility, there is also the myth of complete, mutual comprehension in non-interpreter-mediated-situations (Venuti, 1995). Bahadir (2004) considers 'the desire to turn off the voices of the interpreter in apprehension that communication is corrupted and comprehension inhibited is a non-functional one' (p.4). Venuti (1995) presents the translator's dilemma as a struggle for 'emergence from the invisibility imposed by the mono-cultural bias of English' (p.67).

In various interpreting situations, particularly at immigration courts, I was often not recognised as a professional, in the same way that the lawyers, barrister or legal caseworkers were. I was not even seen as the link between the clients and the claimants and the immigrations courts, rather I was expected to be neutral, with a clear professional distance and very much invisible. On many occasions I felt like the weakest member of the courtroom working with the most vulnerable members of society, asylum claimants. I was not introduced as the intermediary between the claimant and the status determining authority. I also found that the success of applications depended largely on the success of the verbal communication process in which the

claims have to convince the authority that the definition of the Refugee Convention applies to them (Inghilleri, 2005). The legal perception of my role as the court interpreter was that of a mechanical device rendering literacy, word for word what was being said by the claimant. This approach is grounded in the belief that this would eliminate hearsay in the courtroom. Academics and scholars have, over the years deepened their understanding of inter-lingual communication and the legal profession seems unaware of these developments (Inghilleri, 2005). The courtroom experience has very much confirmed for me that the ‘verbatim requirements’ for court interpreters is a myth and should really be abandoned, instead interpreters in the court setting need to be given greater latitude and rather extending the role of the interpreter in asylum hearings. Some would go as far as to say that interpreters should be ‘legally recognised as active intermediaries between the claimant and the adjudicating body’ (Barsky, 1996:46). Barsky (1996) also proposes strategies for interpreters that would best assist asylum claimants by improving their chances of receiving a fair hearing. These strategies range from ‘interpreting with questions and clarification that are pertinent to the case’ (Barsky, 1996:46) to ‘compensating for the claimants’ errors of judgement’ (Barsky, 1996:52), to adding information on the historical, political and social situation of the claimant’s country, to finally ‘improving the narrative’ (Barsky, 1996:56). However, even though as an interpreter I did not see myself as being part of the decision-making personnel in asylum seekers cases, I am unsure as to the impact of extending my role as interpreter. Nevertheless, these experiences are grounded in the strong emphasis on ethics as part of training for interpreters and rewarding interpreters with a sense of identity and security with the profession (Inghilleri, 2005).

### ***Language and Power in Translation***

Temple (1997) has considered how the perspective of one linguistic community on another is ‘rarely neutral and the perceived status of languages is rarely equivalent’ (p.8). Such differences in power relations between languages influence the translation of meaning. As researchers the way we represent multilingual informants’ languages is influenced by the way we see the social world. Spivak (1992) recognises the power differentials between languages and between countries, whilst accepting that ‘translational hybridity may challenge fixed notions of otherness’ (p.167); she argues that this is through a process of ‘linguistic and aesthetic assimilation by western researchers’ (Spivak, 1992:23). Her *Politics of Translation* highlights the hierarchies implicit in translation for both the informants and languages concerned. Temple and Young (2004) hold the view that ‘the interaction between languages is part of the establishment and maintenance of hierarchical relationships with English, often used as the



yardstick for meaning' (p.167). Temple and Young (2004) recognise this perspective by explaining that:

Speaking for others, in any language, is always a political issue that involves the use of language to construct self and other. If researchers see themselves as active in the process then they have a responsibility for the way they represent other and their languages. When they do not speak the same language as the research informants this means that they have to question the baseline from which they make claims about them (Temple and Young, 2004:167).

In recent translation literature there has been some attention paid to how translation may reproduce prejudice (Niranjana, 1992). Niranjana (1992) suggests that translation may not only reproduce racial, gender, and political, prejudices embodied in the source text, but it may also introduce new prejudices. Niranjana (1992) shows, for example, how English translations of Indian texts during the colonial period presented a particular view of Indians as naturally inferior people; translation thus was an instrument in expressing and spreading colonialist attitudes and therefore an instrument of colonial domination and repression. Niranjana suggests that the:

Potentially repressive role of translation can be avoided by revealing and producing instability, heterogeneity and hybridity, rather than concentrating on a fixed notion of truth (Niranjana, 1992:166).

A Derridian theory of translator and translation views the ideal translator to be critical towards prevailing conceptions and to be open to otherness, including specificities embodied in the source text. This way the translator may thus avoid imposing stereotypes in his or her translation, and 'espouse rather respect for differences, complexity, and local specificity' (Derrida, 1990:23). It could be argued, however, that this aim simply reflects a contemporary Western ideal, which may not be welcomed in some cultures.

Any translation may reinforce the limitations of the original data, if cultural differences are ignored. Some translations may also reinforce unequal power relations by the implicit acceptance of the position of those who created the data, or those who will be using the translated data (Castells, 2000). Hence translations become contested, not on the grounds of cultural difference alone but because they represent manifestations of contested power relations. Castells (2000) talks about how translation from one language to another can also be considered on a continuum from the uncontested to the highly contested. However it can also be argued that all data used in social policy research and practice represents the 'taken-for-granted assumptions of beliefs and power relations and so social policy translation is always contestable' (Castells, 2000:32). Therefore a reflexive approach to translation, as suggested by

Toury (1995), can provide us with useful information in order to understand such translation processes. Paying attention to the influences and strategies involved in the process of translating and interpreting helps to provide transparency of such processes (Toury, 1995). Toury (1995) holds the view that translated texts reproduce and recreate the experience of in-betweens. Hence, the reading of a translated text becomes an encounter with the native language, with the Self, which is also an Other.

### *Concepts of Otherness in Translation*

As researchers we all have different research experiences, and I found that seeing the concept of 'border' (Temple and Edwards, 2002) a useful way of approaching the complex question of identity, perspective and who can represent others when translating and interpreting in research. Temple and Edwards (2002) spoke of how difference of race, ethnicity, gender, class and so on are gathered around borders, where the concept of 'borders' allows us to acknowledge the cultural space in which 'difference' becomes the point at which identity, knowledge constructions and contentions surface and shift around language. Edwards (1998) adds that 'difference is experienced and lived as central to identity and ideas' (p.19). By being the translator/interpreter in this investigation I have come to see the interpretation and translation of research data to be a site of 'interface between different identity and knowledge claims' (Edwards, 1998:19). There is not a simple or distinct separation between knowledge, but rather as Temple and Edwards (2002) state 'there is a multiplicity of borders and border-crossings' (p.8).

Debates on perspectives are crucial in translation research, because there is no single axis of similarity or difference on which to make decisions about who is entitled to represent whose views in the interpreting/translating worlds. Simon (1996) asserts:

Rather than reconfirming the borders which separate nations, cultures, or languages, subjective translations shows them to be blurred. It is the very economy of translation as a system of regulating differences, which has become problematic (p.165).

Spivak (1996) has argued that 'the task of the feminist translator is to consider languages as a clue to the working of gendered agency' (p.142). Identity is produced and not merely described in language (Spivak, 1996). Gender, ethnicity, and other social divisions are important aspects of both identity and language (Heller, 2000). In translating the research data, it was important to consider how I produced borders between Yemeni-British cultures and identities, which as

Temple and Young (2002) have stressed, should become the focus of the kind of scrutiny that such issues have received in translation studies. Without such debates, Temple and Young (2002) argue that it becomes difficult to justify claims that cross-cultural and multilingual research can shed light on different perspectives since we may have ignored a particular perspective, which could have enriched and challenged our own understandings. For me as the researcher, the practical questions about who does the translation, how much of the data analysis the translator/interpreter is involved in and when the language changes from that of the informants to written English are all grounded in theoretical, epistemological and ontological issues which I found challenging throughout the study. These practical decisions no doubt have consequences for how my research is produced and received. Nevertheless, no matter how complex this debate maybe, as researchers we need to bring this debate into mainstream educational discourse to ensure that it does not remain a matter of methodological dilemma.

### ***Concluding Thoughts***

Having carried out the translation in this investigation myself, I realised the importance of making the translation process visible. Ventui (1995) suggest that the translator/interpreters' decision-making process needs to be made visible in order for the reader to reflect on the interpreter/translators' position as being self-reflexive with voices of their own. Hence self-reflexivity and status positioning should not only be confined to the researcher but also to the interpreter/translator (Ventui, 1995).

To conclude, it is important to appreciate the importance of including interpreters/translators in debates on reflexivity. Song and Parker (1995) consider that language can be a significant barrier to research with people who are not like the researcher in various ways, and so to assume that there is no problem in interpreting/translating concepts across languages is to assume that there is only one baseline, and that is the researcher's own. As a multilingual researcher I have been positioned along multiple axes of belonging and not belonging throughout the research process, and as Song and Parker (1995), suggest these border locations are not fixed. As such, extending these insights to the work of interpreters/translators in a way highlights the challenging nature of current debates limited to the technical role of the interpreter/translator and their language proficiency. Finally, my own concerns in addressing issues of reflexivity in the translation of research data have been as a result of the influences of the 'reflexive turn' in social research (Geertz, 1993). Hence, I feel strongly about the need to acknowledge that we are part of the social world we study (Alzouebi and Pahl, 2006), and we also become a part of its production through research accounts. Therefore as researchers we need to reflect on the

ways in which we as individuals with social identities and particular perspectives have an impact on the interpersonal relations of fieldwork (Overing, 1987). Overing (1987) has argued that in the same way, interpreters/translators need to also reflect on their positionality, and place these perspectives and relations in their wider historical, political, economic, social and intercultural context, and importantly consider the consequences for the production of research accounts.

In this chapter I have examined the importance of translator/interpreter identity within the translation situations experienced in this investigation. I have also presented a detailed discussion of the role cultural elements play in communication from the translators' perspective. In addition I have addressed issues of methodological reflexivity in the translation of research data and have discussed at length the need to acknowledge that we are part of the social world we study, and at the same time we also become a part of its production through research accounts. The importance of reflectivity on our positionality and the importance of appreciating the presence of translator/interpreter in debates on reflexivity have also been discussed. I now move on to Chapter Seven, where I introduce the key themes used to frame the data analysis, and begin to discuss stages of and issues surrounding the design, data collection and analytic techniques used.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Encountering and Experiencing the Field

#### *Engaging with the Research*

In this chapter I discuss the stages of and issues surrounding the design of the study, and have described the particular data collection and analytic techniques used. This chapter functions as a bridge between the methodological and empirical parts of the thesis by discussing the data collection process, classroom fieldwork and life history interviews. In introducing life history interviews and classroom ethnography as specific research designs, I also consider site access, sample and temporal issues, validity and reliability. In order to structure the data analysis in as clear a manner as possible, in this chapter I will focus on introducing the emerging themes which I have engaged with in order to explore the textual practices of Yemeni women. The data analysis is spread over two chapters, Chapters Nine and Ten, however here I begin with a recap of the research tools used to collect the data and a detailed description of the analysis process.

I have used narrative analytical approaches to identify emerging themes (narrative threads) embedded within storied texts which I then used to inform the process of synthesising, ordering and articulating meaning to co-construct the womens' stories. I have used narrative inquiry as the process for this research, to enable the distinctive voices of the women to emerge from the life history interviews and from their reflections on their classroom experiences in order for their individual stories to be crafted. I used Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) concept of narrative inquiry space to cast and delve for meaning within individual women's stories, to map aspects of individual experiences and to understand the links and interplay between the personal/social, spatial and temporal factors. The themes identified below will also inform the process of mapping the informants' textual experiences:

- *Blurring the lines: Infused Hybrid Identities*
- *Literacy and Power: A Didactic Encounter*
- *Multilingual Practices: Discounted Literacies*
- *Religious Literacies: Words from Sacred Texts*
- *Digital Literacies: A New Communicative Order*
- *Spaces of Authoring: Asylum Narratives*

The process of analysis and interpretation led to the identification of the above themes within individual informant stories. Commonalities of themes were identified as running through and across the womens' narratives and represented narrative strings. These narrative strings were pulled together into six key threads in this thesis representing the collection of the womens' stories. These common threads were identified as central to the womens' narratives as shown in Chapters Nine and Ten. In Chapters Nine and Ten the six common threads are interpreted further, linked to the diversity of literacy practices and textual experiences of the informants in this study.

I began the fieldwork for the study in an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classroom as this was a good way of meeting Yemeni women in Northtown. I visited the classroom many times and weeks immersed in this field before starting the data collection. As I encountered this field, however, I began to be interested in the women, their life stories, and their literacy practices outside the institutional world of the ESOL classroom. Therefore, I re-focused my study, as can be seen from the research questions outlined in Chapter One and decided to focus instead on the women's life stories. As I entered the women's homes, and spent time hearing their life stories, I realised that these stories illuminated my research questions and enabled me to more fully delve into their literacy worlds. I realised that the women's lifeworlds and literacy practices in their social worlds were my prime focus. Therefore, the ESOL classroom in this particular study is presented through their eyes, and the data from the classroom is refracted through the stories of the women. Through this, however, I was able to make some suggestions about ESOL practice, as the women did have comments and thoughts about their experience of ESOL as opposed to their literacy lives outside the classroom. I have used the informants reflections on their classroom experiences and life history interviews to examine the ways in which literacies are linked to the women's lives, to their social worlds and to their narrative patterns. As described in Chapter Two, this thesis takes a social literacies approach, which draws heavily from the New Literacy Studies to consider social literacies in the diverse socio-cultural contexts of the women's homes and their ESOL class. In doing so, I highlight an ecological view of multilingual literacies as connecting across domains, which I have discussed in detail in the Theoretical Framework in Chapter Two. Through the six identified themes, I have engaged with the informants' narratives to explicate how literacies flow from and within their everyday social practices. I also account for power imbalances across the two sites of the multilingual home and the ESOL class. In doing so, I have explored the privileging of particular literacies and at the same time the marginalisation of others through certain social practices and contextual features. I have focused on 'instances' (Hornberger, 2001) of textual encounters and linked these to multiple identities and ideologies in tracing the

relationship between texts and literacies in multiple sites and domains. Through the analysis. I have explored a socially situated view of literacies, taking into account power relations in tracing and describing the struggles that the Yemeni women encounter in learning English and in their literacy practices being recognised. In foregrounding the women's experiences, I have endeavoured to understand the role literacy plays in the construction of social difference and social inequalities in the Yemeni community in a globalized society. Even though the two main sources of data collection are classroom fieldwork and narrative interviews, I also spent many hours (not meticulously counted), 'hanging out' in the local community, in local shops and walking the residential areas to understand the space in which the Yemeni community is established. Through my time in the community, the homes and the ESOL classroom, I have collected a wealth of information, enriched by my presence in these dynamic spaces.

The selection of informants was from a group of multilingual, female, Arabic speaking learners enrolled on a local community-based ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) programme. Eligible informants were broadly defined as female, Arabic speaking, attending the ESOL classes. This definition aimed to draw on multilingual learners from an Arabic speaking background to capture central themes which cut across a great deal of informant variation (Patton, 1990:172). I decided to focus my research on Yemeni women because they were the largest Arabic speaking community in this particular neighbourhood of Northtown and I was also working as a mentor-advocate at the same community centre, and I will go on to explain this role further in this chapter. Purposeful sampling was used to access potential informants, to deliver the information-rich cases needed to fully understand the research phenomenon (Patton, 1990:169). Neuman (2000:196) defined purposeful sampling as getting all possible cases that fit particular criteria and using a range of methods. While the extent of the sample size were constrained by available research resources and time restrictions, purposeful sampling aimed to provide a context in which thick description would be delivered (Geertz, 1973), through the probing and delving of the underlying meanings, contexts, situations and contexts of the textual experiences of Yemeni women (Glesne, 1999).

The classes are held in a community-based centre providing limited on-site childcare provision. The ESOL classroom like many other ESOL classrooms is extraordinary heterogeneous and largely made up of talk. As well as being the main medium of learning, talk is what is being learnt. ESOL classes are distinctive from literacy, numeracy and ICT classes in several ways, as the focus on talk as an end as well as means. There is a diversity of learners, who range from those with no formal education to highly qualified professionals; the experiences of the learners; many of whom are living with great uncertainty about their life in England. The classes provided opportunities for group learning, opportunities to talk, and the social communal nature

of ESOL classrooms are key factors in the learners' attendance to the classes. All these factors have implications for the learning structure and ESOL provision at the community centre. The ESOL class provided good community provision, and community-based classes can be an invaluable stepping-stone for multilingual learners. The women-only class consists of three categories of learners. Firstly, there are those who are long-term residents who were unable to access ESOL provision earlier for various reasons. Secondly, there are the relative newcomers who had come to England to join their relatives. Thirdly, there are the new arrived learners such as the refugee and asylum seeker learners. All the women attending the classes are Arabic speaking and mainly from the Yemen. Below are profiles of the informants in order to give the reader condensed information about individual informants before going on to discuss the practicalities of informant selection, data collection and research site description.

### ***Kalthum***

Kalthum is a 38 year old divorcee with two children aged 12 years and 9 years. Kalthum left Yemen and came to England to visit her grandfather 15 years ago, who had been working at the steel factories in Northtown for over 55 years ago. During her visit to England she had an arranged marriage to a distant relative who had already been living in England for some time. Five years later Kalthum went through a divorce and spent most of her time at home as a single mother with her two children. When her children were younger she had limited time to learn English but as the children got older and attended school she began to have more time to herself and was able to enrol on a local community-based ESOL programme. Kalthum has been attending the ESOL classes for 18 months. In Yemen Kalthum had attended primary and secondary school and was seen to be fortunate that she had received formal schooling, considering the education of girls in villages throughout Yemen was not a priority. Kalthum lives in a local neighbourhood and regularly meets with the other women attending the ESOL classes. She is often involved in community events and fund raising events such as the Asian Earthquake appeal. She also attends a local mosque to learn how to recite the Qu`ran on a weekly basis.

### ***Saba***

Saba is born in England to a Yemeni father and an English mother. Her father was a Yemeni migrant that had lived and worked in England for many years before marrying a local English lady. At the age of two Saba and her brother aged 4 were taken by their father back to the Yemen, in fear of them becoming too Westernised and unable to speak Arabic. Saba's mother



had no knowledge of where Saba and her brother had gone. Saba's mother spent many years searching for her children but with no luck. On her 20<sup>th</sup> birthday Saba's Yemeni stepmother told her that she had been taken from her biological mother and sent to the Yemen in order to be looked after by Yemeni grandparents. Saba is now 30 years old and has been living in Northtown for two years with her biological mother. Saba has been attending the ESOL classes and Qu'ranic classes for over a year now. She has also been teaching at a supplementary Arabic-Yemeni school for primary aged children on the weekends. Saba is not married and has no children and is now settled in England.

### *Aisha*

Aisha came to England in the autumn of 2000 with her husband and three daughters. They came to England as asylum seekers because of the political problems in Yemen due to her father-in law's prominent role in the Yemeni Socialist party. Aisha and her family have still not had a decision on their asylum case. Aisha married in her early 20's and had her children soon after. Aisha is from a wealthy middle class family and was expected to have gone to university in Yemen, but because of childcare commitments she was unable to continue her studies. She feels very negative about having not gone to university and is determined to continue her learning through the ESOL classes and later enrolling on a college access course. Aisha uses the computer she has at home regularly and spends a lot of time with her children reading and writing.

### *Noora*

Noora came to England in the summer of 1994 with her husband. Her husband was born in England and so was entitled to British citizenship and at a later stage Noora was granted citizenship. Noora has not had any children and lives with her husband in Northtown. Noora has only been attending the ESOL classes for about a year, since the classes used to be mixed-sex, which Noora was not very comfortable with. When the women-only classes opened she enrolled. Noora had not gone through a formal education system in Yemen and only began learning to read Arabic and English in Northtown. Noora is also attending Qu'ranic classes at a local Mosque in Northtown. Noora regularly sends letters and e-mails to her family in the Yemen.

The community centre in which the ESOL classes were held is based in an urban inner city neighbourhood of Northtown. The neighbourhood is one of Northtown's most culturally diverse with over 25% of residents from Black and Minority ethnic backgrounds largely African-Caribbean, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Yemeni and Somali communities (South Yorkshire Police Authority, 2006). According to the Safer Neighbourhoods Area Engagement Plan for Northtown (2006) conducted by the local Police Authority, 43% of households are in social housing with over 25% of persons in the neighbourhood aged under 15 years old. The report also states that the neighbourhood has the highest recorded level of drug and violent crime in the city of Northtown. In my role as a mentor advocate at the community centre, I spent some time teaching the women and offering help with homework, particularly in the areas of English. I was often called upon to help with various community events such as helping to organise Eid parties, helping the women complete forms, and sometimes making phone calls to utility companies on behalf of the women. I am reminded of Baynham's (2001) experience as a mediator of literacy, helping ESOL learners complete forms, while he worked as an adult educator in London during the 1970s and 80s. On a number of occasions I even contacted the Home Office to chase existing asylum applications. Therefore, my roles in the Yemeni community and the ESOL classes were established before this research project began, which helped me gain genuine access to the textual practices of the women. While I am not of Yemeni origin I am still seen as having a legitimate role in the Yemeni community through being an Arabic speaker, of Middle Eastern background, and importantly through my work as a mentor-advocate. I was also able to enter the women's homes for reasons apart from performing interviews, as the women would invite me to participate in wedding celebrations, birth of new babies, and even at times the circumcision of newborn baby boys! These established links with the Yemeni community encouraged the women to participate in this study, and since trust had been built (they noted on several occasions that they wanted to help me with my work because I had been helpful in their learning) they felt that I had become a member of the community. Having known the women for over a year at this stage I built a level of trust and shared experience from which a more egalitarian research process could easily be developed. I learned that the women were eager to share their stories to build new knowledge of their experiences in shaping literate identities. Having identified potential informants with the help of the class tutor, a meeting was arranged for all four informants, the tutor and myself to discuss the nature of the research. I found this to be extremely valuable as the discussions were in Arabic and the informants were given the opportunity to ask questions and discuss issues that may arise. The informants also talked about being pleased that they did not need to communicate through an interpreter! I explained my role as the researcher in detail and talked about my background, (as they all seemed very curious) and discussed the possible contributions this investigation could make to multilingual learners, policy makers, and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other

Languages) educators. Issues of confidentiality and anonymity were also discussed in detail, with the opportunity for a question and answer session. I was clear about who would be listening to the taped recording of the interviews and accessing the research data. The selection of pseudonyms to disguise, anonymise and protect the identity of the informants was also discussed, giving the informants the chance to choose their own pseudonym, which they seemed excited about. The informants' right to change comment or contribute to the analysis and presentations of the data were also discussed. We discussed possible venues for the interviews and all four informants felt that their homes were most convenient and comfortable place for them to be interviewed. The interview process and schedule of interviews were arrived at through the cooperation and negotiations among the informants and the researcher. My contact telephone number was given to the informants for further queries. In addition, once the stories were transcribed I shared the transcriptions with the informants to ensure authenticity of their individual voice in the analysis. Interviews conducted as part of this study were not seen as a set of questions and answers, but part of a larger, recursive narrative about Yemeni women's textual practices and experiences. An interview schedule was developed to guide discussions with the women. The schedule included a set of flexible prompt questions which delved more deeply into aspects of the research questions, as outlined in Chapter One. Interviews were arranged with the women and held predominantly in their homes. Discussions were taped, with full transcripts for each informant. Interviews enabled stories to emerge from the constant interplay and conversational turn taking of speaker and listener (Godfellow, 1998). These conversations provided a detailed understanding of the textual experiences of multilingual women. I also kept a researcher journal to highlight impressions, views, and issues of potential bias at different stages in the research process. The journaling created reflective field notes including non-verbal interpretations and impressions from interviews with individual informant. These notes assisted in forming and re-forming the informants' stories. Field notes also provided a record of the highs and lows of the research process and my anxieties, from a researcher perspective and as a post-graduate student. The journaling process undertaken by myself as researcher aimed to capture separate views and feelings outside of the data collection process.

I conducted a total of sixteen interviews (four interviews per informant) and of eight classroom visits over an 18month period. The fieldwork stretched my time as a sole researcher, due to the more intensive nature of interviews with individual informants and time taken to translate the data. The benefits of aligning research techniques to maximise informant involvement and depth of discussion with informants, however, outweighed the additional time and cost associated with this more intensive approach. The life history interviews each lasted between forty-five minutes and up to two hours. For the purpose of data analysis, saturation was attained

after three or four interviews with each informant. The interview questions were general in nature, since as Rubin and Rubin (1995) explain, 'people gain confidence to talk when they realize much of what will be asked is about their own life' (p.131). Many researchers, particularly qualitative researchers, elect to use interviews, because interviews have the potential to validate the knowledge of ordinary people, especially ordinary women who are liable to be omitted from many research projects (Benmayor, 1991; Coates, 1996; Reinhartz, 1992). Anderson and Jack (1991) suggest that the 'interview is a critical tool for developing new frameworks and theories based on women's lives and women's formulations' (p.14). Since narrative research is orchestrated around storytelling, researchers ordinarily use a conversational style of interviewing (Coates, 1996; Riessman, 1993). In attempting to engage with the informants in relatively informal and friendly ways, I would sometimes listen to other stories the informants told along the way, and allow for stories and discussions that were not necessarily relevant (Coates, 1996). During the interviews I found it very important not to 'hijack' the conversation or foreclose the informants' chosen direction and focus (Coates, 1996).

Data analysis commenced during the data collection phase and continued through to completion of the writing phase. The process of analysis and interpretation, or the drawing of meaning from analysed data, involved a synthesising and mining for meaning within the collected data and elaboration of this experience through ongoing interpretative writing and discussions between researcher and informants (Goodfellow, 1998). Analytical framing was used to lift meaning making to the next interpretive state, and involved revisiting, re-interpreting and finding deeper meaning in the texts, then re-presenting the data to identify themes (narrative threads) and diversity. The process of analysis reflected the multiple iterations of analysis within the analytical framework developed by Anfara, Brown and Mangione (2002). This framework for coding and analysis, aimed to bring order, structure and interpretation to —'the mass of collected data' (Marshall and Rossman, 1999:150). Interpretive texts or summaries were prepared, following the first interview with individual informants. These interpretive texts brought together the key issues raised by each informant. The interpretive texts represented the outcome of the initial storying with informants through the interview. These texts were then reviewed and revised through further discussion and storying with informants. Data for each informant were grouped into individual meaning units identified from their interview transcript (Tesch, 1990; Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner and Steinmetz, 1991). These meaning units were usually based on an individual paragraph or paragraphs of text, which were then grouped under a heading or category. Quotes from the informants were used as headings for data groupings identified in the first stage analysis of each individual informant's story. This analytical framing was undertaken during a 3-4 month period, with my own field notes also providing additional insights. A record of this data grouping process was also kept to enable further sorting and

reworking in the next stages of interpretation (Krueger, 2000). The transcripts and interpretive texts prepared from initial interviews with the informants were presented to each informant and discussed in a follow-up interview. These interviews engaged informants in further discussion of the main issues outlined in the interpretive text. This was undertaken to ensure all priorities were captured and to search for deeper meaning behind informants' words. Based on these discussions and new insights provided through researcher field notes (restorying), initial interpretive texts were revised, with a follow-up interview held with informants where agreed, using the revised interpretive text to guide discussions. Through this process informants added their own words, changed the emphasis of their story, expanded specific aspects or meanings and added new developments. As researcher I was reviewing data groupings or meaning units and key narrative strings to enable further delving and clarification of themes. This restorying process provided added depth to the interpretive text and ensured informant verification of the initial aspects of the interpretation. A copy of the final interpretive text prepared from this storying and restorying process was provided to all informants for verification as part of the research process. This verification of the text by informants was seen as critical to ensuring verisimilitude of the research findings. As researcher, I prepared a mind map of each informant's interpretive text/story, to reflect the key themes emerging from individual stories and to help illustrate the backwards/forwards and inwards/outwards aspects of the narrative inquiry space. This mind map also helped to illustrate the interconnections between different themes and to develop a more holistic view of the women's collective textual experiences.

All the interviews were conducted in Arabic, which were tape-recorded and written transcripts were created immediately after each interview. The Arabic transcripts were later transcribed into English and I colour coded the areas that I wished to explore further in relation to the research questions. I gradually went through the transcripts and each time used different coloured ink to identify my developing and changing foci. I began to identify and tentatively categorise the relevance of literacy practices in the emergence of the women's identities. As a life history method is a process of co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and informant(s), it is often individualistic and personal, involving 'intensely idiosyncratic personal dynamics' (Sikes et al, 1996:43). The transcripts were presented back to the informants to identify recurring individual and collective themes. As I discussed my interpretations of the emerging data with the women, I found that those subsequent discussions were very useful in clarifying my understanding of their textual experiences. As I moved into the next stage of the research process I began to develop an enhanced understanding of the informants' textual experiences and was able to begin to pursue in more detail and depth aspects of their accounts.

A social theory of literacy as contextualised in time and space has also guided my use of life history research methods in this study. These methods have enabled me to examine, in detail, the role of literacies in the lives of Yemeni women and in the histories and traditions of which the women are a part. In this investigation, I have drawn upon an ethnographic approach because it focuses on a more holistic phenomenon where the main purpose is to represent the women's perspectives of literacy. These approaches have helped to provide detailed, descriptive knowledge of the women's literacies, which needs to be understood in specific contexts. The narrative process 'seeks to collect data to describe lives' (Marshall and Rossman, 1995:86). In using narrative methods, I worked hard to actively locate the voice of the informant in a particular time, place and setting (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990) and so it is important to assume my voice, and not to pretend that I can 'give voice' to the other, even though I found the data in a very material way to be the women's voices.

### ***Refining and Reworking the Data***

I entered the narrative field without much fieldwork formal training, and perhaps if I had been formally trained as a narrative researcher, the framework and structure would have been less complicated. However working alone, translating, interpreting, reading, writing and thinking about literacies in the lives of my informants led me to make the connections that enabled a constructive, creative and considered analysis of the narratives. Recounting the steps I took to conduct this investigation may assist others engaged in similar studies. My first encounter with narrative as a research method came as I read Wolcott on '*Ethnography and Validity in Qualitative Research*' (1988), however other influences came from my desire to make sense of the informants' experiences through stories. These stories are not works of art; rather they reflect a kind of story, which has enabled me to study how 'humans make meanings of the experiences by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves' (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990:14). The narrative process was a messy, chaotic enterprise which involved a constant re-visiting of the data, both when in the field and afterwards (Bloommaert, 2003 and Bourdieu, 2000). The process became in part a 'shared narrative construction and reconstruction through the inquiry' (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990:5). Bruner also writes:

A life as led is inseparable from a life a story-or- a life is not 'how it was' but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold. Certain basic formal properties of the life do not change easily. (Bruner, 1987:137).

In the emerging field of narrative analysis, various approaches have been used to analyse narratives. Some researchers, focus on linguistic elements in stories, others such as Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992) emphasize the psychological aspects of narratives. Riessman (1993) suggested that we see narratives as 'windows into the informant's self-representations' (p.23). In this study I examined six key themes deemed critical in relation to the informants' and how they characterized the role of literacy in their lives and how they represented their own identities with regards to literacy. I examined the data as it was collected, and then arranged the data into 'manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what's important and what is to be learned' (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992:153). As the research progressed, the data were analysed inductively by means of categories being derived from the data. In other words, as the data were examined, I looked for particular recurrent themes and perspectives (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). I also asked the informants to identify significant events, memories, and relationships (starting school/learning to read/write etc) in relation to their literacy experiences. As a result thematic descriptions were identified. I then divided these descriptions into different themes. This involved critically reflecting on what the women had said about their literacy and identity practices. These exercises have helped yield rich information about the lives of the women and have helped focus the data on their textual practices in the context of other happenings. I feel this method was comprehensive and have adapted it for the purposes of this research. The analysis process was two-tiered. In the first phase, the narratives were analysed to identify common patterns and themes in the informants' stories. Polking (1995) describes stories as, 'storied narratives differ from a mere listing of a sequence of events because they are emplotted accounts with a beginning, a middle, and an ending' (p.26). Once themes were identified, each theme was coded separately to produce a category. Polking (1995) termed this process a 'paradigmatic analysis of narratives, in which an examination of the data attempts to locate particulars as instances of general notions or concepts' (p.26). During the analysis categories were inductively produced and coded. The categories were then compared across the four sets of data (from four informants) to locate common themes. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note that it is important to 'utilize the natural functions of narrative as operational conditions or formats during analysis phases' (p.12). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) go on to explain that if multiple forms of data analysis are used it is more likely that the findings and 'narratives of research will be grounded and, as a result, more likely to be valid' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:28). Furthermore, because narratives are negotiated exercises, the data were collected in order to create 'textual and cognitive bridges between the original tale and the resulting theory' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:25).

Like many other novice researchers, I was initially overwhelmed by the sheer volume of paper work that the investigation had generated. Deciding what to include in the data analysis and what to leave out was not an easy task. My initial impulse was to try to include everything. In the beginning, still heavily influenced by post-positivist notions about research that had been nurtured through my experiences as an undergraduate student, I envisioned myself as a kind of 'container into which the women were pouring out their stories' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:65). I felt it was my job to preserve and report everything exactly as I had received it. To leave something out, I felt, would be dishonest. However, as my understanding of narrative research grew, and my thinking became more consistent with what Denzin and Lincoln (2000) have called the 'sixth moment of qualitative research', I realised that this 'container' metaphor was unrealistic. The women's experiences were much too fluid and changing for me to ever capture them in this way. No matter how hard I tried, they were always incomplete; such is the nature of narrative research (Coles and Knowles, 2001). During the data analysis, there were times when I struggled to best understand the data and to select the most appropriate meaning or meanings from the narratives; and at times I would put the data aside and read literature related to the themes that were slowly beginning to emerge. This reading allowed me to decide on a number of closely linked recurrent themes. With time, through the interview transcripts, recurrent themes began to emerge. I wanted to include as much of this data as possible into the investigation, and so decided to put the women's stories into the main body of the thesis. Organising, analysing, and discovering theoretical meanings from storied data was challenging due to the nature of narrative research because, like qualitative inquiry itself, it is 'iterative and evolutionary' (Coles, 1989:72). The stories represented in the data were also highly eclectic and varied, and they left me with questions concerning how best to work with, preserve, and respect their content and meaning. However I soon realised that such difficulties lie in the fact that storied data are not simply ideas strung together, nor do they necessarily represent universal formats and concepts (Bruner, 1990). Instead, narratives contain unique individual worldviews and perceptions that are negotiated through the act of storytelling itself (Atkinson, 1995; Bruner, 1990; Coles 1989). Coles (1989) argues that the narratives I have referred to as data are 'illustrative linguistically, of perceived human experience' (p.17), such that their meaning is dependent on context, time, place of telling, and audience response, as well as the teller's viewpoint, coupled with the researcher's findings (Coles, 1989).



## *Getting close from A Far: Classroom Ethnography*

The ethnographic approach that I have adopted for the purpose of the classroom fieldwork aims at whole phenomena; in the case of literacy, the phenomenon I am investigating is the cultural practices involving textual experiences. In using classroom fieldnotes combined with narrative interviews, I explore the informants' literacy practices. It is more accurate that I refer to my approach as having an ethnographic perspective (Bloome and Green, 1985; Green and Bloome, 1997) than carrying out a full-blown ethnography. I decided to adopt an ethnographic approach because ethnography has potential as a learning resource, it encourages reflection and allows the researcher to theorise about literacy and critical engagement with questions about what literacy is, what the social practices of literacy are, and how certain communities use literacy. Using Norman Denzin's (1997) construction of ethnography as a technique, I have promoted the discussion of the classroom as a situated cultural site. It is a site that places the researcher as both insider/outsider and in an intense social negotiation of attitudes, beliefs, values, and practices. The nature of this kind of research:

Shifts the focus of research from the perspective of the ethnographer as an outsider to a discovery of the insider's point of view. Ethnography is not merely an objective description of people and their behaviour from the observer's viewpoint. It is a systematic attempt to discover the knowledge a group of people have learned and are using to organize their behaviour. (Spradley and McCurdy, 1997:9).

The classroom is also a cultural space that is socially negotiated and socially constructed (Wolcott, 1999:79). Approaching this space as socially constructed, 'fully constituted in relation to human agency and activity' may offer a way of overcoming the methodological and conceptual tensions between 'unhooking identity and culture from space and constructing them as space bound' (Caftanzoglou, 2001:22). The classroom becomes a space for tracking these movements. I also decided to use the classroom because it offers rich opportunity for ethnographic reflections and analysis for me as a researcher. The work of Peter McLaren (1993, 1998) calls our attention to the classroom as a 'cultural space' and ethnography offers a journey into the personal experiences and reflections of researchers within that space (Hammersley, 1990). This investigation has offered further significance of ethnographic approaches and storytelling by grounding them in 'thick description' and critical reflection of experiences which ethnography is. Carter (1993) argues that story has become more than a 'rhetorical device for expressing sentiments about teachers or learners, it is now rather, a central focus for conducting research in the field' (Carter, 1993:5). As a researcher doing classroom fieldwork I am uniquely situated to engage in writing ethnographies as a means of both documenting my own experience

and providing insights to others (Smith, 1999). What I am advocating here is an ethnographic perspective. Green and Bloome (1997) make a conceptual distinction, concerning ethnography between doing ethnography, and adopting an ethnographic perspective. Doing ethnography involved 'the framing, conceptualizing, conducting, interpreting, writing and reporting associated with a broad, in-depth and long-term study of a social and cultural group, meeting the criteria of doing ethnography as framed within a discipline or field' (p.183). With adopting an ethnographic perspective, Green and Bloome (1997:183) refer to the possibility of taking 'a more focused approach (i.e. do less than a comprehensive ethnography) to study particular aspects of everyday life and cultural practice of a social group. Central to an ethnographic perspective is the use of theories of culture and inquiry practices derived from anthropology or sociology to guide the research' (p.183).

Crary (1999:55) argues that 'although grounded in aesthetics, it, similar to critical ethnography, is committed to the social critical processes of meaning making and illuminating experience through descriptive language'. Denzin (1997) states:

A theory of writing is also a theory of interpretive work. Theory, writing, and ethnography are inseparable material practices. Together they create the conditions that locate the social inside the text. Hence, those who write culture also write theory. Also those who write theory write culture. There is a need for a reflexive form of writing that turns ethnographic and theoretical texts back 'onto each other' (p.24).

In contrast to quantitative approaches, I adopted an ethnographic approach to classroom fieldwork because it emphasizes the socio-cultural nature of teaching and learning processes in the ESOL classroom, incorporates informants' perspectives on their behavior, and offers a holistic analysis sensitive to levels of context in which interactions and classrooms are situated (Hornberger and Corson, 1997:51). Through the classroom fieldwork I focused on an in-class interaction of the informants that forced me to re-vision the nature of literacy and how my position as an Arabic speaking female researcher demanded certain accountability on the part of informants. The informants negotiated the content of classroom experience in relation to their own lives and my material presence in the classroom. As researchers in the classroom it is important that we realize our own subjective position in relation to the informants, the practitioners and to other learners (Hammersley, 1990). Making this realization has placed me both on the inside of the outside, and the outside of the inside of my own research experience (Henderson, 1995). Henderson (1995) offered a description, which captures the positionality of the researcher engaging in an ethnographic experience. She said:

Forever on the periphery of the possible, the border, the boundary, and the frame are always at issue and their location and status inevitably raises the problematic of inside and outside and how to distinguish one from the other (Henderson, 1995:2).

Another important contribution classroom fieldwork can make to educational research is the analysis of institutional context of schooling, together with societal pressures on teachers and learners. Classroom fieldwork in this study has also allowed me to examine societal and institutional pressures that affect life in ESOL classrooms. The holistic approach of classroom fieldwork helps to integrate research on literacy and identity. Heath's (1983) extensive ethnography on issues of reading and writing in black and white working-class childrens' homes and communities in the Carolinas has shown the importance of understanding learners' prior experiences with language and literacy. Such an understanding is critical to effective teaching of literacy in the ESOL setting. Classroom ethnography can also assist ESOL practitioners to anticipate their learners' needs in relations to their prior literacy experiences. Classroom ethnographic studies can help ESOL practitioners to understand the expectations that their learners bring with them, their understanding of what ESOL classroom life entails and for appropriate styles of interaction.

Classroom ethnography not only serves ESOL practice by applying research results to practice, but ethnographic techniques of classroom fieldwork can be applied to classroom practitioner supervision and feedback, whether in initial practitioner training or in staff development (Preston, 1981). Ethnographic fieldwork takes a holistic perspective of classroom interaction and because the ethnographic-fieldworker seeks to achieve an insider's understanding of interactions, ethnographic techniques can be used to provide helpful feedback to classroom practitioners about what is going on in the classroom, including interactions that are outside practitioners notice or teacher behaviours outside the teacher's conscious awareness. Hymes (1981) refers to this kind of feedback to practitioners as 'ethnographic monitoring' of the classroom. I also think that classroom practitioners can make a difference in their own classrooms, by learning to use ethnographic methods with their learners. Classroom ethnography also helps to increase practitioners' observational skills, helping them to gain new awareness of classroom organisation, teaching and learning strategies and interactional patterns in their own classrooms. This fieldwork can become a basis for ESOL practitioners to reflect on their own classroom practice. In this study, I have found classroom ethnographic approaches to classroom fieldwork to be holistic, with richly detailed descriptions and analyses of ESOL classroom interactions.

### ***Concluding Thoughts***

In summary, the process of analysis and interpretation outlined in this Chapter led to the identification of meaning units within individual stories. Commonalities of meaning units were identified as running through and across informants' narratives and represented narrative strings. These narrative strings were pulled together into six key threads in this thesis representing the collective stories of informants and reflecting their textual experience. These common threads were identified as central to the collective threads that have been outlined in this chapter. In Chapter Nine and Ten the common threads are interpreted further, linked to the diversity of literacy practices and textual experiences in the contexts of this study (reflecting the personal and social, temporal and locational aspects of the narrative inquiry space). In the next chapter I present the informants' stories. These stories, both in Arabic and in English have been included to enable the reader to become more familiar with the lives of individual multilingual women and to more fully understand the findings presented in Chapters Ten and Eleven. Seen in this light, this chapter functions as a bridge between the methodological and empirical parts of the thesis. Having discussed the stages of and issues surrounding the design of the research study, and having also described the particular data collection and analytic techniques used, I now turn in Chapter Eight to present the informants' co-constructed stories in English and Arabic.

### *Kalthum's Story- 'From the Margins to the Centre'.*

*I came to the England almost 15 years ago, and I'll never forget that day. The weather was very cold, foggy and misty and I felt let down. I heard that England was beautiful, lots of green land, and many friendly and wealthy people. I found it difficult to believe people were rich, everybody dressed the same, and they all wore jeans the men and women; everybody dressed the same. I remember it clearly in my mind how I waited for my cousins to get the rest of our luggage while I sat on one of the suitcases trying to absorb all what was around me. It was the first time I had ever left Yemen and the first time I saw men and women hugging and kissing in public. I would look this way and look that way; sometimes I would stand up and then sit down. Everybody was rushing, and time was passing by so quickly that I hadn't realised, even though I had been there for some time. I wanted to stay there all day. I love watching people, it may sound strange but I learn a lot this way. In Yemen time seemed to pass by very slowly and here, well I cannot believe it's already been 15 years. On leaving the airport I noticed the signs on the walls, above lifts, dangling from the ceilings, they were in many different languages and I couldn't believe it when I saw the one in Arabic. I remember stopping and reading it over and over again, I even began reading it out 'ك ر للجما ضعة خاعة بضا اي يك لاد جد يو هل' 'If you have anything to declare queue to the left and declare it to the customs officer'. I was impressed, it was personal and I felt at home in some funny way. The language I spoke was seen to be so important that it was on the walls and doors of Heathrow airport! Everybody could see it. I began to like the place already! When I was in Yemen, I was told people in England were very rich, but when the automatic doors opened at the arrivals lounge, and we stepped outside I noticed an old man sat on the floor with a cardboard sign begging. It seemed wrong, this wasn't the England I had heard about. I couldn't see much sitting in the back seat of my grandfather's minibus driving down the motorway on our way to Northtown, I was looking for the signs and words in Arabic, I didn't see anymore signs.*

*It took me many years to adapt to settling in England, and I went through a period where I was severely depressed, longing for home. I spent many years unsure whether my heart was in Yemen or here in Northtown. I thinking I was trying to create a space where I felt safe, where I felt I wasn't leaving my family behind and was convincing myself that I was only here temporarily. You know, it's interesting because men like my grandfather who came to England over fifty years ago, came with the intention of working for a few years, saving some money and eventually going back home. But they all ended up staying, they said that they found it difficult to pull themselves away from the communities they helped build in Northtown, from the friends they made, from the neighbourhoods they live in, from the cafes they go to drink Arabic mint tea, from the community centres where they learn English, and from the country they helped rebuild after the world wars. This is home now for most of them. For me, I think it is also home. I still miss Yemen, but when I walk in our neighbourhoods and I see those signs I*

ة و البقلا اء شر يمكنك يمكنك . When I hear Arabic being spoken down the streets, the music, the armour of Yemeni kubs (Yemeni Bread), I feel at home. You go to the local oriental supermarket stores and buys things; they give you a printed receipt in Arabic. I spend time going through the list, reading item at a time, I begin to recall Yemen.

At the age of 21 I married a distant relative who had been in England for few years. This was an arranged marriage if I can call it that. At that age I wasn't really sure what to expect from married life. I was certain I couldn't cook and when I met my husband then for a brief fifteen-minute chat, which was going to be an opportunity for me to ask questions. It turned out that this fifteen minute brief talk was to decide whether I should marry this man or not. He asked many question; most of which were answered by my grandfather, but the one I really wanted to answer was whether I could cook. Before I had a chance to explain myself, my granddad jumped in with 'كل لا ا نحب ل جالرا نحن' - Of course what do you think!! We men love our food'. I felt like I was already cheating the man, why couldn't I tell him that I couldn't cook? And instead maybe that we would learn to cook together and for a few days of the week we would have take-outs and one evening a week to eat at a restaurant. 'NOOO' they all shouted!! 'Marry him first and later deal with the cooking'. I remember spending weeks on end reading Arabic cookbooks trying to understand how to make at least a few dishes. I needed to be able to cook, because you know what it's like in the Yemeni culture, it's expected that following the wedding ceremony, the bride and groom invite close relatives for a meal. This is an opportunity for the bride to impress the groom's family and assure them that their son will be well looked after. This was a struggle. I read pages and pages of the cookbook, it seemed so difficult, and I couldn't even pronounce the ingredients in Arabic. I just couldn't relate to it, the cookbook seemed like a brilliant idea at the time, but yet distant. It was too technical, I couldn't understand it, I had no previous experience to bring to it, because I'd never cooked before, I felt powerless. I made it to the meal and the food was okay. Our marriage lasted for five years and in that time I had two children. We divorced soon after I had my daughter. My marriage was not the typical sort of talked about arranged marriage, where people talk of abuse and violence, no freedom, and strict Islamic clothing. We divorced because we genuinely did not love each other even after five years and we agreed to part. But in Islamic law we were not officially divorced until I was given a ق طلاق ر و - divorce certificate. I spent many years fighting for this important document that would prove to the rest of the world that I was free, that I was able to move on. I don't think this document made any practical difference but it was the emotional, mental imprisonment of knowing that even on paper I was still tied to a man I didn't love and have never loved. The Islamic court in London heard my case and my ex-husband was finally talked into giving me this important document. This is a part of my life that will always carry with me because of the importance put on a document that I needed so badly to feel free, my permit to

*leave prison. I've never really talked about my experiences this way, even though it's quite natural particularly in the Arab culture to tell stories. We live for stories, we breathe stories, my great, great grandmother, told stories, my grandfather even tells us stories about his life. This is the way we learn, it's a part of who we are, storytellers! But to tell your story you have to be able to trust the person listening and not feel like you have to be careful with what you say because the listener may get offended or upset. You can't just tell your story to anybody; do you know what I mean? There needs to be a kind of cultural understanding, we're both women, we both speak Arabic; we both have children...that sort of thing. I just wouldn't feel comfortable otherwise. Plus I don't need an interpreter, and I think if I needed one I wouldn't have probably told my story. Why? Well trust is important and it's difficult because many of the interpreters go home and share the information with their families and then the whole community end up knowing who you are. Plus you have to have an education and most of the interpreters learn to interpret on the job, but you're from the university and it's different.*

*What happens at the ESOL class? Well at the class I live a different life to the one I live at home. The experiences I have had in life, my country of origin, the language I speak, the faith I associate myself with, the cultural background I'm from, all of these kinds of things feel like they're taken away from me when at the class. Some of the women you've met are refugees, others are Asylum Seekers still waiting for their immigration status to be decided and so they live a life of uncertainty, they worry day in and day out. They may be deported today, or tomorrow, or they may even be sent to other parts of England. I can't imagine living life with this uncertainty; I was very fortunate to have my family here. But when we come to the class, we are expected to forget about everything and talk about the assessment we have to prepare for next Tuesday, because if you don't do well then you cannot move up to level three. Who cares about moving up to level three, when you don't know whether you will still be in the country the following day? To be fair to the teachers they do ask and they say that they understand that it must be difficult to live this way, but that there is nothing that they can do, and they have a set amount of time to get through the modules and to pass you need to get through all of them. A new law also came into place a year ago which meant that even if you have been granted indefinite leave to remain in the U.K (which means you can stay in the United Kingdom for as long as you want), to be naturalised as a British citizen you have to sit a citizenship exam and pass a certain level of English. The Home Office sent some of the women a book that they can use to help them prepare for the exam. The teacher sometimes goes through this and helps the women prepare. I find it really difficult to understand that in order for people to be integrated into British society they have to sit an Exam which asks whether they know how to queue at the Post Office, how to ask a Policeman directions politely. I feel very strongly about this document. I also feel that there is more to British life than queuing at the post office. Why do they not tell us about how to get a good education, a*

*good career, and good schools for our children? What about our culture, where does this fit in to the exam? do we not bring anything to the life we live here?, which many of us consider 'home'. That's why I think that the classes should be a sort of a bridge between the education system and the community, a space for us to share our experiences and for our cultures to come together, but there was never enough time for this to happen. The teachers are under a lot of pressure to try and cover all the topics and so they cannot help with making phone calls for the other women, or helping to fill forms or calling their children's schools. I sometimes help. The networks we have built in the class have given us constant support, as we all continue to struggle to put our ideas and thoughts into written English. My English is not so good, and sometimes I confuse matters even more, but I try. I call their children's school and talk to the teachers and head teachers and interpret what the schools are saying. I know what it was like. When my children were young I would go to the school and want to see and talk to somebody about my daughter, but because my English wasn't very good it was difficult. As a parent I felt powerless, I didn't know the system, it was not easy to enter the school, you had to understand the culture to be able to make sure that your children achieved. Even if I took an interpreter with me, I felt that the school would immediately assume that there was a problem. My aim was to understand the curriculum, and look at how I could help my children. Instead they gave me lots of government documents and told me to read them and if I had any questions to come back. I couldn't even understand any of them; some parts were about policy, research and other government agencies. I kind of developed my own way of coping. There was a need for me to understand, a need for information, so I began looking for certain keywords, recurrent words and began to develop my own ways for coping with the difficulties of being unable to understand the document. Over time I noticed that my relationship with reading and writing had changed, and it's not stood still, and it continues to change because I came to England, and I experienced a change of culture, a change of life, and a new community. I have learnt that the 'technical' way of documents, which I was given by my children's schools, are quite similar to the ones that I experience at the class; very distant, bare, divorced from who I am. I am not sure if I am making much sense, I know I keep talking, but I always struggle with ideas that are in the centre when I seem to be so far out in the periphery. I just think that the reading and writing that the women and I have been taught to do in the class are more suited to the centre not to me at the periphery, and maybe that's why I don't move up to level three or five or whatever. I've learnt that to pass the modules, I have to view reading and writing as something technical, something I can de-code, something I break-up to be able to learn, and something that stays the same, something that doesn't change. I don't know how to explain it, even in Arabic I cannot think of the words.*

*I still love to read and write. But I love stories. Stories have helped a lot in life. Stories that I can understand, the ones that help me get through my struggles, and I know we all struggle in some way. As a Yemeni woman I struggle in lots of ways. I know I don't have to worry about being deported or sent to another city,*



*so I am fortunate in some ways, but I struggle in many other ways. I struggle, because I still don't have the standard of English I should, even though I have been here for fifteen years. But I have spent most of this time being at home, and bringing the children up and so I never had the opportunity to go and learn until I was divorced, but that is a big struggle of its own. My son is now 12 years old and my daughter is 9, and like I was saying before I still have to fight for their rights at school. You know what I mean. I don't mean literally go and fight. Even though sometimes I think this might be easier!! So I struggle with trying to make sure that my children are not losing out. There is too much mess in schools. It's similar to our class, where my experiences always feel like they are in the periphery, and it's the same with schools, I always feel like my children are at the margins. I know it may sound negative and I should be grateful but it's like we should be grateful and stay at the margins. You know and I know that this is all to do with racism. Even though many Yemeni people have been in Northtown for over fifty years, they have spent their entire lives working as labourers for England, helping to rebuild the county after the first and second world war, when all the infrastructure was damaged. Working long hours in the steel factories, leaving their families and children behind in Yemen for a small amount of money. My grandfather was one of these men. He spent years here, he left my grandmother for over fifteen years and when he went back to Yemen he couldn't even recognise his own children. But even men like my grandfather still face racism. I sometimes ask what more do you need to do to be accepted, isn't more than fifty years in the steel factories enough? My grandfather can speak English, a kind of broken industrial English, but cannot read or write. He cannot even sign his own name properly. In those days they did not have enough time to go to English classes, he learnt to speak English on the job. He even used to interpret for his friends who came to join him in the steel factories from Yemen. I know there are other factors that have also kept me and many other women like me out, institutional racism, the hijab I wear (Islamic head cover) particularly after September 11th terror attacks, not having the 'proper English skills', and not fitting in. So I continue to struggle I will still work hard not to necessarily prove myself to anybody but to make sure that I have autonomy over my own learning, that I progress and that I bring my own experiences to any reading and writing I do, which I think we all do naturally. But it's important that our teachers, those in the centre, and those who design the curriculum, those who decide who is successful and who isn't, that they recognise this. A starting point might be to try and understand our experiences as learners, our experiences outside the classroom, about our backgrounds, and I know it's impossible to know everything about everybody but to at least begin to invite our experiences into the classroom.*

*What is included when talk about literacy? Well I am not sure exactly but I defiantly think it's more than reading and writing. When I look at my own experiences of reading, I look beyond the written words. I think that in every culture reading and writing have a different meaning and a different way of being used. I think that reading and writing are just as important as each other, but*

*it's the way we are involved with them that's more important, because for women like me this relationship is so deep in culture, in experiences of multilingualism, of displacement, and of migration.*

*Even though I love books and reading, I was never really a great fan of the media or newspapers. This changed after 9/11. It was impossible to just walk past shop windows and not just stop and look at the pictures and the headlines. I began to recognise keywords that wouldn't have meant a great deal to me previous to 9/11. I began to have an interest in learning how to pronounce certain word and key phrase that were on the news all the time. For example; War on Terror, eliminate, destroy, extremists, terrorists, suicide bombers, groups, networks, change, crisis, occupation, United Nations, peace, ceasefire, bombardments, Palestinian intifadah, West Bank, Gaza, Iraq, weapons of mass destruction, Afghanistan, nuclear power, and Iran. I started to practice spelling these words, and would ask my children to spell check them for me. I suppose I felt I could understand the words because it was all to do with the Middle East, and occupation, and as a Yemeni woman I felt it was important for me to know what was happening around the world. I began to read newspapers and would highlight keywords and recurrent phrases. I didn't even know where Iran was on the world map, but because I was wanted to learn I began to have a quest for information about the region. I think these sorts of reading and writing have in some ways made me more political. It's interesting because all of these things have taken place outside the class but I'm going to try to take the spelling test back to the class and see what kind of response I get. Whether a dialogue around these keywords maybe seen as something separate from the 'normal' learning that I am involved in the class, and whether it will be given any value at all, I am not sure.*

*Since we're taking about reading, can I show you a recent letter I received from my mother, who is still living in Yemen? How's your Arabic reading? Are you quite a fast reader? Anyway we can read it together, because you might be able to help. She has also sent a few photographs (We read letter together). Yes of course I write to my mother, I value a hand written letter. I feel it helps to create a personal space that a typed letter doesn't. I can share my thoughts, feelings, and fears through letters. I read them, time and time again. But I don't spend along time saying to myself this is reading and writing', I just get on, read and write; it's part of life. I pay the bills, I read the children's school letters, help with their homework, fill in forms, and write letters. A few months ago the women and I designed and produced a poster to help raise money for the Asian Earthquake Appeal. We were very proud, because it attracted a lot of attention from the community and we managed to raise over £500. Experiences like this make me adamant to shout 'I am literate' even though I attend these classes and an outsider may see me as being 'illiterate'. I have lots of stories like this to tell and I have never really had the opportunity to tell them or even think about my experiences as 'real reading' or 'real writing'. Because I came to England as young woman, I was not concerned about losing my mother tongue, or being unable to*

*communicate in Arabic after a few years. I was more concerned about being able to speak English rather than trying to retain my home language. Because I believe that if a person can sustain their spoken mother tongue fluently until the age of sixteen, I think they've cracked it; they will be bilingual or multilingual in some cases for life. I have seen many family members with young children, whose parents speak very little English, but their children also speak very little Arabic and it's interesting to understand how they communicate. I learnt that the parents speak to the children in Arabic, which the children understand, but when the children respond, they respond in English because they find it much easier to speak English. At least that's what my children say. My explain that if they were to respond in Arabic, it would be difficult, because they think in English, which means that they would have to translate their thoughts into Arabic (which do not always make sense, because thoughts have a cultural connotation tied to them, and to translate them would mean having to translate culture). This worries me. Because like any other parent in my situation ideally I would like my children to grow-up being bilingual but this seems to be more and more difficult. My children say that when they dream it's in English, and until they begin to dream in Arabic they will then become bilingual. I am not just worried because they're at risk of losing their mother tongue, but along with the mother tongue there are lots of other factors, such as cultural identity, religious beliefs, cultural values and so on that are at risk of being lost. It's these that I worry about. I want my children to know their roots, to understand their culture, to understand the accomplishments people from our sort of backgrounds have made, but at the same time to be integrated into British society. It is possible to be both at the same time, I don't think you have to compromise who you are to be accepted... it just wouldn't feel right. For this reason I decided to enrol my children at an evening Arabic school. It is quite intensive study, and they attend at the school between 5pm and 8pm every evening. I am not concerned about learning the technical skills of the Arabic language, I'm more interested in them mixing with other children who speak Arabic and practicing their spoken Arabic. I want them to be able to practice everyday sort of things in Arabic. I want them to be proud of their mother tongue, I want them to have access to the knowledge that is out there and I know that being 'literate' is a key. I also think that their identities are always shifting, changing and being reshaped. As bilingual communities our experiences are made up of the way we talk, the way we act, the way we think, our values, and so reading and writing a real part of all of these things and of our existence, so I don't think you can divorce these from identities.*

*Anyway, like I said when we first met, we all struggle and I know I'll continue to struggle as long as there are barriers. At the classes I'll struggle with being at the margins and not having my experiences included into the learning and my children; they will probably still be at the margins in their school. But I work hard, and I can only do my best, and as long as I teach my children the value of reading and writing from the margins our experiences may be accepted.*

## قصة كلثوم- من البعد الى المركز

جئت الى بريطانيا قبل خمسة عشر سنة، ولن انسى ذلك اليوم الذي وصلت فيه، كان الجو بارد جدا وضبابي وشعرت بالحبطة، قبل هذا سمعت ان بريطانيا بلد جميل و اخضر والناس صديقه وثرية، كان من الصعب علي تصديق ان الناس اغنياء، كل الناس هنا ترتدي نفس اللباس (الجينز) نساء ورجال. اذكر جيدا عندما كان اولاد عمي يجمعوا الحقايب وانا اراقب كل ما يجري حوالي في المطار. كانت اول مرة اغادر فيها اليمن و فيها شاهدت الرجال والنساء يتبادلون القبلات في مكان عام. نظرت في كل الاتجاهات والناس على عجلة والوقت يمر بسرعة حتى صننت اني كنت هنا من قبل. اردت ان اراقب الناس طيلة اليوم لاني تعلمت الكثير من هذا. الوقت في اليمن يمر ببطيء ولا اصدق اني قضيت خمسة عشرة سنة في بريطانيا. ونحن نغادر المطار لاحظت يافطات بلغات مختلفة، اندشت عندما رايت يافطة عربية لقد قرعتها عدة مرات. مكتوب عليها اذا كنت تحمل بضاعة تخضع للجمرك فمرور من هنا و اذا لم تكن فمن اتجاه اخر، شعرت اني في بلدي. احسست ان لغتي مهمه ولهذا كتبت في مطار هيثرو، عندها احببت البلد. في اليمن قيل لي ان البريطانيون اغنياء ولكن عندما غادرنا المطار، فتح باب الكهرباءي شاهدت رجل عجوز جالس على الارض معه يافطة تدل على الشحنة، لم اصدق ان هذه بريطانيا. جلست في المقعد الخلفي في سيارة جدي لم استطع رؤية الكثير، كنت ابحث عن كلمة عربية طوال الطريق و لكن لم اجد واحدة.

اخذت مني سنوات عديدة لاستقر في بريطانيا، مرت فترات كنت محبطة ومشتاقة للوطن. قضيت عدة سنوات لم اكن متأكدة اين قلبي في اليمن ام في شقيلد. فكرت ان اوجد مكان لي وذلك اينما اجد الامان، وفيه لا اشعر بالبعد عن اهلي. كنت اقع نفسي بانني هنا لوقت مؤقت. انه من المهم معرفة ان رجال مثل جدي قد جاء قبل خمسين سنة لغرض العمل لبضعة سنين لجمع المال وبالتالي العودة. ولكن انتهوا بالبقاء وقالوا انه كان من الصعب ترك مدينة شقيلد التي ساهموا في بنائها وترك اصدقاء وجيران وقهاوي عربية وترك مراكز تعلموا فيها الانجليزية ومكان قد ساعدوا في بنائه بعد الحرب العالمية. انها بلد لمعظم هؤلاء الناس واعقد انها بلدي ايضا. مازلت اشتاق لليمن ولكن عندما امر بمحلات مجاورة ارى علامة تقول يمكنك شراء بقلاوة من هنا. عندما اسمع كلام عربي ستحصلني على وصل مطبوع بالعربية. عندما اقراء الاشياء المكتوبة اشعر اني في بلادي. اذا اشتريت من متجر عربي ستحصلني على وصل مطبوع بالعربية. عندما اقراء الاشياء المكتوبة بـالرؤية التي هو رمزها في بلادي. في ذلك العمر لم اكن اعرف ما هو المتوقع من الزواج، كنت متأكدة انه ليس بمقوري الطهو. قابلت زوجي لمدة خمس عشرة دقيقة قبل الزواج وكانت هذه فرصه لاساله اسالة ولكن في تلك الدقائق كان علي ان اقرر بالقول او بالرفض. لقد سألني اسالة كثيرة وكانت معظم الاجوبة يرد عليها جدي. كنت اود ان اجواب علي سؤال واحد فيما لو كنت قادره علي الطهو، قيل ان اقول ما في نفسي سيقني جدي في الاجابة وقال نحن الرجال نحب الاكل، شعرت بانني اغش

هذا الرجل من اولها. لماذا لم اقل له باني لست قادره على الطهو او قد نتساعد في تعلم الطبخ مع بعض او نخرج مرة في الاسبوع لتناول في مطعم. عادة الناس تقول... لا...تروحيه او لا ثم احسني الطهو. انكر اسابيع قضيتها اقرء كتب طهو بالبريية اردت ان اكون قادره على طهو بعض الاكلات، لانه جرت العادة في المجتمع اليمني بعد حفل الزفاف يدعوا العرسان الاقارب الى وليمه. هذه فرصه للزوج ليثبت لاهله ان زوجه ماهره في الطهو وان ابنهم سوف يعتنى به احد. لقد عانيت قراءة صفحات عديدة، تبدو صعبه حتى اني لم استطع تهجئت بعض الكلمات بالمرية لم استطع ان اتقبلها، كان فكرة كتاب الطهو جيدة ولكنها بعيدة عن الفهم، كانت عمليا صعبة ولم تكن لدي خبرة سابقة شعرت بضعف. لقد صنعت الاكل في ذلك اليوم، وكان مقبول. استمر زواجنا خمس سنوات انجبت طفلين. طلقت بعد ما رزقت بالطفلة الثانية. لم يكن زواجنا من النوع الذي تتكلم به الناس عن الاعتدات او العنف او الحريه او ملابس اسلامية بحتة. انفصلنا لاننا لم نحب بعضنا حتى بعد خمس سنوات من الزواج. في الشريعة الاسلامية لا اعتبر مطلقة الا بعد الحصول على ورقة الطلاق، لقد عانيت عدة سنوات لاحصل عليها لايت للناس اني حرة واستطيع ان اوصل دربي. لا اعتقد ان ورقة الطلاق قد غيرت اي شيء عملي و لكن مغربا وذهنيا (انني لست مرتبطة برجل ما احببته ابد). المحكمة الاسلامية في لندن كانت على علم بالقضية واخيرا اعطى زوجي هذه الوثيقة المهمة. انها جزء من حياتي احتاجها بشدة لكي اشعر بالحرية، وهي انن للخروج من سجن. لم اتحدث عن ماضي بالطريقة هذه من قبل رغم انه من طبيعة ثقافتنا العربية ان نحكي القصص. نحن نميش للقصص و نتفس القصص، ان جدة جدتي و جدي يرون لنا قصص عن حياتهم، بهذه الطريقة نتعلم وهذه الوسيلة تعتبر جزء من ثقافتنا.

لكن لتحكي قصتك لشخص ما، يجب عليك ان تتقي فيه حتى لا تكوني منتقاة في كلامك، حتى لا تشعري ذلك المستمع بلحباط او بالمظايقة. لذلك لا يجب ان تروي قصتك لاي شخص. تعرفي ما اعني، لا بد من توافق في الثقافات بين المتكلم والمستمع فمثلا هنا انا و انت نسوه و نحن نتكلم العربية ولدنيا اطفال.....ومن هذا القبيل. وعلى عكس هذا لن ارتاح في الحديث اليك. بالاضافة اني لا احتاج الى مترجم ولو احتجت لما حدثتك بقصتي.لاني لا اتق بالمترجم الذي سيحدث اسرته وبالتالي سيعرف كل الناس عن قصتي. ايضا يجب ان تكوني مثقفة والمترجم غير متعلم الا مما يسمعه، بينما انت تتعلمين في الجامعة.

حدثني ما يحصل في دروس ESOL ؟ اني اعيش في الفصل بطريقة مختلفة عما هي في البيت. خبراتي في الحياة وفي بلدي ولعتي و ديني وثقافتي اشعر بان كل ذلك يسلب مني اثناء الدرس في هذا المعهد. بعض النسوة في المركز لاجنات والبعض ما زال ينتظر قرار اللجوء فهم يعيشون عيشة غير واضحة. يقولون في كل يوم فمن الممكن ان يطلب منهم المغادره (اليوم او الغد) او ان يرسلوا الى اجزاء مختلفة من بريطانيا. لا استطيع ان اعيش عيشة كهذه. انها عيشه غير مستقرة. اني محنوضه ان اهلي كانوا مقمين من قبل. في داخل الفصل من المتوقع منك ان تتركي كل ما هو خارج عن

موضوع الدرس خارج الدرس، وان تركزي على موضوع الدرس و ان نحضر لدرس الثلاثاء القادم واذا لم تحضري فلن ترفعي للمستوى الثالث. من سيكون مهتما بالمستوى الثالث اذا كنت غير متاكده من بقاؤك في هذا البلد ليوم غدا. صحيح ان المعلمات يسالن عن ذلك، و يقلن انه من الصعب جدا المساعدة، واجبهم ان ينهوا المنهاج كله.

ظهر قانون جديد العام الماضي ينص على ان لو حصلتي على اقامة دائمة لا بد من امتحان وطني، وامتحان في مستوى اللغة، قبل الحصول على الجنسية. مكتب الهجرة ارسل كتب الي بعض النسوة للتحضير للامتحان، المعلمه ساعدت احيانا في عملية التحضير. يصعب علي ان افهم انه من اجل ان تتخرط في هذا المجتمع لا بد ان يكون من خلال امتحان، يسال في هذا الامتحان كيف تصطفين في صف عند البريد او ان تسال رجل الامن بادب. اشعر بان هناك اشياء اكثر في الحياة البريطانية اكثر من الاصطفا في طابور البريد. لماذا لا يعلمونا كيفية تحصيلي على تعليم عالي، ووضيفه جيدة، ومدارس جيدة لاطفالنا؟ ماذا عن ثقافتنا، اين هي من الامتحان. الانجلب اشياء كثيرة، لهذه الحياة التي نعيشها هنا؟ والتي يعتبرها كثير منا وطن لهم. ولهذا اعتقد ان هذه الدروس يجب ان تكون جسر بين المجتمع والنظام التعليمي. مكان يجمع ثقافات وخبرات مختلفة مع بعض. ولكن لم يكن هناك وقت كافي لذلك في هذه الدروس. المدرسات من واجبهن تغطية مواضيع كثيرة، بالتالي لا يوجد وقت لهم لمساعدة النساء في اجراء مكالمة هاتفية او تعبئة طلب ما. انا اساعد بعض الاحيان. لقد شكلت النساء شبكة فيما بينهن وهذه الشبكة تدعم بعضنا البعض في اشياء كثيرة. لاننا في صعوبة مستمرة في التعبير عن افكارنا بالكتابة بلانجليزية. لغتي الانجليزية ليس جيدة كثيرا، ولكن احاول المساعدة الممكنه، فمثلا اتكلم مع معلمات ومع المدراء مدارس والمترجمين لانقل ما يريد الامهات قوله.

عندما كان اولادي صغار، كنت احب ان اتكلم لاحد في المدرسة لاعرف عن تحصيل ابنتي في المدرسة، ولكن لم تكن لغتي جيدة انذاك ولذلك كان صعب علي متابعة ذلك. كام لابنتي شعرت بضعف انذاك. لم اعرف النظام، لم اعرف كيف ادخل مدرسة، عليك ان تفهمي الثقافة لتتاكدي من تحصيل اطفالك في المدرسة. واذا اتيت بمترجم الي المدرسة ستفهم الادارة بان هناك مشكلة، كنت اود فهم المنهاج المدرسي حتى اساعد اطفالي، اعطتني المدرسة اوراق حكومية كثيرة عندما سالتها عن المنهاج التدريسي، وقالت لي اذا كان لديك سؤال فارجعي الينا. لم افهم اي منها بعضها يتعلق بسياسات مدرسية واخر بابحاث و مكاتب حكومية، لقد طورت نفسي في التأقلم مع هذا، كنت بحاجة لفهم و جمع معلومات لهذا بداعت التركيز على مفاتيح الكلمات والمتكررات وطورت في نفسي طريقة خاصة لفهم هذه المعطلات. مع مرور الوقت لاحظت ان علاقتي مع القراءة و الكتابة قد تغيرت وما زالت في تغير دائم لاني اتيت الي بريطانيا وانا امارس تغيرات في الثقافة والحياة في مجتمع جديد. لقد تعلمت طريقة لفهم الوثائق (الوثائق التي اعطتنيها المدرسة) وهي مشابهة للتي تعلمتها في الفصل. ان هذه الطريقة بعيده وصعب التأقلم معها وهي منفصله عن ما هو انا فيه (ذو ثقافة مختلفة). لست متاكده اذا كان كلامي يعطي معنى قوي. اني دائما اتكلم و دائما اعاني من الافكار المركزية والتي لا تناسب شخصي. اعتقد ان

طريقة الكتابة والقراءة التي تعلمناها في الفصل لا تناسب شخصي ولهذا السبب لا اترفع للصف التالي (ذو مستوى ثلاثة او خمسة) او غير ذلك. لقد تعلمت انه من اجل ان تتجح في المادة يجب ان تكون تكتيكيه في القراءة و الكتابة، يجب ان تستخدم طريقة التفكير و التجزئة و احيانا لا تغيري شىء في محتوى الكلام وذلك من اجل فهم المادة. لا اعرف شرح ذلك حتى بالعربية.

مازلت احب القراءة و الكتابة والقصص. القصص قد ساعدتني في الحياة وفهمها سانديني في معضلات كثيرة. اني كامرأة يمنية اعاني الكثير. اعرف اني لا اقلق على ان يطلب مني ان اغادر الى مدينة اخرى ولهذا محظوظه بطريقة ما. ولكن اعاني لانني لست على المستوى المتوقع في اللغة حتى ولو امضيت خمسة عشر سنة هنا. امضيت معظم هذا الوقت في البيت اربي و اعنتي باولادي ولم تحن لي الفرصة للتعلم الا بعدما طلقت من زوجي، والطلاق معاناة بحد ذاتها. ابني عمره اثني عشر سنة وابنتي تسع سنوات، كما قلت لاحقا اعاني من اجل حقوقهم المدرسية. تعرفي ما اعنيه، احيانا تكون المعاناة اكثر من هذا ولكن المهم ان اتأكد انهم لا يتركوا شىء هام في تعليمهم اليومي. هناك مشاكل كثيرة في المدارس، وهي مشابهة للتي في فصل الدراسي والتي يكون شعوري عنها ضعيف. انا اشعر دائما كما يشعر اولادي انهم على الهامش، اعرف ان ذلك سيء، وانه علينا ان نكون شاكرين وممنونين وان نبقى على الهوامش. انا وانت نعرف ان هذا بسبب التمييز العنصري. حتى كثير من اليمنيين الذين امضوا خمسين سنة في مدينة شفليد، لقد امضوا كل عمرهم يعملون كعمال قد ساعدوا في اعادة بناء البنية التحتية للبلد بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية، في الوقت التي كانت مدمرة، اشتغلوا في مصانع الحديد ومصانع كثيرة تاركين اولادهم وعائلاتهم في اليمن من اجل اجر بسيط، جدي كان واحد منهم، امضى سنوات هنا وترك جدي لمدة خمسة عشر سنة وعندما عاد الى اليمن لم يميز اولاده، وان هناك رجال كثيرين مثل جدي ما زالوا يواجهون التمييز العنصري؟. احيانا اسال ماذا يجب ان تفعل لان تقبل في هذا المجتمع، اليس خمسين سنة في مصانع الحديد كافيته لذلك؟ جدي يتكلم الانجليزية بمستوى عمال المصانع ولكنه لا يستطيع القراءة او الكتابة ولا يستطيع توقيع اسمه بطريقة صحيحة، في ايامهم لم يكن هناك وقت كافي لحضور دروس التعليم، تعلم الكلام من مكان العمل، كان احيانا يترجم لاناس قد جاؤا من اليمن للعمل في مصانع الحديد. اعرف ان هناك عوامل قد ابعدتني وابعدت نسوة مثلي، فمثلا العنصرية، الحجاب خاصة، هجمات الحادي عشر، وعدم القدرة على التحدث بالانجليزية لهنهارسلهاسقلرية في عدالمهواتنفا ونلسببمتمل في جالمليتمتع لاثبت نفسي ل احد ولكن لارسم طريق تعليمي بذاتي لاتطور للامام، وان ادخل خبراتي في اي قراءة و كتابة امر بها، اعتقد كلنا نعمل ذلك طبيعيا. المهم ان يعرف بهذا المعلمات وايضيا راسموا المنهاج التدريسية. تكون البداية هنا في فهم خبراتنا كمتعلمات خبراتنا خارج الفصل و عن خلفيتنا وكيف ندخل هذا في قراءتنا وكتابتنا، و اعتقد انه من السهل معرفة كل شىء عن معظم الناس، وذلك من خلال الاستماع لنا و بان يسمح لنا بالاتيان بخبرتنا الى داخل الفص لتتحدث فيها.

دعيني اسالك، ماذا يتضمن عندما نتكلم عن العلم؟ لست متأكد بالذقة ولكن بالتأكيد انها اكثر من القراءة والكتابة ، بالنسبة لي ففي القراءة انظر الى اكثر مما هو مكتوب ، في اي ثقافة ما القراءة والكتابة لها معنى مختلف وهي مستخدمة بطرق مختلفة ايضا، ان القراءة والكتابة مهمتان ولكن الالم هي الطريقة التي ندمج فيهما. بالنسبة لي وللنساء هنا فان هذه العلاقة متعمقة في الثقافة ومتأثرة فيها وكوني انسان مهاجر يتكلم بلغتين.

احب الكتب و القراءة، لم اكن مهتمه بوسائل الاعلام وهذا تغير بعد الحادي عشر من سبتمبر. كنت امر بمحلات ولا انظر او اقرأ عنوين الصحف. بدأت بمعرفة كلمات لم اعرفها قبل هذا التاريخ(الحادي عشر) و بدأت الاهتمام بمعرفة وتهجئة الكلمات التي على الصحف ، فمثلا الحرب على الالهاب، ابادة، دمار، تطرف، ارهاب، الانتحارين، مجموعات، شبكات، تغير، ازمة، احتلال، الامم المتحدة، سلام، وقف اطلاق نار، اقتحام، الانتفاضة الفلسطينية، الضفة الغربية، غزة، العراق، اسلحة دمار شامل، افغانستان، قوة نووية، و ايران. بدأت بممارسة املاء هذه الكلمات واسال اولادي احينا. استطعت ان افهم هذه المصطلحات لانها تتعلق بالشرق الاوسط والاحتلال وكامراءة من اليمن انه من المهم ان اعرف ما يجري حول العالم. بدأت قراءة اخبار الصحف اركز فيها على مفاتيح الكلمات والمتكررات، لم اعرف اين تقع ايران على الخريطة ولكن عندما اردت ان اتعلم كنت اسال عن المناطق، ان هذه الممارسة جعلت مني نوعا ما امرأة سياسية. هذا جدير بالاهتمام لاني تعلمته خارج الفصل ، سوف اجلب هذه المصطلحات الى الفصل وارى ما هو الرد عليها. اما ان تكون شىء غير طبيعي للتعلم، او ان تعطى المعلمة درجة من الاهتمام، لست متأكد.

ونحن نتكلم عن القراءة دعيني اريك رسالة من امي من اليمن. كيف قرأتك بالعربية؟ اهي سريعة؟ على اي حال نستطيع ان نقراها مع بعض وقد تساعدني في ذلك . هنا بعض الصور المرفقة، سارد عليها بالطبع، انني استطيت الكتابة والتي تخلق مجال جميل في نفس الشخص، في الكتابة اشارك افكاري ومشاعري وخوفي. اقرأ ما اكتب مرات عديدة، ولا اقضي وقت طويل لامييز بين القراءة والكتابة ولكن استمر فيهما، انها الحياة ادفع فواتير و اقرأ الرسائل المدرسية، واساعد اولادي في الواجبات المدرسية واملئ استمارات و اكتب رسائل. قبل عدة اسابيع قمت انا وامراءة بجمع تبرعات للمتضررين من الزلزال الارضي في اسيا، كنا فخورين بجلب الانتباه وجمع مبلغ خمس مائة جنية. خبرات مثل هذه جعلتني اشعر بانني متفقه حتى ولو انني ابدو خارج الفصل غير متفقه. عندي قصص كثيرة من هذا القبيل ولكن لم تكن هناك فرصة للحديث عنها ولم افكر في الحديث عن خبرتي كقراءة و كاتبة حقيقية.

لانني جاءت الى بريطانيا في عمر بالغ لم اكن لاخاف على لغة الام حتى ولو بعد سنوات عديدة، كنت مهتمه بان اتكلم الانجليزية اكثر من العربية، اعتقد انه اذا اتقن شخص ما لغة الام حتى عمر السادسة عشر فانه سيصبح يتحدث بلغتين او اكثر. اني اعرف عوائل فيها الالباء يتكلمون القليل بالانجليزية بينما الاولاد يتكلمون القليل من العربية، اتعجب كيف يجري الحديث بين الطرفين. اعلم ان الالباء يتكلمون بالعربية ويفهمها اطفالهم ولكن يرد عليهم الاولاد بالانجليزية لانها اسهل



عليهم. هذا ما اعترف فيه الاطفال. اعتقد ان ردوا باللغة بالعربية سيكون صعب عليهم، لانهم يفكروا بالانجليزية وبالتالي عليهم ان يترجموا افكارهم الى العربية والتي لن تكون لها معنى في اكثر الاحيان وذلك لان الافكار متعلقة بالثقافة وترجمة ذلك يعني ترجمة الثقافة.

ان تبادل الحديث بين الاباء والاولاد يلقى لاني كاي من الاباء احب او لادي ان يكونا متحدثين بلغتين ولكن يبدو هذا اصعب. اطفالي يحملون باللبل باللغة الانجليزية، اعتقد عندما يحلوا احلامهم باللغة العربية عندها سيصبحوا من المتحدثين بلغتين. اني قلته على فقدان لغة الام وفقدان اشياء اخرى مثل الهوية الثقافية والاعتقادات الدينية والقيمة الثقافية وغيرها. كل ذلك في خطر الضياع. وهذا يلقىني. اود او لادي ان يتعلوا بجزورهم ويفهموا ثقافتهم ويفهموا الانجازات التي قام بها اناس من جنسهم وبنفس الوقت ان يندمجوا في المجتمع البريطاني. انه من الممكن ان يحصل ذلك، لا اعتقد انه عليك ان تخسري من شخصك لتقبلي في هذا المجتمع...والا... لن اشعر بالراحة. لهذا السبب سجلت او لادي في المدرسة العربية المسائية ، فيها الدراسة مكثفة تبدء من الخامسة الى الثامنة من مساء كل يوم. لا اركز على المهارات اللغوية العربية ولكن على الاختلاط بالاطفال العرب وان يمارسوا لغتهم ويمارسوا كل شيء عربي. اريدهم ان يفتخروا بلغتهم الام ، اريدهم ان يملكو وسائل لمعرفة ما يحدث في بلادهم. اعتقد ان هوياتهم في تغير دائم، كمجتمع متحدث بلغتين فان خبراتهم جاءت من الكلام(المسموع و المتكلم به) ومن التفاعل و التفكير في المجتمع ومن قيمهم. وايضا القراءة و الكتابة جزء من كل هذه الاشياء. لا اظن ان احد يستطيع ان يفصل بين هذه الاشياء وبين الهويات.

على اي حال كما قلت لاحقا كنا نعانى وسنستمر بالمعاناة ما دام هناك حواجز، في الفصل الدراسي اعاني لاني على الهامش، وان خبراتي ليست جزء من تعليمي وكذلك ايضا خبرات اطفالي ليست جزء من تعليمهم اليومي المدرسي وهذا بالتالي سيقفهم على الهامش في مدرستهم. لقد عملت بجدية وما علي الا الافضل وساواصل تعليم او لادي القراءة و الكتابة من منطلق خبراتنا وهذا هو المقبول.

### *Saba's Story- 'In and out of Class'*

I came to England four years ago from a small village on the outskirts of Aden, the capital city of Yemen. My brother and I were born in England but we were taken back to Yemen by our father as young children because he was worried about bringing us up in England, being unable to speak Arabic and becoming Westernised; he was also afraid that our mother would take us away from him. He basically kidnapped us from our mother, I was about 2 years old and my brother was about 4 years old. She knew that our father had taken us back to Yemen, but she had no knowledge of where we were, or who were living with. Initially we stayed with one of our aunts, and then when our father re-married we lived with our step mum. I spent most of my childhood not really knowing that I had an English mother, or that I was born in England. I knew I was different in comparison to the other children; I had blond hair and green eyes, and I had a much lighter skin complexion compared to most of my relatives and friends. When I asked about why my brother and I looked so different to our relatives, I was told that my great grandmother was light skinned and we must be just like her. I struggled to accept this explanation but there was no one else I could ask, no one else who would tell me the truth. So I spent my teenage years in conflict over my own identity and who I really was. It was only on my 20<sup>th</sup> birthday that my stepmother could see that people were beginning to talk; my frustration was beginning to build up at people whispering every time I came into a room, and at people pointing at me. She held my hand and took me into a room and sat me down. She started by explaining that everybody wanted the best for my brother and me and that they wanted to protect us. She then went on to explain that she was not our biological mother and that when our father was a young man he had to immigrate to England to support his parents. He spent many years working away at the steel works and needed someone to look after him. So he moved in with an English lady, with whom he had two children. She went on to explain that he didn't really love her and that he had no intention of staying with her, nevertheless he wanted the best for us so we were taken back to Yemen!

I spent the next few years of my life more angry than I had been before, angry because I was a mistake, angry because I had been taken away from my mother, angry because I had been lied to, angry because I had lived a fake life, angry because I didn't know who I was. I am now 30 years old and I still have a lot of anger inside me. But over the years I have come to terms with these experiences and even though I still feel angry I have had to try to move on which has not been easy. Along with being told that

my mother was English and living in England, I was told that I would be entitled to British citizenship, which meant that it was possible for me to go to England to find my biological mother. I decided to leave Yemen and immigrate to England.

When we were living in Yemen we were living in a small village and there was no school in the village. So I didn't get an opportunity to attend school and it's strange because I am half English and I can't even speak English! So when I came to England it was even more bizarre, because there I am light skinned, with green eyes, and dressed in traditional Yemeni clothing with henna patterns on my hands, it didn't all go together! I eventually met my biological mother, and to me she could have just been another person walking in the street and I would have walked past her and not even known who she was, she probably wouldn't have known who I was. It is really difficult to talk about the experience of meeting a parent for the first time, the emotions and anxiety that I went through; it was a strange feeling altogether. The hardest part was trying to communicate with my mother, she couldn't speak Arabic and I couldn't speak English, she just kept wiping the tears away from my face. A year on and we still don't fully understand each other, we use hand gestures, photographs, pictures, and numbers to try and tell our stories to each other. I have been living with my mother now for two years, and living with her has really helped to improve my English. She seems keener on me learning English, than her trying to learn Arabic! But I suppose it's more important that I learn English because I need to be able to manage on my own, to be independent rather than taking my mother everywhere with me as an interpreter.

Since I've become more settled here in England, I feel that I can begin to concentrate on my own learning more, and so I decided to enrol at the ESOL classes. Even though I was involved in my own sort of learning at home, I didn't really feel confident until I started attending the ESOL classes and began to understand more about what was expected when it came to the proper sort of learning. Since coming to England, I've also started attending Arabic classes at the same centre where I go for the English classes, and within a few months I was able to read and write Arabic, I can even send text messages in Arabic, but I have not mastered the English ones yet!! At home I use Arabic for various reading and writing exercises, particular during Ramadan when I read the Quran, and read the Arabic calendar in order to use the exact times for the prayers and for breaking the fast which is not as easy as people think. It's not an

ordinary calendar it's the lunar moon calendar in Arabic its called السنة الهجرية . So I use this calendar quite a lot particularly for religious and cultural celebrations.

Like most of the women, I attend the class everyday Monday to Friday from 10 am to 12 pm. The class has become like a small family, we are all Arabic speaking and from different areas of Yemen. We sometimes get into heated debates and discussions about the way Yemen is governed and about how its people are oppressed through poverty and exploitation. We end up arguing about the civil war, which lasted for almost 10 years; and having had a major impact on the economy in addition to the younger generations of Yemenis who are still living with the after math of the war. Some of the older women in the class who don't have much English are very political in their views of worldwide issues. I was surprised to find that most of the women were fully aware of what was happening around the world in particular with war and politics, and many of them had not even been through an education system as such, but they still seemed well informed of issues of discrimination, of prejudice, of racism and even sexism.

For the duration of the class we are expected to try and cover as much of the curriculum as possible, but on most occasions we don't because we tend to divert to the more interesting things that we really want to learn about like going to university, learning how to drive, buying a car, buying a house, and so on. Nowadays our learning is centred on topics that help asylum seekers, refugees and newly arrived people settle in England. This is okay for a few sessions, and once we've been taught how to communicate with a bus driver, a traffic warden, and a policeman; then we need to really move on. But we end up going round in circles and since I enrolled on the programme it seems I've been taught the same things time and time again. I think that most of what I'm taught is just a surface level kind of learning more of basic skills. I'm not taught how to think critically, how to negotiate professionally; I'm not taught how to communicate with those higher up in society. I don't know how to interact with different social institutions, in dealing with professionals, in communicating, in acting and understanding. I don't have access to the knowledge controlled by those at the top, and I feel that it's these skills that I would like to develop at the class. Instead I've spent five mornings a week over the last few years being taught how to communicate to the bus driver and postman!! I'm not saying that what I have been learning is not important, but I need something that's more challenging and it seems that even if I move up into the higher group, it's the same sort of thing but a little bit more difficult. I don't feel that I have the standard of social skills to be fully involved in British society and I feel that's what I should be learning. I don't need to learn about the survival

English because I feel that survival English comes automatically, it comes out of desperation, out of a need to be able to speak the minimum. I don't need the minimum anymore, I need to know how to converse with the professionals, how to further my knowledge and understanding, I need to know to develop myself intellectually, and the ethos of the ESOL curriculum I found to be pulling me back. I know it all sounds very negative, and I also have learnt a great deal from the classes and I've made some lifetime friends, but I also feel that intellectually I haven't progressed. I write a lot of these thoughts and feelings in a diary I have been keeping, and when I look back six months I still have the same feelings and I often feel sad and embarrassed about saying it but even the ESOL class which is supposed to be a place where we grow academically, a place where we can develop our intellectual ability and develop our social skills; I feel that we are marginalized, discriminated against, and often side tracked.

Our class is very much multicultural, where all of us as learners bring a variety of cultural perspectives and experiences, which I think, need to be welcomed. The realities that I live in my community need to be a reality for the class. It's about listening to and appreciating what we bring from our homes and from our communities to the classroom. Because the learning that I am involved in has mainly been developed within a social network in my own community, hence I feel that it must also be learned within that community. And so I would hope that the ESOL class becomes more than a place where I'm taught the technical skills, which are required for using the written language, but a place where I feel safe bringing in those experiences. Our learning cannot be measured in terms of absolute level of skills, but with communicative practices with which we engage in various areas of our life. It's important that our teachers recognise this and invite our own communicative practices into the classroom.

When I reflect on what reading and writing mean to me, I think it's lots of things, it's about the way I speak, the way I think, the values I bring to reading and writing, and the way I'm engaged with a text. We all practice reading and writing in different ways because we are from different social groups and from different backgrounds. Since I began learning to read and write Arabic, I have kept a sort of a diary where I let my thoughts and feeling run wild. I know it's not something people in my culture do, you know that many people in our culture don't keep their own private diaries or if they do, they don't tend to tell people about them. The reason I've kept my own diary is

because of the experiences I have had with not knowing who my real mother was, I spent years not being able to speak to any one, I couldn't write as such, so I ended up keeping all the anger and frustration inside. But since I've had this diary I feel like I have someone else to talk to, someone else to tell, somewhere safe where I can share my thoughts and feelings. My spelling isn't very good, and I know I get lots of words wrong and make lots of mistakes, but nobody will know, because nobody else reads it apart from me. I can go back as far as last year and tell you what I did on any particular day, and how I felt. I use the diary now to reflect on how things have changed, and how I've changed as a person. So reading the diary has become a sort of reflection space for me, it's helped me grow, and it has also given me confidence in what I believe.

The way I read will no doubt differ to the way my friends read, because for me it's not just about decoding a sentence, it's about what I bring to that sentence, it's about where my experiences are from, and how they've changed. The skills that I gained were acquired at home, through communicating with my mother, through my everyday perplexities and curiosities of my own life. They have not been acquired through formal learning, by sitting at a desk, but by being in my community, by being a local, by networking, and by being in control of my own learning. This way I feel that my learning, and my own way of reading and writing are valued. It's these sorts of thoughts and experiences that I write about in my diary, it's where I tell my stories. I would like to show you extracts from my diary but I'm going to hide the names of the people I've mentioned, because it wouldn't be fair, and I want to read you something I wrote about my journey to England...

My decision to come to England was an easy decision, but my settlement here in England, the place I was born, the place I lost connections with is blurred, and now that I have settled here this space has been extended rather than replaced, because nothing can replace my home country. I do however at times feel displaced, more probably because I spent most of my life not knowing who my real mother was, but also because I have left the only place I knew and have begun a new life somewhere far away from what used to be home. We all have our own stories to tell about our journey to England, and most of the time I feel that our stories are silenced, because other stories are more important, other stories may fit in more comfortably with what stories are about. My story doesn't really fit in anywhere, I'm not sure if I fit in anywhere either! I have a Yemeni father, an English mother, I only began learning to speak

English as an adult, I have blond hair, I'm light skinned and have green eyes so I didn't fit in with the local villagers in Yemen, and here in England I wear traditional Yemeni clothing, and often walk in my neighbourhood with my English mother who speaks no Arabic and we end up using hand gestures to communicate to each other; so I don't know where I fit in? I tend to spend a lot of time thinking about my own identity and whom I associate myself with. Writing in my diary has helped me air these thoughts; I can shout them out without being worried about anybody else hearing them. I've recently started teaching Arabic at a supplementary school, which is run on the weekends for local Yemeni children. It's only basic Arabic that I teach, but I enjoy working with young children, I love seeing the smiles on their faces and I've always wanted children of my own. I don't really follow the set curriculum as such, because I think a lot of what's in the curriculum is heavily focused on the grammatical aspects of learning the Arabic language. I decided to move away from this type of teaching to a more diverse, a more practical, a more of a social skills sort of teaching. I think it's important that the children are taught a whole variety of skills, skills that they are able to use in life. I was amazed to find that children even as young as six years old had access to knowledge which is rich in experiences, cultural understanding, and cross-language communication. These can be seen as informal processes where knowledge is created and circulated at home and at school, and for me encouraging the children's experiences outside the classroom and welcoming them into the classroom is important. This was not easy by far, I struggled with the school ethos, with parents being concerned that that their children came to school and talked about what they had been learning at home, the parents explained that home is strictly home and school is strictly school and they did not want any crossing between the two. I couldn't understand how the two could be separated, surely what they were learning at home they should be entitled to share in the classroom and 'Vis a versa' ? Well even after long negotiations with the parents, I was forced to return to the tedious way of teaching them Arabic, and moved away from them learning through play, and when the children were unable to understand the technicality of the Arabic language, they were seen to have failed in their ability to progress to the second class and I was threatened with the sack. This was a really challenging experience and at times I felt it was similar to the experiences I had when at the ESOL class. Nevertheless I continue to teach at the Arabic school because I have a commitment to a different learning and I feel that if I can contribute something to the future generations of our young people then I'll continue my mission to change and develop what children are taught at community schools.

جئت الى بريطانيا قبل أربع سنوات من قرية قريبة من عاصمة اليمن عدن. لقد ولدت أنا وأخي في بريطانيا ولكن اخذنا أبونا الى اليمن خوف من ان نكبر في بريطانيا ولنعيش هناك للحفاظ على اللغة العربية والبعد عن العادات الغربية وايضا الخوف من أن تأخذنا أمي وتحرم أبنائنا. ابعدا والدنا عن انا وانا عمري سنتين واخي اربع سنوات . عرفت امي ان والدي اخذنا الى اليمن ولكن لم تعرف الى اي مكان. عشت انا وأخي عند إحدى عماتي منذ الصغر، وعندما تزوج ابي بامرأة ثانية عشنا مع زوجة ابي وعندما بلغت العشرين من العمر، ظهر أختلاف الجينات فإن لون عيناى أزرق وشعري أشقر وجلدي أبيض. وعندما اسأل الناس عن هذه الفروق كان الرد ان جدتي كانت فاقعة اللون. لم يكن جواب مقنع بلنسبة لي، ولذلك عشت سن البلوغ في حيرة وأخذ كلام الناس يكثر علي وعلى أخي، عندما بلغت العشرين، وبسبب هذه الفروق شعرت بأستفزازية داخل نفسي حتى جاء يوم وأنكشفت فيه الحقيقة عندما قالت عمتي أن أمتنا الحقيقية هي أم أنجليزيه. حيث هاجر والدي الى بريطانيا في الماضي ليعمل والديه هناك و كان أبي يعمل في مصانع الحديد لفترة طويلة و بينما هو هناك وجد أمتنا لتخدمه وانجب منها طفلين ولم يكن يحبها ولم يرد ان يبقى معها طويلا. وأتى بنا الى اليمن و نحن في طفولتنا ليحمينا هناك. عشت طفولتي في اليمن ولم اعرف اني ولدت في بريطانيا وان لي ام انجليزية. عندما بلغت تبين اختلاف لون شعري ولون عيني ولون بشرتي عن بقية الاصدقاء والاقارب. بعدما عرفت الحقيقة قضيت بضعة سنين من عمري في غضب لأنه كذب علي ولقد حرمت من أمي وعشت عيشة مخدوعة ولم أدري من أنا، وكان علي أن ارجع لأن أمي أنجليزية تعيش في بريطانيا وبتالي لي حق في جواز سفر وجنسية انجليزية، لهذا قررت العودة الى بريطانيا ولكن لم يكن ممكنا ان نعيش في قرية صغيرة لم يكن فيها مدرسة لذلك لم اتعلم في اي مدرسة. والغريب جدا اني نصف انجليزية ولم يكن بمقدوري ان اتكلم الانجليزية خاصة عندما رجعت الى بريطانيا . وعندما رجعت الى بريطانيا لم يكن هناك توافق بين لباسي اليمني الطويل والحنا على يداي وبين لون عيناى وشعري وجلدي وفوق كل ذلك لا أتكلم الانجليزية، وعندما قابلت أمي الحقيقية كانت لحظات فيها خليط من شعور غريب وعواطف وقلق قد مررت بها. لو مررت بامي في الشارع لما عرفتها ولا عرفتني، أصعب ما كان في الامر هو تبادل الحديث معها، فهي لا تتكلم العربية وأنا لا أتكلم الانجليزية كنا نستخدم لغة الإشارة وهذا يثير دموعي و كانت أمي في كل مره تمسحها عن وجهي. مرة سنه وما زلنا لا نفهم بعضنا البعض لقد استخدمت لغة الأرقام والصور والأشارة لأحدثها عن قصصي في اليمن. لقد ساعدتني أمي على تعلم الانجليزية أكثر مما علمتها انا العربية، بعد مرور سنتين اصبحت امي مهتمه لتعليمي اكثر مني لتعليمها، ولذلك افترضت ان اتعلم الانجليزية كاولوية في هذا البلد، كان من المفروض أن أتعلم الانجليزية حتى أعتمد على نفسي ولا أكلف أمي وأخذها الى كل محل للترجمة. بعدما استقرت في بريطانيا قررت أن اتعلم أكثر واكثر لهذا سجلت في معهد



(ESOL) للغات. شعرت بالثقة في هذا المعهد أكثر مما شعرت في البيت، ومنذ مجيئي الى بريطانيا كنت أدرس العربية الى جانب اللغة الإنجليزية وكان ذلك في نفس المعهد. الآن أستطيع ان ابعث رسالة خطيه بالهاتف باللغة العربية، بالنسبة للغة الانجليزية لم ابدعها حتى الآن، في البيت أستخدم العربية للقراءة والكتابة خاصة في شهر رمضان المبارك أقرأ القرآن الكريم وأقرأ أوقات الصلوات وذلك لم يكن سهلاً، كنت استخدم تواريخ السنة الهجرية لأعرف المناسبات والاعياد الدينية. مثل بقية النسوة احضر دروس اللغة من الاثنين الى الجمعة من الساعة العاشرة الى الثانية عشرة

هذه الدروس اليومية لمدة ساعتان صباحاً أصبحت بمثابة العائلة الصغيره لي. كل النساء هنا متحدثات بالعربية ومن اماكن مختلفه من اليمن كن نتحدث عن اليمن وعن الفقر والحرب الأهليه وغيرها. وكنا نخوض في احاديث قوية وننتهي بالحديث عن الحرب الاهلية التي دامت عشر سنوات ولقد ادشتني معرفة النساء بمواضيع كثيره منها التمييز العنصري والجنسي والثقافي والسياسي وغير ذلك رغم عدم اندماجهن في مدارس من قبل وعدم معرفتهم بالانجليزية. خلال مدة الدراسة في معهد اللغات كان من المفروض تغطية المنهاج الدراسي ولكن معظم الاوقات لم نكمل المنهاج بسبب الخوض في مواضيع شيقة خارجة عن المنهاج، كنا نتحدث عن الدراسة الجامعية وكيفية تعلم قيادة السيارة وشراء بيت أو سيارة وغير ذلك من المواضيع الحياتية المختلفة. أما الآن نتعلم مواضيع تتعلق بالمهاجرين والاجئين في بريطانيا وكذلك كيفية التأقلم في بلد جديد، هذا جيد لفترة معينة. وكذلك نتعلم كيفية التعامل مع سائق الحافلة ومنظم المرور ومع الشرطة. تعلمنا كيف يكون ذلك التعامل بالأدب، بعد هذا يجب ان نتحرك في تعلمنا الى شيء اخر. اعتقد في نفسي ان ما قد تعلمناه هي مهارات تعامله بسيطه واساسية. لقد مضى وقت طويل ونحن نخوض في نفس المواضيع. لم نتعلم كيفية التعامل مع المسؤولين من الدرجة العليا. لم أكن أستطيع ان أتعامل أو أتفاعل أو أفهم هذه الطبقة من المسؤولين او حتى مع مؤسسات راقية. لم تكن لدي الوسيلة لأصل الى المعلومات او اصل الى اساليب الطبقة المسؤولة في المجتمع. هذه المهارات كنت أطمح أن أتعلمها في هذه الدروس اللغوية ولكن هيهات.

على عكس ذلك امضيت خمس ايام في الاسبوع لعدت سنوات وأنا اتعلم كيفية التعامل مع السائقين وغير ذلك أنا لا أقول أن ذلك غير مهم ولكن أريد شيئاً أكثر تحدياً، شيئاً يوصلني الى طبقة أعلى من تلك التي انا فيها. الى الآن لم أشعر بأنني قادر على فهم المهارات الاجتماعية المطلوبة لأندمج مع المجتمع البريطاني وهذا ما يجب علي أن أتعلمه. لا اريد أن أتعلم الانجليزية بمجرد البقاء او للحديث المختصر، لا اريد حديث مختصر وانما اريد أن أكون قادراً على الخوض في حديث طويل مع المتقنين وعلي أن أطور معلوماتي وقدراتي الفهمية والذكائية. رغم أنني تعلمت الكثير وبنيت علاقات جيدة مع أصدقاء كثيرين. وجدت ان منهاج ESOL يسحبني للخلف. هذه علامة سلبية في الوقت نفسه قد تعلمت اشياء عظيمة واشياء عملية في الحياة في هذا المعهد، ولكن لم اشعر انني تقدمت في ذكائي. كنت أكتب هذه المشاعر في صفحات يومية وبعد ستة أشهر اقرؤها ثانية أجد نفس الشعور، هذا محزن ومحبط. مركز (ESOL) كان من المفروض أن يطور هذه

المهارات اللغوية والأكاديمية والاجتماعية، ولكني أشعر باننا في هذا المركز قد تركنا على جانب الطريق، اي اهل بنا وكان هناك تميز واضح . هذا المعهد يجمع نساء من ثقافات مختلفة وكان يجب على المعهد أن يرحب بهذه الاختلافات ويرحب بما تجلبه الطلابات من مواضيع اجتماعية من بيوتهن أو ثقافتهن. الحقائق التي اعيشها في مجتمعي يجب ان اعيشها في دروسي داخل المعهد. اعني هنا الاهتمام و الاستماع فيما اجله الى الصف لان التعلم هو جزء من الحياة الاجتماعية كلاهما مرتبط بالآخر. أتمنى أن يكون مركز (ESOL) مكان تعلم كثير من المهارات التي نحتاجها في الكتابة. كذلك أن يكون مكان أمناً لجلب وكتابة الخبرات ذاتيه. أن نتائج التعليم في هذا المركز لم تكن لتقاس بمعايير معينه بل من خلال القدرة على ممارسة معاملات رسمية تتعلق بحياتنا. كان لابد من اندماج الخبرات الذاتية والحياتية في الفصل وذلك لأبرز مهارات عديدة وكان على المشرفين ان يدركوا هذا ويسموا به عملينا داخل الصف.

عندما اقدر في نفسي قيمة القراءة و الكتابة. اعتقد ان هناك اشياء كثيرة تتعلق بها، انها الطريقة التي اتحدث بها والطريقة التي افكر بها وكذلك القيم التي اقدمها للقراءة و الكتابة وايض الطريقة التي اندمج بها في نص ما. نحن كلنا نمارس القراءة و الكتابة بطرق مختلفة وذلك بسبب التأثير الثقافي الاجتماعية المختلفة.

عندما بدأت القراءة و الكتابة باللغة العربية بدأت بتوضيح وكتابة ما في داخلي من مشاعر. أحتفظت بذلك في مذكرة كتابية وانا على عكس معظم الناس هنا فهم لا يحتفظون بمذكراتهم وذا أحتفظوا بها لا يرونها لأحد. اما انا فقد قررت ان احفظ بها لانني مررت بتجربة صعبة لم اعرف امي الحقيقية حتى لاحقا، ومرت سنين لم اكن قادرة على ان اتحدث مع اي شخص. في الماضي لم يكن بإمكانني الكتابة لذلك بقي الحزن والغضب بداخلي ولكن منذ ان استطعت الكتابة، اشعر بانني استطيع ان اتحدث لاحد وهي كذلك تحديتي، وهي مكان امن لافكاري ومشاعري. اعرف اني اخطئ في الاملاء ولكن لن يعرف احد بذلك لانه لن يقرأها احد غيري. استطيع ان احثك عندما حدثت في اي يوم من ايام السنة الماضية وذلك في مذكرتي، انها مراة للاشياء التي حدثت في الماضي وكذلك تبين كيف اني قد تغيرت كشخص فهي تساعدني على النمو وأشعر بأنها تكبرني وتزيد الثقة فيما أعتقد به. أن الطريقة التي أقرأ بها بلا شك تختلف عن زميلاتي في الدرس، لأنه بالنسبة لي ليست القراءة فقط تجزعت الجملة بل ما اجله الى الجملة من خبراتي الماضية التي اكتسبتها في بيتي و ايضا من خلال تبادل الحديث مع امي ومن خلال تجاربي اليومية كل ذلك كان لهو اثر على معنى الجمل التي اقرائها. اكتسبت هذا ليس من خلال التعليم الرسمي او من خلال الجوس خلف طاولة بل من خلال وجودي في المجتمع كشخص محلي وايضا من خلال الشبكة العنكبوتية وايضا من خلال سيطرتي على تعليمي الذاتي. بهذه الطريقة اشعر ان قراءتي و كتابتي ذو قيمة. هذه هي الافكار و الخبرات التي اكتبها في مذكرتي، وهي المكان الذي احكي فيه قصصي. اود ان اقرأ لك عن كخطتي التي بويطاليليرياً سهلاً عندما قررت العودة الى بريطانيا، ولكن استقرارني وتلقي في البلد الذي ولدت فيه كان ضعيفا منذ الصغر، وأعتقد أن بريطانيا قد توسعت الان بوجود ذاتي وليس أن مكاني قد ملئ بشخصي. ان شعوري قد

تاثر لاتي عشت ولم اعرف امي الحقيقية، وغادرت المكان الوحيد الذي عرفته (اليمين) وبدأت حياة اخرى في مكان جديد (بريطانيا).

كل شخص له قصة عودة، وان هذه القصة غير مفرودة لان قصص العالم الاخرى اهم. قصتي لن تجد مكان مناسب بلنسية للقصص الخرى ولا اضنها مناسبة في موقع ما، وذلك لاسباب منها ان والدي يمني وامي انجليزية، بدأت تعلم الانجليزية متأخرا من عمري، شعري اشقر اللون ولون جلدي فاتح، عيوني خضراوتان ولذلك لم تناسب مع الناس في قرى اليمين و هنا في بريطانيا اللبس التقليدي يمني امشي مع امي التي لا تتكلم العربية وبالتالي تتبادل لغت الاشارة لفهم بعضنا البعض. ولذلك لا ادري اي مجتمع انتاسب فيه ؟ افضي اوقات طويلة ابحث عن هويتي. كتابتي ساعدتني في هذه الافكار استطع ان اعبر عنها ولا يثقني ان سمعها احد. حديثاً بدأت العمل كملمه للغة العربية في مدرسة اضافية ادرس فيها خلال عطلة الاسبوع وهي تابعة للجالية اليمينية، ادرس الاطفال هذا متع بلنسبة لي، احب ان ارى بسمه في وجه الاطفال الصغار ، وانا احب ان يكون لي طفل. لم اكن ادرس المنهاج المطلوب لان معظمه قواعد لغوية عربية اساسية وهي صعبة التعلم لذلك كنت ادرس مهارات أكثر عليه ومهارات اجتماعية يحتاجونها في حياتهم اليومية.اعتقد ان هذا اهم للاطفال لانهم يتعلمون المهارات المختلفة التي تساعدهم في حياتهم اليومية.

إندهشت لما تبين لي أن الطفل الذي عمره ستة سنوات بمقدوره الحصول على معلومات ثقافية ولغوية واجتماعية من خلال التعامل الحديثي اليومي، لقد تبادل الاطفال هذه المعلومات في البيت وفي المدرسة، لقد شجعتهم على جلب هذه الاراء ورحبت بها في داخل الصف. هذا لم يكن سهلا لقد عانيت مع المسؤولين في المدرسة لان الاباء كانوا يقولون ان البيت بيت وان المدرسة مدرسة ولايجوز الخلط بين هاتين. لا استطيع فهم ذلك. وبعد نقاش طويل مع الاباء اضطررت الى العودة الى تدريس القواعد اللوغوية في الوقت الذي لا يفهم فيه الاطفال ممارسة اللغة العملية.ولقد لاحظ انهم قد اخفقوا في تحصيلهم المدرسي في الصف التالي في العام الذي يليه وبالتالي هددت بفصل من المدرسة. كان هذا تحدي لي ولقد تذكرني كل هذا بمعهد ESOL. ولكن اشعر بانني استطيع ان اقدم اشياء للاجيال القادمة، وذلك سوف استمر بمواصلة جهدي في تغير ما يتعلمه الاطفال في هذه المدرسة التعليمية.

### **Aisha's Story- 'Invisible by Seeking Asylum'.**

*I left Yemen in autumn 2000 with my husband and daughters. We came to England as Asylum seekers because we had various political problems in Yemen, mainly because my father-in-law was a prominent figure in the Yemeni socialist party during the civil war. Yemen was in civil war during 1984-1992 during which my father-in-law was in opposition to the government. As a result my husband became a target because he was supportive of his father's political activities. My husband would often receive threatening messages sent to his workplace, and on a number of occasions armed men stormed into his place of work and threatened to kill him if he did not stop supporting his father's political campaign. My father-in-law fled Yemen with his wife and younger children and applied for political asylum in the United Arab Emirates. My husband and I were left frightened for our lives and in fear of our children being kidnapped. Migration is very common in Yemen, but it is always those less well off people who migrated, those who are looking for a better life outside Yemen. We were already living a good life in Yemen, we had a lovely house, our children went to private schools, we had a chauffeur and a maid helping us, we were living very comfortably and so we didn't want to leave. Nevertheless we had no protection from the government; we were living day-to-day, not really knowing what may happen to us tomorrow. We were in a real dilemma and we would sit for hours on end contemplating leaving Yemen and starting life in a new country but it just seemed so difficult until one day when my husband didn't return home from work. He was kidnapped from his work place by a group of masked men and was taken away in a car. He didn't come home that evening so I called his office but nobody knew where he was, I spent days going from government buildings to police stations looking for him. A few days later I heard a car stop outside our home and my husband was thrown out of the car onto the street. He had been badly beaten and told that if he didn't leave Yemen within the next 72 hour he would be killed. We were forced to leave. My husband made contact with an agent who agreed to arrange our visas and flights to leave Yemen and to move to somewhere safe. We weren't sure where we were going until the evening before our flight. We paid the agent \$13000 in order for us to leave. We left everything behind, our beautiful home, our families, our neighbourhoods, our children's schools, everything. We left our home for the last and final time that morning to get a flight to Heathrow airport.*

*I had long heard about people leaving their homeland and becoming refugees in a land far away from home. I just never thought that it would ever happen to us, I never thought for a minute that one day I maybe a refugee, I never thought that I would be forced out of my own country, the place where I was born, the place I was raised in. For a long time I resisted being called a refugee, I resisted being called an asylum seeker. How could I accept being anonymous, being camouflaged, being invisible; I refused to be a number, a statistic, and I refused to have my identity stripped away from me. When I reflect on who I am, where I am from, what community I associate myself with, and what language I speak, I find that I'm much more than a number on a file, I have lots of identities, not just one. I have*

*a sort of relocated identity, an identity that has shifted in time, place, and culture.*

*We arrived at Heathrow airport in the early hours of the morning, where we were searched, we had all of our documents taken from us, we were then interviewed in separate rooms and it felt like we were being treated like criminals. We had our fingerprints and photographs taken. We were then taken into a small room and interviewed for more than three hours. The immigration officers told us that the interview was a chance for us to tell our story, and for the immigration officers to hear it from our end. But this wasn't the case. It felt more like an interrogation of dates and events, of locations, of addresses, of people they wanted information on. This wasn't a chance for us to speak our voices. The immigration officers didn't want to hear our stories, they didn't want to hear about our experiences and difficulties. We were not allowed to tell our stories, instead we were interrogated about places we had been to, it was like they didn't want to know who we were and why we were here, they just wanted questions to be answered with short brief answers, no feelings and no emotions. It was however comforting to see signs in lots of different languages on the walls of the interview room, I felt kind of safe in some strange way. The immigration officer was taking through an Iraqi interpreter who we found really difficult to understand, because she spoke a different kind of Arabic, the accent and dialect were different and so I remember asking her to repeat the questions time and time again. I was asked about everything from the moment I was born to the moment I left Yemen. The questions were all about dates, places we had visited, nothing about who we were and why we had applied for asylum in England. Six years later my story still hasn't been heard, and I am still waiting to tell my story. Our case has still not been decided and I continue to wait.*

*When I first came to England my English was good in comparison to a lot of the women I met at the ESOL class, because I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to attend school as a child in Yemen. My parents were wealthy people, they had businesses across the Middle East and they had always expected me to go away to University. But because I married in my early 20's and had children soon after, university wasn't really a priority. I now feel like I've lost out in some ways, and wish that I had continued my education, because I know I had the ability to succeed I just didn't really try. But since I started attending the classes I have become more determined to succeed, I am more determined to improve my English, to enrol on an access course and eventually to go to university to become a teacher. I know that I can do it, I don't have the childcare responsibilities that I had when my children were young, I don't have extended family members to care for like many of my friends, plus my husband is really supportive of me going on to higher education. My written English is much better than my spoken English; this is because in Yemen when they teach English they focus more on the grammatical aspects of the language and so being able to write a proper sentence was more important than being able to verbally construct a sentence. I can write quite well, but it's my spoken English that I need to really improve, that's the one that makes the*

*difference. I've learnt that being able to speak English properly helps to have access to better things; do you know what I mean? It helps in getting a better education, better medical care; it also means being more aware of my own rights. I'll be more accepted when my own way of speaking English is accepted, and so I decided to enrol on the ESOL programme.*

*The ESOL class is a different world altogether. It's where we quietly share our experiences, where we laugh and joke and it's where I really look forward to going in the morning. As Arabic women, we love talking, and we feel that we're missing out if we're not talking. We talk about lots of things, we talk about who we are, why we came here, what we do outside the class, how we read and write. We even talk about whose been granted citizenship and whose been deported!! For me deportation is a long-term worry. I worry about being told that I'll have to leave the country within a few days, I worry about where my daughters are going to live, and I worry about their education being disturbed. The class should be a place where we can reflect on who we are, it's where we are supposed to be able to talk about the real us, it's a place where we should be allowed to bring the realities we live in our communities into the class. Our class is a small family, made up of women who have rich life experiences. It's a cultural place and we have even tried to make the displays reflect this cultural diversity. The displays are full of memories of happiness and sadness, sadness at the loss of our friends, those who have been deported. We aren't really prepared for this part of the asylum process, I know it's always a possibility, but the people around us never know, they don't know if their friends have been deported, where they have gone to, or how we can stay in touch with them. I just wish we had more time to talk about these sorts of experiences in class, particularly in Arabic, because many of us suffer in silence no one is able to talk us through this sadness of having friends taken away from us. But we are always expected to focus on the more important bits of learning that we need to complete. Even though I have gone through an education system, it's been in Arabic, but I still see myself as being educated and just because I have not had a proper English education, it doesn't mean that I am any less. I value knowledge and education and I hope to get the most from the classes and I really aspire to going to university.*

*I feel strongly about the kind of learning that I'm involved in, the sort of technical skills I'm taught, and I know that that's why we are on the ESOL programme, but I can't help but think about the other skills we can be taught, there are other things that I bring to the class, that I would like to learn more about, but there is never enough time. The broader skills we need for survival, the skills that empower us as social and cultural beings. At times I feel kind of powerless in terms of my learning; what I mean is that we do sometimes get opportunities to air our views to talk about what we would like to learn, which the teachers make notes of and they promise to try to integrate more topics to the curriculum but it hasn't really changed anything, we still have to struggle with the learning modules that have been set. There are lots of activities that I'm involved in outside the class that I really want to take into the class and talk about but I am always worried about them being welcomed. My own experiences, my own sort of understandings, my own ways of reading and writing, my ways of switching*

*between Arabic and English, my own accounts of how I read and write and what I read and write. We all do these things in different ways and I think that in the class we are taught a kind of a narrow, a one-way system of reading and writing. When I think about what's involved in the real reading and writing, I move away from thinking of the technical skills to recognising the difference and diversity and challenging how these differences are valued within our society. Because we are all from different linguistic communities, we have lots of different ways of reading and writing, hence we need to move away from seeing a one way to reading and writing and move to seeing many ways, if that makes much sense! Particularly when some of our learning takes place outside the classroom, in our homes, in our communities, at the mosques, and at the Arabic schools. We are always learning, and it's not just in the classroom. Like most of my friends I really enjoy coming to the class and I know that we are supposed to speak English most of the time, but we whisper in Arabic, and scribble on small notes in Arabic, and when it's break time we can't wait to talk in Arabic in order to catch up with all that we've missed out on during the class. Because you know what it's like, that certain things can only be said in Arabic and if you said them in English they just wouldn't have the same meaning.*

*It's interesting that you ask me what I think reading and writing involve, when I think that we should be asked this exact question at the class, by our teachers, by the people who are responsible for our learning. To me reading and writing is one thing and to my friends they are something else; I think that we all have our different views of what reading and writing are, and we can also develop them in different ways. Because I don't think it's just about being able to read a sign in the street or a title on a book cover. It's more than that, to me it's the way I engage with what I'm reading, what experiences I bring, it's a whole lot of other things. My feelings about reading and writing are always moving, they are not static, but for me because I reflect on my everyday things, I have to ask questions, and I think that the teachers should also do the same. They need to ask what we think reading and writing mean, rather than assume that they already know. I think it's also the kind of person I am, I am a thinker, and I'm the type of person that reflects on everything in life all the time. I reflect on what I've done during the day, what conversations I have had with people, where I've been, who I've seen. In the same way that I reflect on everything in life I also reflect on the reading and writing that I am involved in. Whether it's reading e-mails, writing e-mails, sending postcards, sending text messages, it's all reading and writing to me, but I do most of them in Arabic and I'm not sure if the teachers still consider it as reading and writing. When I think about it, reading and writing play a major role in my life, being able to read and write didn't happen over night for me, it's not like I was 'illiterate' and all of a sudden I became a 'literate' person. I have been going to school since I was four years old and it's not like I have been 'blessed'. I'm quite an advanced reader and writer in Arabic, and over the last few years I have become more literate in English and it's mainly because there is a need for me to be able to read and write English for my immigration case.*

*As a child I have always had a love for computers and because my parents were quite well-off in comparison to the people in our community, they were able to buy a computer for the family to use and they even paid a private tutor who would come to our home once a week to teach us how to use the computer. Since then I have been fascinated with computers and when we first came to England I insisted on buying a computer for me and the children for to use at home. When I was at college in Yemen I learnt how to use the Internet and since then, my fascination of computers has developed even more. Nowadays I use the Internet on a daily basis; I use it for lots of things. I use the MSN chat, but only in Arabic because I can't type very well in English. But in Arabic I am really good, I sit and chat with my family who are still back home in Yemen for hours, particularly during the evenings, because then the children are in bed and I can just type away freely. Typing in Arabic feels very normal, kind of natural, I think of what I want to say and as I'm typing it's like I'm having a conversation with the person at the other end so I can type quite fast. The Internet has become a kind of a lifeline. I really look forward to going home and having my own space to chat with my family and friends, I feel warm, comfortable and close to them, I don't feel as far as I am, miles and miles away. When I e-mail them, it's usually through my hotmail account and it's all in Arabic. My husband asked one of his friends to install the Arabic software onto our computer; otherwise I wouldn't have been able to manage typing in English. By chatting with them I feel like they're in the same room and that we're all sat together talking, I feel closer to home. We even recently installed a web-cam just to make the whole thing more real. The children love it, they switch it on and then text their cousins in Yemen to tell them to log on, I don't really know how to do all the technical stuff, and so I stick to the simple MSN chat. Communicating with my family this way has kind of helped me survive, survive the uncertainty I've lived since I arrived in England and survive the episodes of longing for home. Writing and reading particularly through e-mail has also helped me establish aspects of my own identities, because like I was saying earlier, I don't just have one identity, I have many.*

*Communication with the Home Office, with immigration officers, with the Nationality and Immigration Section has become a daily task, whether it is by letter, or by phone. Being unable to read and write English made me feel helpless, not really in control of my own case, and not even being familiar with the legal aspects my own asylum case has weakened my position, it made it difficult for me to defend my application, even though I know it was my solicitors responsibility to fight my case for me, I still felt that I had to understand the system, I had to understand the legal terminology, I had to justify my application for asylum. I spent the first two years not really being able to understand all of this, and this is when I felt most vulnerable, most fragile, and most defenceless. Even if I had someone read the immigration letters for me, I would still be very much dependent on others to help me and I really hated this, I hated having to rely on others to read letters for me, when I could learn to read them myself, I hated having to share private and confidential information with others. I decided to enrol on a local ESOL programme that was being run by women and for women and I also decided to rely on my own skills that I had developed over the last few years. Since then, I've become familiar with the terminology used in all*



*the communication I receive from the immigration officers. I can now even identify and recognise certain keywords such as case refusal, positive decision, appeal, asylum, refugee status, NASS support, vouchers, tokens, emergency payments, ARK cards, fingerprints, tribunal, representations, dates, events and places. I still worry about every letter that comes through the letterbox, fear of seeing the word 'deportation' on the documents. I worry day after day about the outcome of my case because I've been living this uncertainty and insecurity since I arrived in England almost six years ago. It's ironic because I left Yemen for fear for my own life and for my children's lives and I have become a refugee, here in a land far, far away from home, and I'm still living this uncertainty and insecurity. But here in England I'm still in fear it's just another sort of fear, it's a fear of not knowing what could be coming tomorrow, it's a fear for not knowing where I could be living tomorrow. I pray and hope that the whole thing can be put the case to a close.*

*We were initially refused asylum case was heard; what I mean by heard is that questions were asked and we had to answer. There wasn't an opportunity to elaborate; to tell the story like it really was, without all the legal jargon. When my barrister read my statement out to me, I kept thinking, 'I didn't mean this and I didn't mean that' but because it was a question and answer session that had been turned into my story, but in their words. I kept asking the barrister about why my own words couldn't be used?' he insisted the words had to be 'acceptable' and my exact words wouldn't be 'acceptable to the courts'. I couldn't help but feel powerless. I realised that I really didn't mean much to the immigration officers, my story wasn't important; I just became another case file that needed a decision. Walking through the court doors, it brought memories back of the days at Heathrow airport where we were searched and interviewed under police caution. At the immigration court, the children and I were asked to walk through metal detectors to empty our pockets, bags and present our documents; I felt like a criminal. We were guided to the waiting area where we waited for over four hours for our case to be heard. It was all very bureaucratic. We were all treated the same; like we had done something wrong, and today we were going to be punished for it. Our names were not read out; instead our case file reference numbers were read out. We were told to speak only when asked to speak, and we were told to give as brief as possible answers to any questions asked. How can my answers be brief? How can I tell my story in a few sentences? How can my struggles be told in a few minutes? Did that mean that it would only take the courts a few minutes to decide on my fate, on my destiny, on where I would be living, on the future of my children? The whole experience was very distant, very remote, very far from reality, far from real people and real emotions, divorced from any real experience. I couldn't relate to anything, it was all very fast moving, and I was hearing voices and my case file reference number being read out time and time again. Here I felt vulnerable, I was almost invisible. I couldn't help but think that maybe if I were able to speak fluent English, maybe I would have been heard; maybe I would have become visible. I felt that just as my own words were 'unacceptable' for my asylum statement, my spoken English was also 'unacceptable' for the court hearing.*

## قصة عائشة - انسان غير مرئي عند طلب اللجوء

غادرنا أنا وزوجي اليمن في خريف عام 2000 ، جننا الى بريطانيا كلاجئين وذلك لاننا مررنا بظروف سياسية قاسية في اليمن. كانت الاسباب الاساسية التي تتعلق بذلك هو ان والد زوجي كان عضواً في الحزب الشعبي الإشتراكي المعارض للحكومة. وبلتالي زوجي أصبح أيضاً هدفاً للحكومة لأنه كان يدعم والده صاحب الأفكار السياسية المعارضة، حدث كل ذلك خلال فترة الحرب الأهلية ما بين عام 1984-1992. تعرضنا لتهديدات عديدة ومخيفة بواسطة رسائل خطية ترسل الى مكان عمل زوجي. وفي عدة مناسبات كان رجال يدهمون مكان عمله ويهددون بقتله اذا لم يتوقف عن العمل لصالح والده المعارض السياسي. لذلك قرر والد زوجي الهجرة الى الإمارات مع زوجته واطفاله، ونحن قررنا الهجرة الى بريطانيا. كانت الهجرة من اليمن شىء معروف ومنتشر خاصة للذين يتطلعون للعيش في مكان افضل للحياة و لثقتين ان المستوي جيتي يتهخوف على حياتنا وعلى حياة اطفالنا. كنت وعائلتي لا نريد الهجرة لأن عيشتنا في اليمن كانت جميلة حيث ان بيتنا فاخر وأولادي في مدرسة خاصة وجيراني واصدقائي اناس طيبون، وكان عندنا سائق في المنزل وخدمة تخدم في منزلنا. كنا نعيش في مشكلة يومية نفكر بها وناقش كيفية مغادرة البلاد و العيش في مكان اخر. كانت الحكومة اليمنية لا تحمي احد انذاك. وفي يوم من الايام أختطف رجال زوجي لعدة أيام دون انذار سابق، أخذت بالبحث عنه في كل يوم، أبحث عنه في مكاتب الحكومة ومراكز الشرطة دون جدوى.

وفي يوم ما القت به سيارة مجهولة امام منزلنا وهددته بالقتل اذا لم يرحل خلال اثنا وسبعون ساعة. تمكن زوجي بالاتصال مع شركة سفريات، والتي تمكنت من احضار تاشيرات مغادرة، لم نكن نعرف وجهة سفرنا الا بلبلة واحده قبل سفرنا، لقد دفعنا انذاك مبلغ 1300 دولار مقابل ترحيلنا. لقد تركنا كل متاعنا ولم نستفد منه شىء ، وتمكنا من مغادرة البلاد بسلام حيث نزلنا في مطار هيثرو لندن في صباح اليوم التالي.

كنت اسمع عن اناس تركوا بلادهم واصبحوا لاجئين في بلاد بعيدة عن وطنهم، ما فكرت يوماً ان اكون احد هؤلاء الناس او ان اكون لاجئة، ما فكرت يوماً ان اجبر على مغادرة بيتي او بلدتي التي ولدت فيها وتررعت فيها. لوقت طويل كنت اعناد ان اكون طالبة لاعانة او طالبة حق لجوء. كيف اقبل ان اكون شخص غير معروف او بدون علم او شخص غير مرئي (ليس له اعتبار). رفضت ان اكون رقما في ملف او جزء صغير من احصاء، رفضت ان تسلب مني هويتي الاصلية. عندما اتذكر من انا ومن اين اتيت واي مجتمع اندمجت به واي لغة اتحدث بها. اعتقد اني اكثر بكثير من رقم في ملف، عندي هويات كثيرة احملها، ليست بواحدة فقط. اعتقد ان هويتي قد تحركت بالوقت والمكان والثقافة فقط. ما فكرت يوماً أن أحمل لقب لأجنه. لقد كان لدي لقب وهويه اكبر من هوية لأجنه وكانت لدي هوية بلد وهوية لغة وتراب وحضارة ومجتمع أعرفه. أما الآن فهي هوية لاجئ كبقية الاجئين من جنسيات متعدده.

وصلنا مطار هيثرو في الصباح الباكر، وعندما أخذت منا كل الأوراق والوثائق الرسمية التي كانت بحوزتنا. ثم أخذ بنا الى غرفة صغيرة وهناك جرى تحقيق لمدة ثلاث ساعات، ثم أخذت منا بصماتنا. كانت المقابلة بالأسئلة الكثيرة والمتنوعة كالتي تسئل عند التحقيق مع مجرمين عن قضية كبرى. وقيل لنا أن هذه الأجوبة سوف تنقل الى مكتب الهجرة المركزي للمساعدتكم في قبول طلب الهجرة. شعرت على العكس من ذلك لأن طبيعة الأسئلة وكثرتها جعلتني أشعر بشعور غريب. كانت الأسئلة عن أشياء دقيقة وكذلك عن عناوين وتواريخ وأحداث وعن اناس كانوا يريدون جمع معلومات عنهم، لم تكن هذه فرصة لنا نحن لتتكلم عما مررنا به من صعوبات في حياتنا. مكتب الهجرة في المطار لم يرد ان يسمع قصصنا ولا المصاعب التي مررنا بها، ولم يسمح لنا بالتكلم عن قصصنا التي عشناها، على العكس من ذلك قد تحقق معنا عن اماكن قد زرناها. قد تبين لنا انهم ليسوا مهتمين بمن نحن و لماذا اتينا الى هذه البلد ، تخيلت أن هذه الأسئلة ليست للمساعدة ولكن كان المطلوب هو جواب مختصر بدون شعور او عواطف فيها. كان على جدران غرفة المقابلة لافتات بلغات مختلفة، شعرت بتويع من الامان في مكان غريب. وكانت المترجمة عراقية ذى لهجة مختلفة، ولذلك اذكر انني كنت اطلب اعادة السؤال مرات عديدة للفهم. الحقيقة أن الأسئلة كانت كثيرة تبدأ من تاريخ ميلادي الى اليوم الذي غادرنا فيه اليمن. غطت الاسئلة الاماكن التي زرناها، ولم يكن اي سؤال عن من نكون، و لماذا طلبنا حق اللجوء في بريطانيا.

بعد ستة سنوات لم يسمع احد قصتي (من قبل المهتمين)، في الوقت الذي اريده ان يسمع احد قصتي. لم يصدر قرار بها حتى الان وما زلت انتظر جواب الى هذا الوقت.

عندما التحقت بمعهد اللغات (ESOL) كانت لغتي الانجليزية احسن مقارنة مع نسوة كثيرة قابلتهن في المعهد ، كنت محظوظة في اني درست في مدارس اليمن منذ طفولتي، والدي من الاثرياء، و كانوا يتوقعوا ان اكمل دراستي الجامعية، ولكن بسبب اني قد تزوجت على سن العشرين و اصبحت اطفال فاصبحت الاربوية لهم فوق الجامعة. اشعر الان انني وضعت بسبب هذا و اتمنى لو انني قد اكملت دراستي الجامعية، وذلك لانه كانت لدي القدرات والامكانيات لمتابعتها. ومنذ ان بدأت الدراسة في المهه اصبحت اكثر مصممه على تحسين لغتي الانجليزية ومتابعة دراستي الجامعية وان اصبحت مملمة في المستقبل. اعرف نفسي بانني قادرة ان اكون كذلك ذات يوم، الان ليس لدي واجبات لتربية الاطفال كما كان في الماضي، و ايضا زوجي يشجعني حقا على متابعة الدراسات العليا.

لقد تبين أن الكتابة بالانجليزية أسهل على من التحدث بها وذلك يعود إلى فضل المدرسة في اليمن التي كانت تركز على تعليم كتابة قواعد اللغة الانجليزية أكثر من التحدث فيها. ولذلك فان الكتابة اصبحت اقوى من المحادثة الشفوية بالنسبة لي. بمقتوري الكتابة بسهولة ولكن التحدث بالانجليزية هو ما اريد ان اطور ذاتي فيه، لانه هو الذي يميزك عن غيرك وهو الاهم. لقد تبين فيما بعد أن المتكلم بالانجليزية بطلاقة هو الذي يصل ويحصل على ما يريد بسهولة أكثر. انت تعرفي ما

اعني بذلك ؟ انها تساعدك على حصول تعليم افضل ورعاية طبية افضل ، وكذلك تفتح ذهنك بطريقة افضل على حقوقك. وتوكلين مقبولة اكثر في المجتمع، ولذلك قررت أن التحق بمعهد اللغات (ESOL). مركز اللغة (ESOL) هو عالم مختلف تماما، فيه تشترك النساء خيراتهن الحياتية و فيه نضحك وهو الذي انظر للذهاب اليه كل صباح. كنسوة عربية نحب الكلام ونشعر بقد الشيء ما لم يكن هناك كلام جاري عن شيء ما. تتكلم النساء بمواضيع مختلفة، منها عن ذواتنا ولماذا اتينا الى هذا البلد وماذا نعمل خارج المعهد وكذلك كيف نقراء ونكتب ، وايضا من منا منح الجنسية او من قد اجبر على السفر الى بلد اخر. بالنسبة لي التفسير الى خارج هذا البلد كان الهم الاكبر في نفسي. اخاف ان باتي يوم ويقال لنا عليكم بالمغادرة خلال ايام معدودة . اقلق اذا حدث هذا ،الى اين ستميش ابنتي ، وماذا عن تعليم اولادي المدرسي؟.

مركز اللغة يجب ان يكون مكان فيه نستطيع ان نتكلم في هذه المواضيع. نتكلم عن حقيقتنا التي نعيشها في مجتمعاتنا الاصلية وكذلك في هذا المجتمع. الفصل الدراسي هو بمثابة عائلة صغيرة لنا مكون من نسوة ذوات خبرات حياتية، انه مكان ثقافي وقد حاولنا ان يكون هذا المكان صورة تعكس وتعرض ثقافة مختلفة. وهذا يعرض ذكريات سعيدة واخرى حزينة خاصة عن الذين طلب منهم مغادرة هذا المكان، نحن لسن مستعدات للمغادرة ولكن ذلك ممكن ان يحدث في اي وقت. الناس من حولنا (المعهد) لا تعرف عن ذلك ولا يستطيع احد التكلم في هذا. بل كان متوقع منا ان نركز على المناهج التعليمي. لقد مررت بالمناهج التعليمية العربية منذ الصغر، ولهذا اعتبر نفسي مثقفة، ولا يعني انه من لا يتكلم الانجليزية بطلاقة انه شخص اقل مكانا من غير المثقف.

اني اقدر العلم والتعليم واحب ان اتعلم معظم ما يلقن في الدرس في كل يوم، واتطلع للذهاب للجامعة في المستقبل. اشعر بقوة بما اتعلمه في المعهد وكذلك المهارات العملية، ولذلك نحن نستمر بلاتيان الى هذا المعهد، اشعر ان هناك مهارات اخرى كان بالامكان ان نتعلمها هنا(المعهد)، واشياء اخرى نجلبها للصف، ولكن لم يكن وقت لذلك ابدا. ان المهارات التي نحتاجها للبقاء هنا في بريطانيا هي سلاحنا الاجتماعي والثقافي. في بعض الاحيان اشعر بعدم القدرة المهارية، بعض الاحيان يسمح لنا بالتعبير عما نريد مناقشة من مواضيع خارجة عن المنهاج داخل الفصل، كانت المدرسة تكتب ما نطلبه وتعندا باخذ ان من الادارة حتى يسمح لنا بمناقشة ما نريده في داخل هذا الفصل. ولكن هيات يسمح لنا بذلك؟. وما زلنا نعاني من طبيعة المواد التي تدرس لنا في الفصل.

اني اشترك دائما في نشاطات كثيرة خارج الفصل، واحب دائما ان اناقشها في الفصل ولكن اخاف ان لا يرحب بها.خلال هذه النشاطات اشياء افهمها بطرقتي الخاصة في القراءة والكتابة، وكذلك طريقي في تحويل المعاني من العربية الى الانجليزية وبل العكس. وكذلك طرقتي في الكتابة والقراءة وماذا اقراء وماذا اكتب. الناس تفهم الاشياء بطرق مختلفة واعتقد بان الطريقة التي تدرس في الفصل هي طريقة محدودة في القراءة والكتابة. وعندما افكر في جديفة القراءة والكتابة

لا افكر في المهارات التي تبين الفروق والتحديات بين الثقافات المختلفة والحقيقة ان لها وزن واثر هنا . بسبب ان النسوة من خلفيات لغوية مختلفة فان لهن طرق مختلفة في القراءة و الكتابة، لذلك علينا ان نستخدم طرق عدة و ليس طريق واحد في اسلوب القراءة و الكتابة. خاصة انا نتعلم اشياء كثيرة خارج الفصل، نتعلمها في البيت وفي المساجد وفي المدارس العربية و غيرها من الاماكن وهذا يؤثر على اسلوب القراءة و الكتابة. اني مثل صديقتي احب الايمان الى الفصل، والمطلوب منا التكلم بالانجليزية، ولكن كنا نهمس ونكتب بالعربية، وفي وقت الراحة نتكلم بالعربية في الاشياء التي لم تفهم اثناء الدرس . تعرفين ان هناك اشياء لا يمكن قولها الا بالعربية و اذا قلتها بالانجليزية تفقد المعنى المطلوب .

انه من المهم انك سالتني... ماذا اعتقد في القراءة و الكتابة ؟ واتمنا لو ان هذا السؤال قد سألته المعلمات. الجواب ان القراءة و الكتابة يعينان شيء لي وشيء اخر لصديقتي . كل شخص له منظور في القراءة و الكتابة يختلف عن الاخر وكل له طرق مختلفة في تطويرها . لا اعتقد ان القراءة هي علامة بسيطة كذلك التي مكتوبة في الشارع او على مغلف كتاب، انها اكثر من ذلك، انها الطريقة التي اندمج فيها، فيما اقراء وايضا فيما اجلبه للجمله من خيرات ماضية و اشياء اخرى . ان شعوري عن القراءة و الكتابة دائما يتغير . لاني افكر في كل يوم عندما حدث خلاله، اسأل نفسي لماذا لا تسأل معلمتنا هذا السؤال، ان هذه العادة تعتمد على طبيعة شخصي وانا من النوع الذي يفكر لاحقا عن كل شيء حدث في ذلك اليوم، وعن كل محادثة جرت معي، واين كنت ومن شاهدت، كل ذلك افكر به لاحقا وبنفس الطريقة افكر عن القراءة و الكتابة التي امر عليها في اليوم . فمثلا كتابة رسائل بريدية وارسال رسائل تهنته ورسائل بالحوال كل ذلك يعتبر قراءة وكتابة، ولكنه بالعربية وهل يا ترى تعتبر المعلمة جزء من القراءة و الكتابة تلعب دور هام جدا في حياتي، ولم ياتي ذلك بيوم و ليلة ولكن بعد جهد طويل، كنت في المدرسة منذ الرابعة من العمر وفي السنوات الاخيرة تحسنت لغتي الانجليزية وذلك بسبب الحاجة لها، اعني فهم المعاملات التي تتعلق بملف الهجرة .

منذ الصغر وانا احب الحاسوب الالكتروني، حيث ان والدي من الاثرياء وكان في بيتنا حاسوب منذ صغري، على عكس معظم الناس انذاك ، لقد كان ياتي معلم دروس خصوصية الى بيتنا ليعلمنا الحاسوب، وبما انني محببه بالحاسوب ومنذ ان جئت الى بريطانيا وانا مصممه على شراء حاسوب لي و لاطفالي . حتي للحسوب بدا عندما تعلمته في اليمن والان استخدم الشبكة العنكبوتية يوميا، استخدمه للمحادثة الالكترونية ليس بالعربية فقط ولكني لست سريعه في طباعة الانجليزية . بينما باللغة العربية فاني احدث اهلي في اليمن لمدة ساعات، خاصه بعد نوم الاطفال في المساء . ان الطباعة بالعربية بديهيه بالنسبة لي، واطبع ما افكر به كما لو اني اتكلم مع شخص مباشرة و ذلك ساعدني في سرعة التفكير و الطباعة في نفس الوقت . اصبحه الشبكة المنكوبتية خط مهم في الحياة، اني متعلمه الى الذهاب الى المنزل لبدء المحادثة مع اهلي واصديقتي وبهذا اشعر براحة وبقرب منهم ولا اشعر بالبعد الذي انا فيه . ان معظم رسائلي من خلال البريد الالكتروني، كلها بالعربية . زوجي سال احد اصدقائه لتحويل الحسوب الى العربية . بالمحادثة مع الاهل اشعر انهم معي في العرفة

نتحدث و اشعر بالقرب من الوطن، حتى اطفالي احبوا ذلك وهم يرسلون رسائل هاتفية لذويهم ليفتحوا الحاسوب في اليمن للمحادثة. لاعرف غير (MSN) لذلك لاستخدم غيره . الاتصال بهذه الطريقة مع اليمن قد ساعدني في البقاء في الغربة وفي تخفيف مشكلة الشوق للوطن. وايضا البريد الالكتروني قد ساعد في تثبيت هويتي، كما ذكرت لاحقا انه ليس لدي هوية واحدة ولكن لدي هويات عديدة.

ان المخطابات مع وزارة الداخلية و مع موظفي مكاتب الهجرة في بريطانيا اصبح واجب يومي، اما من خلال رسائل خطية او باتصالات هاتفية. ان عدم القدرة على الكتابة والقراءة باللغة الانجليزية يشعرني بعدم القدرة على مساعدة نفسي وعدم سيطرتي على قضية الهجرة ولا حتى فهم الجوانب القانونية للاجئين. وذلك قد اضعف موقفي، اعرف انه من واجبات المحامي الدفاع عن قضيتي في المحكمة ومع ذلك اشعر انه من الضروري ان افهم النظام القانوني. واللغة القانونية وعلي ان ابرر طلبي في حق الجوء في مكتب الهجرة. لقد امضيت اول سنتين هنا في بريطانيا لا افهم كل هذا. كنت قبل هذا اشعر بالعرضة للخطر الذي قد يواجهني وان قضيتي معرضة للخسارة وعدم القدرة بلدفاع عنها. حتى لو اني وجت شخص يقرأ هذه الرسائل فاني لا احب ان اعتمد على شخص في كل مرة ولا احب الاعتماد على الاخرين في الوقت الذي يجب علي ان اقرأ رسائلتي بنفسني. لا احب مشاركة الاشياء الشخصية مع اناس غريبين. لذلك قررت ان اندرج في معهد اللغات والذي هو للنساء فقط ومن قبل النساء، وقررت ان استخدم المهارات التي اكتسبتها في السنوات الاخيرة لاتقدم للامام، ومنذ ذلك الوقت و انا استكثر من فهم المصطلحات التي يتداولها موظفوا مكتب الهجرة. الان استطيع فهم بعض المصطلحات مثل كلمة رفض، قرر ايجابي، استئناف، لجوء، دعم من قبل NAAS ، بطاقات، دفع نقدي طارئ، بصمات، محكمة، ممثل، توريخ، احداث و اماكن.

ما زلت اقلق يوميا على اي رسالة تاتي من خلال الباب ، اخاف ان تكون فيها كلمة رفض او مغادرة. اخاف كل يوم على المعاملة، لاني اعيش حياة غير اكيدة و مصيرنا غير معروف منذ ان اتينا ال هذا البلد وذلك منذ ستة سنوات. انها صعبة لانا غادرنا اليمن خوف على حياتي وحياة اطفالي واصبحنا لاجئين في مكان بعيد عن ارض الوطن، ونحن في بريطانيا نعيش في خوف، الخوف ناتج عن عدم معرفة ما يخبئه المستقبل، الخوف من الى اين ساعيش في الغد ؟ اود لو ان كل ذلك واضح في ملف الهجرة وان القضية قد انتهت.

في البداية الامر رفضت معاملة الجوء، لم تكن هناك فرصة للتعبير عن حقائق قصتنا بدون اي مصطلحات قانونية. وعندما قراء المحامي قرار الدعوة كنت غارقة في التفكير والسماع وقلت لنفسي لم اعني هذا ولا ذلك الكلام الذي قراءه المحامي على مسامعي، ولكن بسبب ان الاستجواب عن قضيتي كان بلغة المحامين الرسمية، وما زلت اسال المحامي لماذا لم يكن التعبير بالطريقة التي اردتها انا، كان المحامي مصر على ان كلماته مقبولة وان تعبيراتي ليس لها قبول في المحكمة. لم استطع فعل شيء وشعرت بالاحباط، ادركت ان موضوع الهجرة لم يعني الكثير لهم . قصتي لم تكن مهمة،

واصبح الملف بحاجة لقرار لاحقاً. عندما مررنا في ابواب المحكمة تذكرت مطار هيثرو الذي تم فيه تفتشنا و اجريت  
مقابلة تحت غطاء امني. في محكمة الهجرة انا واولادي دخلنا من خلال باب مغناطيسي و افرغت جيوبنا من كل شيء  
نحمله، لقد بد ذلك مثل محكمة الجنيات، ثم اخذنا الى مكان الانتظار، هناك انتظرنا لمدة اربع ساعات لسماح القرار. لقد  
تعامل معنا هؤلاء بنفس الكيفية كما لو انا قد ارتكبنا خطأ كبير واليوم هو يوم العقاب.

اسماؤنا لم تقرأ بل قراء رقم ملفنا، وقيل لنا ان نتكلم فقط عندما يسمح لنا بذلك، وان نعطي جواب مختصر فيما لو سؤلنا؟  
كيف لي ان احكي قصتي ببضعة جمل ؟ كيف ان احكي قصتي ببضعة دقائق؟ هل هذا يعني ان المحكمة لها بضعة دقائق  
لتقرر حياتنا ومصيرنا، والى اين ساعيش، وماذا عن مستقبل اولادي؟ ان هذه الخبرة دلت على نتائجها والتي هي بعيدة  
عن الحقائق وعن الناس وعن المشاعر، ولم استطع ان اربط ذلك باي شيء معقول، لقد مر كل ذلك بسرعة كنت اسمع  
كلام كثير واسمع رقم ملفنا مرات عديدة، عندها شعرت بعرضة للخطر، لقد كنت اكثر شخص غير مرىء لوجود له ولم  
استطع ان اساعد نفسي ولكن فكرت لو انني اتكلم الانجليزية بطلاقة قد يسمعي شخص واصبح مرئية اكثر، شعرت ان  
كلامي غير مقبول وان لغتي الانجليزية غير مقبولة في المحكمة.

## **Noora's Story –'No Place Like Home!'**

I came to England in the summer of 1994 with my husband. My husband was born in England in 1969 but his father took him back to Yemen as a child to be brought up by his aunts. My father-in-law was worried about his son becoming too Westernised and losing his ability to speak Arabic and then not being able to fit in with the Yemeni culture. But my father-in-law didn't know that his son would be allowed to come back to England and apply for British citizenship years later. When we were in Yemen my husband enrolled at an English course that was being run by the British council in Sana, Yemen. There he met an English ESOL tutor who told him that foreigners who were born in England before 1983 would be entitled to apply for British Citizenship. This was a start to a new life for my husband and me. In Yemen my husband worked as a mechanical engineer at a small business company and we struggled to live on his wages particularly because I was having fertility treatment. We were married for many years but I was unable to conceive so I began to have fertility treatment. I was known as the 'infertile woman' in the village, and in the Yemeni culture there is a lot of stigma attached to not being able to have children. Coming to England was an opportunity for me to get away from our relatives gossiping and asking who was ill, was it me or was it my husband that couldn't have children. I also had to try and get away from people encouraging my husband to remarry a younger bride who would be able to have children for him. I had new hopes particularly because I had heard that the medical treatment in England was very good and there might be chance for me to conceive. I felt very positive and was very excited about the whole move. We came to Northtown because we had friends here and we heard that there was an established Yemeni community who have been in Northtown since the 1940's, and we wanted to be apart of that community, we wanted to be in a city where we could mix other Yemenis, where we could buy Arabic food, listen to Arabic music, go to the local mosques, Northtown felt right.

I only joined the ESOL classes three years ago, because previous to that the classes we mixed sex classes, and I just wouldn't have felt comfortable in a room with other Yemeni men. So when the women's classes began there was a lot of interest and the ESOL teacher even had a waiting list for women who were wanting to join. The classes run from Monday-Thursday between 10am and 12 pm. The timing was good because it meant those women who had children could take their children to school first then come to the class, and then we all had Friday off because it's a religious day for Muslims, and we cook, we dress nicely, and it's a chance for us to visit each other on Friday's because the men are at the mosques. I really enjoy coming to the classes because I get to see my friends, and we talk and we share our experiences about everything. We don't leave any topic unturned, we talk about our cooking, families back home, our husbands, and we even talk about sex! The teacher doesn't know what we're talking about, and any chance we get to talk we do. The teacher sometimes shouts 'English ladies please, some of you have been here for years and still can't even read or write'. We find it really difficult to share our experiences in English, it doesn't feel the same and it feels like we are pretending to be something we're not. The teacher has a hard time getting us to 'speak English' to each other, but what do you expect? A group of Arabic



women in a room, who have lots of things to say, and they need to say them quickly, they'll speak Arabic. Sometimes we even write small handwritten message in Arabic to each other so that the teacher doesn't understand. It's a shame that we're not allowed to speak Arabic in the class, because I find it much easier to discuss things in Arabic, or talk about particular experiences, I feel that I learn much more, I actually learn things much quicker, and I even find that I can concentrate on a task for longer.

But at my age, and the problems I've had in life, learning wasn't really a priority until I finally accepted that I couldn't have children. I had to turn a new page altogether. Three years ago my friends would have said that I was 'illiterate in Arabic and English'. I wasn't taught how to read or write Arabic as a child because we lived about 75 miles from the nearest school in Yemen and my parents didn't think it was important for me to learn. What was my ability to read or write going to do for them? They needed food, and water to live on, that was more important. But I've managed so far without having to go to school. When I came to England, I wasn't really motivated to learn because I had an aim in life and I wanted to achieve it, I wanted to have children. I neglected everything else. The doctors at the hospitals would do tests and year after year I would wait, but I never managed to conceive. It's painful to talk about it but what I am trying to say is that I was managing, I was paying the bills, I was going to the shops, I would get on the bus and communicate to the bus driver, I would communicate using the little English I had and I managed to get by. I couldn't read fluently, my written language was not as good as it should be. Anyway I don't think because you can read or write that it makes you any better a person, or being able to prove that they you at a certain level in reading or writing. To me what's more important is what you do with those skills and how you use them to help others. Anyway we all read in our different ways and we write in our different ways. Before I could read 'properly' I used to look through my husband's phone book and look for a particular name, I would recognise the initial letter and then divide the word into smaller sections to be able to pronounce the letter and then read the whole word. When I joined the ESOL class I wasn't motivated I was lacking in confidence and was worried particularly about being asked to read in front of the class. Since then, I have learnt to read and write basic English, but like I said before it's not just about being able to read and write.

Reading and writing in different ways? Well what I mean is that none of us are the same, we all have different experiences of books, stories, poems, we approach it from a different angle, we bring our different cultures, different languages, and faith to the reading. Even though I can't write English very well, I still see myself, as being bilingual and I know it may sound strange. I approach reading from a different way to those who aren't bilingual. Like the teacher, you know at the ESOL class, she would experience reading and writing differently to the way me or Kalthum or even you would. I think that's why sometimes the topics we cover in the class are not appropriate to our backgrounds, because the teacher approaches them differently to us. She's monolingual, she's white, and from a middle class background. For example the task we were given last week to discuss was about going on holiday to the seaside. The teacher spent time talking us through buying holiday clothes, sun

block and suntan creams, and bikinis. We didn't get offended because when my neighbours go on holiday that's what they do. But couldn't the teacher see we were all Muslim women, wearing the hijab (Islamic head cover), we were very unlikely to be walking around with a bikini and sun block on. But it was difficult to interrupt her and say anything. We were asked to read extracts from a women's experience of being on a beach and to write about similar experiences of being on the beach. The women and I all felt a little bit lost, we just couldn't click with tasks we were given and we had to pretend like we were really interested because we needed to pass this module. Sometimes I really wish I could bring in some of the poems I've written at home or some of the newspaper articles I've read but we don't really have much time and the teacher has lots of things to get through. It is difficult to bring in our experiences from home into the classroom. The whole thing kind of means keep your home experiences at home and stick to the ones in the class, because there just isn't enough time.

Even though I only began to learn to read and write as an adult, I have always had a love for poems, Arabic poems I mean. I began learning to read Arabic about three years ago at the mosque. All the women used to attend the mosque twice a week to learn the Holy Qu'ran but I was always very embarrassed about going because I couldn't read. The committee at the mosque realised that many of the women were unable to read and write Arabic so they began running a beginners class. Lots of women enrolled at the class because they felt it was okay to say 'I can't read or write', nobody would criticise them, after all that's what we were there for, to learn. I felt Arabic was much easier for me to learn to read; maybe it was because I spoke Arabic and I could relate to the meanings. When I was eventually able to read Arabic fluently I felt like I had accomplished something huge, I felt like I could pick up any Arabic book and read at the top of my voice because I could now read. Since I have been going to the mosque my reading has really improved, but I was getting a lot of support and encouragement there. Learning to read Arabic has enabled me to write letters, read Arabic newspapers, write Arabic poems, and of course learn the Qu'ran. Since I was a young girl, my mother used to recite Arabic poems to me and I would also learn them by heart but I was never able to tell the difference between one poem and the other on paper. I can now read and so I can read the Arabic poems I love. Arabic poems have a totally different meaning; they give a different sense of poetry, which I can click with. If I picked up a poem in English, I just wouldn't have any attachment to it. I've even started writing my own poems, which I can show you. I mainly write about resettlement and longing for home. Because I do long for home, I long for my family, for my sisters and brothers and I think it's also because I don't have children, and so I don't really feel occupied. Even though I have been here in England for a long time I still don't feel like it's home and I think writing these poems has helped me to cope with being away from home. I think as long as I'm away from home I'll continue writing my poems. The poems have also helped me understand who I really am, why I came here (in England) and where I am going. In the same way that I love poems, I also love stories. Stories play a big part in Arabic history, even in the Qu'ran, it's all based on stories and my English neighbour said that it's the same in the Bible. I used to dream about telling stories to my own children, in the same way that my mother used to tell

me stories, but now I just share my stories with husband, but it's not the same. Men don't really like to listen to stories; I don't think they like to listen full stop!! But it's good you're listening to my story, because I think that everybody has a story to tell, and it's okay telling your story but who is listening? I have lots of stories to tell, about our community, about our struggles, about our future, but they're not really important stories for everybody else. Plus my story isn't the typical story that ends with a good ending. Mine doesn't feel like a good ending at all, because I still have not had children and I still live in a Council house! But I know that I have accomplished lots of other things, which I feel really proud of, I feel much stronger and much more confident than I used to. I have lots of stories to tell about our community and the way it has changed, and my generation of women have even noticed it and we can now feel the impact. When I first came to Northtown the Yemeni community was a very close knit type of community and people felt proud of being Muslim and being able to speak Arabic but now it has really changed. The terrorist attacks have put our communities at the centre of all of this conflict. Before September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and the London bombings everybody was okay, there were no problems between the local Northtown people and the Yemenis. You know the Yemeni community has been here in Northtown since the 1940's and like other immigrant communities we faced racism and discrimination but we have never felt like we were being watched. Now people have to be careful even though they may not be doing anything wrong, the police raid people's homes, they detained two young men a few weeks ago. The Police have even started putting leaflets through people's doors, and I didn't really understand the leaflet so I took it to the Yemeni Advice centre and they read it for me, and explained that if I had any information on the terrorist attacks to call them and I would be given a reward. This has made the Yemeni community unstable and trust has been lost between people.

I have even noticed that the younger generations from our community have become more westernised and some can't even speak Arabic. I get worried because even though they're not my children they are part of our community and if we don't help them then we will lose them. The Arabic school is still running on the weekends but children from the community don't like to go because the teachers are too old fashioned and very strict and so the children can't click with them. I don't think they get the support that our generation of women got from each other. The women in our community are very strong minded and even though they may seem uneducated they know a lot about life and we have built strong networks of support, where we can go to each other for help, for advice, for childcare, and even for money. The women and I have got a small group together and we help each other in different ways. For example because I can write Arabic and some of the women want to write letters to their families back home in Yemen without their husbands knowing, they dictate and I write the letters for them. They try to send money home regularly particularly to their mothers and fathers who are living in poor villages. But they do this without their husbands knowing, so I write the letters and address the envelopes and they take them to the post office and send them. We try and help each with anything we can, but it's all based on trust and we have been doing this for many years and so we really do trust each other. Since I have not been able to have children I feel insecure about my future and in the Yemeni culture women always say that you shouldn't trust a man, even if

he tells you that he loves you! So I have been saving some of my own money in case something happens one day and I am left on my own. One woman at this group helped me open my own bank account and because I find it difficult to understand the bank statements, she explains them to me. But now I know how to deposit money into the bank and how to use the cash machines. But all of these things we have helped each with secretly without our husbands knowing. And I think I feel a little bit more independent this way, I feel secure.

But I don't think that the young people have that kind of support. I think it's difficult for them to build what we have because they have become kind of fragmented. They used to be proud of their culture and language but I think because they feel that their faith is under attack it's made them very frustrated. Because things are changing and because our community has changed and I think our young people need to be educated differently. What goes on around the world and in other countries they cannot ignore, they get affected and frustrated. You know, they see the news in Iraq, in Afghanistan, the Asian earth Quake and nobody asks them how they feel or what they think. I went with my friend to her children's parents evening and it's like nothing has happened around the world, the teachers talk about celebrating how the school is so multicultural. I got very angry because schools in our area have been celebrating multiculturalism for many years now; they have signs on school entrances in different languages. I sometimes wonder whether having these signs in community languages really means that we are celebrating who we are. I don't think schools are giving our children an opportunity to talk about the issues that affect many of them, it's like what goes on around the world is something separate to what they should be learning in the classroom. I walk through our neighbourhoods and many young boys are lost and I feel very sad because I think that they could have been helped and schools could have helped.

Having lived in Northtown a long time now I still feel that no matter how long I live in England I will always be considered an immigrant, a foreigner, and sometimes even an asylum seeker. I feel that we're always looked upon as taking somebody else's job, somebody else's house. For me it's lots of issues, it's the colour of my skin, it's the way I dress and the way I speak. My accent, even when I call the housing department to report a repair, the staff make you feel very small, and they say that it would be better if I spoke through an interpreter. If we're not allowed to practice speaking English, how are we ever going to learn and not depend on interpreters all the time? This way I feel very reliant on someone else to speak for me, because that's what they are doing, they are speaking for me, and I don't feel like I'm in charge do you know what I mean? I want them to hear me and not the interpreter. But when I am telling you my story, it's my voice, it's me speaking, it's me that's coming through the story. I still think it's important for me to continue to learn English, because I get lots of forms from the social services department, from the housing department, and when I don't fill them in, I lose money and the rent doesn't get paid. So it's like our lives really depend on these forms being completed and handed in on time. If they asked me to complete them in Arabic that wouldn't be a problem, but I know it's difficult for them to do that, because the whole purpose of us being here in England is to also be able to read and write in English and not in Arabic.

But now it seems that everything depends on these forms and being able to fill them in is really important. I still try to fill them in, like the TV licence, the meter readings, the change of circumstances form and even the ones we get from the passport office. Sometimes I take them to the Yemeni advice centre, the girls who work there, they speak Arabic and English and they understand what we need to do and they help me. But I find that most of our lives are tied to these forms, and we have to keep the social benefit department updated if anything changes in our circumstances. I wanted to go to Yemen a year ago for a visit, but I basically had to get permission from them to say if it was okay for me to go. Because had I not told them, they would have discontinued my benefits and sent me more forms to complete. The forms make me feel like a number on a file that needs to be regularly reviewed otherwise I would lose my entitlements. I think that's why I am going to continue going to the classes, because unless my English is very good I 'm always going to struggle and not know my full rights, but more importantly to at least have some power over my own learning.

## قصة نوره لا يوجد مكان مثل بلدنا،،،

جنت مع زوجي إلى بريطانيا في صيف عام 1994 ، زوجي ولد في بريطانيا عام 1969، جاء به والده إلى اليمن وهو طفل صغير ليتربى في بيوت عماته، والد زوجي كان قلق عليه فان ظل في بريطانيا فانه سيأخذ بعادات الغرب او ان يفقد التحدث باللغة العربية او ان لا يتناسب مع الثقافة اليمنية عندما يكبر، ولكن والده لم يعرف ان بمقدور ابنه الرجوع الى بريطانيا وياخذ الجنسية بعد عدة سنين.

في اليمن كان زوجي يدرس لغة الانجليزية في دورة لغة عقدت في المركز الثقافي البريطاني في صنعاء اليمن. اعلمه معلم اللغة اثناء دورة ESOL بانه من ولد قبل عام 1983 في بريطانيا فله حق في طلب الجنسية. كانت هذه المعلومة بمثابة حياة جديدة لزوجي الذي كان يعمل كمصلح للسيارات في محل صغير وبراتب بسيط، وكانت تكاليف المعيشة صعبة، خاصة تكاليف معالجة عدم المقدرة على الإنجاب والتي كانت عندي بمثابة مشكلة كبيرة. كنا متزوجين لعدة سنوات ولم اكن قادرة على الإنجاب لذلك بدأت ابحث عن علاج انذاك. كنت معروفه في القرية بالتالي لا تنجب، وتعرفي الثقافة اليمنية التي تتعلق بعدم القدرة على الإنجاب. قدومي الى بريطانيا يعتبر بمثابة الهروب من اقاربي الذين يتسالون فيمن قد تكون مشكلة في عدم القدرة على الإنجاب في ام في زوجي، وايضا اهرب من تشجيع الناس لزوجي ليتزوج بسيدة صغيرة لتنجب له اطفال. اصبح لدي امل جديد عندما عرفت ان الطب في بريطانيا على مستوى عالي وان هناك فرصة لي بلانجاب. كان لدي شعور ايجابي و متفانله بالهجرة . اتينا الى مدينة شفيلد لان لنا اصدقاء وسمعنا ان هناك جالية يمنية منذ عام 1940 . اردنا ان نكون جزء من هذه الجالية، و اردنا ان نخالط اناس يمنيون ونشتري طعام عربي ونسمع موسيقى عربية ونذهب الى المساجد وكانت مدينة شفيلد هي كذلك. التحقت في معهد اللغة ESOL قبل ثلاث سنوات، قبل ذلك كان الفصل مختلط الجنس، لاشعر بالراحة اذا كان في الفصل رجل يمني. لذلك عنما فتحت دروس للنساء فقط كان الاهتمام اكثر، حتى ان المعلمه كان لديها قائمة طويلة باسماء المنتظرات للاتحاق بالفصل . الفصل يبدأ من يوم الاثنين الى الثلاثاء بين الساعة العاشرة الى الساعة الثانية عشر صباحا. كان هذا التوقيت جيد للنساء حيث هناك وقت كافي لتوصيل الاطفال الى المدارس ثم الاتيان الى المعهد. كنا ناخذ يوم الجمعة كعطلة لانه يوم عبادة للمسلمين، فيه نطهو الطعام و فيه نتزين بلباسنا، وهو فرصة لزيارة بعضنا البعض بينما الرجال في المساجد.

احب المجيء الى الفصل لان فيه اقابل صديقتي وتحدث عن مواضيع كثيرة، لانترك موضوع الا وتكلم به فمثلا الطهو، وعن اهلنا في الوطن، وعن ازواجنا، وحتى عن الجنس. المعلمة لا تدري عما نتكلم فيه، احينا المعلمة تصرخ تكراراً بان نتكلم بالانجليزية وتقول بعضكم قضى سنوات عديدة ولا يستطيع القراءة او الكتابة حتى الان. انه

من الصعب ان تشرح عن خبراتك الحياتية بالانجليزية، انها لا تعطي نفس الشعور و عندما نتكلم بالانجليزية نشعر باننا نتمثل بشيء ليس لنا فيه. كان وقت المعلمة صعب معنا لتجعلنا نتكلم الانجليزية ولكن ماذا تتوقع من مجموعة نسوة عربية في غرفة وعندهن الكثير للتكلم به وبيردن التكلم به بسرعة ولا يكون ذلك الا بلغة العربية، و احينا اخرى نرسل لبعض رسائل كتابية صغيرة حتى لا تعرف المعلمة ما فيه. انه من المخجل ان لا نستطيع التكلم بالعربية داخل الصف، وانا اجد المناقشة بالعربية اسهل بكثير و اشعر اني اتعلم اكثر وبسرعة اكبر وايضا استطيع ان اركز لفترة اطول.

انا كشخص شاب في عمري و المشاكل التي مررت فيها، لم يكن التعليم له اولوية حتى عندما ايقنت انه من الصعب ان تكون لي ذرية في حياتي، وبذلك فتحت صفحة جديدة في اسلوب الحياة. قبل ثلاث سنوات كن زميلاتي يقلن انني لا اقراء ولا اكتب، في الوقت الذي لم اتعلم فيه منذ الصغر، وذلك لاننا كنا نعيش في اليمن في مكان يبعد خمس وسبعون ميل من اقرب مدرسة، والذي اعتقدا ان التعليم ليس له اهمية او قيمة، وماذا ستفعل القراءة و الكتابة لهم ان تعلمتها؟ كنا بحاجة الى الماء والطعام للعيش وبالتالي هذه هي الاولوية. ومع ذلك استطعت ان اواصل التعليم بطرق عديدة دون الذهاب الى المدرسة. وعندما اتيت الى بريطانيا لم اكن متحمسه للتعليم لان اولويتي انذاك هي الانجاب وبالتالي تجاهلت كل شيء اخر. الاطباء اجرؤا فحوصات، وسنة بعد سنة، وانا انتظر لم استطع ان احبل في النهاية، انه من المؤلم التحدث عن هذا ولكن ما اريد قوله اني كنت متفكته في حياتي، حيث كنت ادفع الفواتير و اتسوق و اسافر بالحافلة واتحدث لسائق الحافلة وذلك باستخدام كلمات بسيطة والتي تؤدي بالغرض. لم يكن بمقوري القراءة المطلقة ولم تكن كتابتي كما يجب ان تكون. على اي حال لا اعتقد ان من بإمكانه القراءة و الكتابة هو انسان افضل او يستطيع ان يبرهن انه على مستوى معين من القراءة و الكتابة. بالنسبة لي اعتقد ان من المهم هو ماذا تفعل بهذه المهارات؟ وكيف تستخدمها لمساعدة الاخرين؟. على اي حال كنا نقراء بطرق مختلفة و نكتب بطرق مختلفة. قبل ان تمكنت من القراءة الصحيحة كنت انظر في دفتر زوجي للارقام الهاتفية و ابحث عن اسم معين، كنت ادرك الحرف الاول من الكلمة ثم اجزاء الكلمة الى اجزاء لا يمكن من تهجتها ثم اقرانها ككلمة واحدة. عندما التحقت بمعهد ESOL لم اكن متحمسه وليست واثقه من نفسي وكنت قلقه ان اقراء امام الموجد في الفصل. منذ ذلك كان علي ان اتعلم القراءة و الكتابة بالانجليزية ولكن كما قلت لاحق، انها ليست القدرة على القراءة و الكتابة فقط بل اكثر من ذلك. ذكرت سابقا ان القراءة و الكتابة تكون بطرق مختلفة؟ ما عنيته هنا كنا نختلف في ذلك. كنا له خبرات مختلفة في الكتب و القصص والشعر ونحن نتعامل معها من زوايا مختلفة، ندخل فيها ثقافتنا المختلفة، لغاتنا المختلفة وندمج اصقاداتنا المختلفة في القراءة. حتى لو انني لا استطيع ان اكتب الانجليزية جيدا اعتبر نفسي من المتحدثين بلهجتين و اعرف ان ذلك يفهم كشيء غريب. اني اتعامل مع القراءة بطرق مختلفة عن الاشخاص الغير عارفين بلهجتين.

فمثلا المعلمة في الفصل فانك تلاحظينها في تجاربها بالقراءة والكتابة تكمن بطرق واهتمامات مختلفة عن عني وعن كلثوم وحتى عاك، لهذا اعتقد احينا ان المواضيع التي تدرس في الفصل ليست مناسبة لخلفتنا التي اتينا منها، وذلك لان المدرسه تتعامل مع هذه المواضيع بطرق مختلفة مقارنة معنا، انها ذو لهجة واحدة و بيضاء اللون وهي من الطيقة الوسطى في مجتمعها. فمثلا درس الاسبوع الماضي كان بعنوان كيف تحضري لرحلة سياحية الى شاطيء ما كانت المدرسة تشرح كيف وماذا تشتري من ملابس ومرامهم لمنع الشمس ومرهم مسمر للبشرة وملابس سباحه داخلية. وهذا هو حال جراني فهم يحضرون لذلك كل عام وهم متعاونون على هذا. ولكن لا تترك المعلمة باننا مسلمات نرتدي الحجاب ولا نتمثل بملابس داخلية ولا نستخدم مرامهم مانعة للشمس....الخ. و كان من الصعب تفهيم المعلمة او قول اي شيء في ذلك، ولكن طلب منا ان نقرأ من خلال خبرة امراءة كانت على الشاطيء و كذلك علينا ان نكتب عن تلك الخبرة على الشاطيء. انا والنسوة في الفصل شعرنا بالضياع و لم نستطع فعل شيء وتظاهرننا بلا اهتمام بالموضوع لان علينا نجاح المادة.بمقابل احب ان اقرأ شعر كتيبه في بيتي او اقرأ مواضيع صحفية ولكن ليس لدينا وقت داخل الفصل، والمعلمة لديها الكثير من المادة لتغطيها في الفصل. انه من الصعب ان نتكلم عن مواضيع البيت في الصف. المعنى المطلوب ان ما في البيت للبيت وهنا نلتزم في مواد الدروس لان الوقت غير كافي لاشياء اخرى.

مع اني تعلمت الكتابة والقراءة في سن البلوغ احب الشعر العربي ، بدأت تعلم العربية قبل ثلاث سنوات في مسجد في بريطانيا، تاتي النساء مرتين في الاسبوع لتعلم القران الكريم، كنت دائما محبته لاني ضعيقه في القراءة. مسؤولين المسجد ادركوا ان كثير من النسوة لا تقرأ ولا تكتب لذلك بدأت الدروس الاولية لغير المتعلمين. التحقت في تلك الصفوف نسوة كثيرة معصمهم غير متعلمات وانا واحده منهم، و بالتالي لا احد يلوم احد على عدم المعرفة وذلك الكل متشابهة في المستوى. اشعر ان اللغة العربية هي للقراءة والتعلم، ربما لاني متكلمه بالعربية التي الجاء اليها في التعبير عن المعاني. وعندما اصبحت ماهره بقراءة العربية شعرت انني حققت شيء كبيراً، اشعر ان بمقدوري ان افتح اي كتاب عربي و اقرأ بصوت عالي. منذ ان ذهبت الى المسجد تحسنت قرأتني وجدت تشجيع ودعم هناك. كان تعليمي هذا قد ساعدني على كتابة رسائل وقراءة صحف بالعربية و كتابة الشعر العربي وايضا قراءة القران الكريم. منذ الصغر كانت امي تقرأ علي الشعر وانا احفظه عن ظهر قلب ولكني لم اكن افرق بين شعر مقروء وشعر مكتوب. الان استطيع القراءة وانا اقرء الشعر الذي احب. الشعر العربي دائما له معنى مختلف والذي يعطي احساس مختلف والذي احس به. اذا قرأت شعر بالانجليزية علي ان اكون على اتصال به وهذا صعب ثقافيا. اني استطيع ان اكتب الشعر واستطيع ان اريك ذلك اكتب في مواضيع كثيرة معظمها في موضوع العودة و الشوق للوطن. لاني اشتاق للوطن وللاهل وللخواتي وللخوني واعتقد بما انه ليس لي ذرية فاني لا اشعر بملء الوقت. حتى ولو اني قضيت سنين عديدة



في بريطانيا الا اني لا اشعر به كوطني ، وكتابة الشعر قد ساعدني في مشكلة البعد عن الوطن. اعتقد ساستمر في كتابة الشعر ما دمت بعيدة عن الوطن. لقد ساعدني في ادراك حقيقتي و لماذا اتيت الى ههنا والى اين ساذهب. وبنفس الطريقة احب القصص. القصص لها دور كبير في المجتمعات العربية وفي قراءة القران الكريم، وجراني قالوا ان الانجيل يعتمد على القصص مثل القران الكريم.

كنت احلم بقراءة القصص لاولادي لون ان لي، كما كانت امي تفعل معي والان اشارك زوجي القصص، لكن ذلك يختلف لان الرجال لا يحبون سماع القصص. انه من الجيد انك تسمعين لقصتي، لان كل شخص له قصة، وانا عندي قصص كثيرة عن مجتمعنا، وعن معاناتنا عن مستقبلنا وهي قصص غير مهمة لاناس اخرين، وخاصة ان قصتي ليس نهايتها جيدة لان ليس لي ذرية، وما زلت اعيش في بيت للبلدية وفي نفس الوقت قد انجزت اشياء كثيرة وانا فخور بها واشعر الان بمزيد من القوة و الثقة عما كنت فيه .

عندي قصص كثيرة عن مجتمعنا وكيف تغير هذا المجتمع، وان النسوة لاحظوا هذا التغير. عندما اتيت الى مدينة شفيلد كان المجتمع اليمني مغلق و يفخر الواحد منهم بانه مسلم وان لغته هي عربية ولكن قد تغير ذلك الان. حيث ان الهجمات الارهابية قد وضعت مجتمعنا في هذا الملف. قبل هجمات الحادي عشر من سبتمبر وتفجيرات لندن لم تكن مشاكل بين اليمنيين وسكان شفيلد. تعرفين ان اليمنيين كانوا في بريطانيا منذ الاربعينات ومثل باقي المجمعات المهاجرة قد عانينا العنصرية والتمييز ولكن لم نحس من قبل باننا مراقبين. الان حتى لو لم تفعل شيء فان الشرطة قد تداهم بيتك، لقد احتجز شابين قبل عدة اسابيع، ان الشرطة تضع رسائل معلوماتية في البيوت، لم افهم ما فيها حتى قرانها شخص في الجالية بانه اذا كان لديك معلومات عن الارهاب فسوف تكافىء عليها. وهذا قد زرع الثقة بين المجتمع اليمني في هذا البلد. لاحظت على الجيل الجديد من اليمنيين، انه متأثر بالحياه الغربية، وأنهم لا يتكلمون اللغة العربية. انهم ليسوا باولادي ولكنهم جزء من مجتمعنا واذا لا نساهم في مساعدتهم فسوف نفقدهم. مازالت المدرسة العربية مفتوحة خلال اجازة الاسبوع ولكن الاولاد غير مبالين بالذهاب اليها لان المدرسين والسلوب التعليمي فيها قديم وهذا لا يلائمهم ولايجذبهم للمدرسة.

لا اظن احد يعرف ان النسوة تساعد بعضها البعض، ان النساء هنا قويات في فكرهن حتى لو انهن لا يبدون مثقفات الا ان عندهن الكثير من هذه الحياة ، نستطيع ان نزرور بعضنا البعض للمساعدة وننصح في رعاية الاطفال وحتى عن معاملات مالية. انا والنسوة في مجموعة نساعد بعضنا البعض في طرق عدة. فمثلا اكتب رسالة لاهل امرأة في اليمن دون علم زوجها، يحاولون ان يرسلن بعض النقود بانتظام الى امهاتهن او ابائهن القاطنين قرى اليمن الفقيرة. نساعد بعضنا البعض بقدر المستطاع وعلى ثقة عالية، كان هذا لسنوات عديدة.

منذ ان تبين اني لن انجب اطفال شعرت بعدم الثقة بالمستقبل، والمجتمع اليمني يقول لا تتقي بالرجل، حفظت بعض من اموالي فيما لو تركت وحيد في المستقبل. قامت امراة من مجموعتنا بفتح حساب بنكي خاص بي، كنت مستصعبه الاوراق البنكية حتى بينتها لي سيدة. والان اعرف كيف ادخل واسحب اموال من البنك واستخدم الصراف الالي. كل هذا كان بعيد عن علم زوجي ولهذا شعرت باستقلالية وامان اكثر. لا اعتقد ان الجيل الجديد لديه نفس النوع من الدعم لبعضه البعض وامن انه من الصعب ان يبنوا هذا النوع من الثقة لانهم اكثر تجزئة الان. كانوا يفتخروا بلغتهم و بثقافتهم . واعتقد لانهم يشعرون بانهم معرضون للاذاء فهم محبطون. لان الاشياء تتغير والجالية تغيرت ايضا وبالتالي الشباب يحتاجون الى تثقيف من نوع اخر. ما يحدث حول العالم لا يمكن تجاهله وهذا يسبب احباط لهم. تشاهدي اخبار العراق و افغانسيان و الهزة الارضة في اسيا، لم يسألهم احد عنما يشعرون في هذا وماذا يعتقدون فيه؟ ذهبت مع احدى صديقاتي الى مدرسة ابنها في يوم ما، وكان الشعور هناك وكأنه لا تحدث اشياء مخيفة في هذا العالم، بل تكلمت المعلمة عن احتفالات بمناسبة ان المدرسة اصبح فيها جنسيات متعددة. لقد غضبت كثيرا لان مدارس اخرى تحتفل بهذه المناسبة منذ سنين طويلة. وضعت المدرسة يافطات على مداخلها بلغات مختلفة. اتسال اذا كانت هذه اليفطات تعني اننا نحتفل ايضا. لا اعتقد ان المدرسة تعطي فرص للاطفال ان يعبروا عن اشياء تؤثر عليهم خارج المدرسة. فما يجري حول العالم مفصول عما يجري في الصف، شعرت بحزن عندما مررت باطفال قد ضاعوا، كان بلامكان مساعدتهم والمدرسة كان بإمكانها تقديم المساعدة اخرى.

عشت في مدينة شفيدل طويلا ومهما عشت في بريطانيا ساظل انسان مهاجر وغريب ولاجئ. اشعر باننا قد سلبنا وظائف وبيوت سكان هذا البلد. هناك فروق اشياء مثل لون بشرتي ولباسي وطريقة كلامي، فمثلا عندما اتصل هاتفيا لتصليح شيء ما في البيت فان الشخص المتكلم في الهاتف يشعر بانك شخص صغير وينصح باستخدام مترجم لتوصيل المعنى المطلوب. اذا لم نمارس اللغة العملية الى متى سنعتمد على المترجمين. كلما اتصلت اشعر بالاعتماد على الاخرين. انهم يتكلمون عني ولا اشعر بانني صاحب القضية اريد ان يسمعوني انا. عندما احكي لك قصصي انه صوتي وانا اتحدث من خلال قصتي بصوت ذاتي. انه من المهم استمرارية تعلم الانجليزية لان هناك استثمارات كثيرة من مكاتب الخدمات الاجتماعية ومن شركة البيوت. بدون هذه الاستثمارات تضيع حقوقي. حياتنا تعتمد على هذه الاستثمارات، يجب ان ترسل في الوقت المحدد لها. لو كان ذلك بالعربية لكن سهل علي ولكن سيكون صعب عليهم، الغرض من وجودنا هنا(مركز ESOL) ان نكتب ونقرأ بلغة الانجليزية وليس بالعربية. كل شيء يعتمد على هذه الاستثمارات، انه مهم تعبئتها، ما زلت املئ بعضها مثل رخصة التلفاز وطلب الجوازات وطلبات رسمية اخرى، احينا اخذ نصيحة من بنات الجالية. اجد ان حياتنا مرتبطة بهذه الطلبات، لا بد من اعلام مكتب الخدمات باي تغيرات فمثلا زرت اليمن في العام الماضي ولم اخبرهم بذلك ولهذا اوقفوا كل الفوائد المستحقة لي. هذه الاستثمارات تشعرني بانني

عبارہ عن رقم ملف بحاجة الى النظر فيه بانتظام، ولهذا علي ان استمر تعلم الانجليزية، والا ساعاني و لن اعرف كل حقوقى، وبها اقوى في هذه الحياة .

## CHAPTER NINE

### Mapping Literacy Practices

#### *Literacy Worlds*

This chapter functions as an introduction to the first stage of the analysis of the informants' literacy practices, as outlined in Chapter Two, through a mapping of their textual practices, across various domains. Having presented the informants' stories in Chapter Eight, I now in this chapter begin to highlight the multi-layered language and literacy environments in which the women live and I present a detailed discussion of their literacy worlds. In this chapter I draw on Kenner's (2000) diagrammatical outline of children's 'literacy worlds' (p.5), which she constructed to represent the literacy worlds of bilingual children in her study. I have adopted and adapted these diagrams as a way of providing a conceptual map of the domains of literacy practices within the women's lives. The women's experiences of texts in different geographical spaces they inhabit are represented by separate layers on the diagram, which signify different domains. I found the diagrams a useful means of representing the multi-layered language and literacy environments in which Yemeni women live. Each layer represents an area of experience, a 'domain' that I examine in Chapter Ten, such as the home, the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) setting, the Mosque, and the community. I have arranged these layers to show how each domain was located with respect to the informants; so phrases in the middle section of the diagram are the most central, with the phrases on the outer being the furthest away. I have tried to indicate the significance of each domain in terms of the amount of time the informant spent there. I also made notes on some of the people the informants regularly communicated with and the languages used, and various important places where literacy events took place. In addition I have identified particular texts in languages other than English, which were central to the women's lives. These are all complex issues and the diagrams are intended to operate only as a simple way of introducing the reader to the diversity of the informants' literacy experiences and the various literacy domains in which these experiences are located (Kenner, 2000), before moving on to a detailed analysis of the informants' narratives.

It has long been assumed amongst many educators and policy makers that the homes of linguistic minority families are deficit in literacy skills. Linguistic minority communities tend to be over-represented among the 'functionally illiterate' in today's society (Cummins, 1994), where educational underachievement of these communities is attributed to deficiencies within the home. Blackledge (1999) argues that studies by Anderson and Stokes (1984), Delgado-

Gaitan (199), Martin-Jones et al (1996) and others who have studied literacy practices in the homes of families from a range of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds indicate that these assumptions are unfounded. Importantly, the informants' narratives and their reflections on ESOL classroom experiences, which are analysed in this and in Chapter Ten, illustrate a contrary perspective to this. The informants were involved in a wide range of diverse literacy activities in which they regularly use texts in Arabic and English as an integral part of their daily life. Like Ada (1988) and Auerbach (1989), I refute the notion that linguistic minority families fail to value or support literacy learning; in fact I found that the women very much felt that literacy was key to their own social mobility and to empowering them in their disadvantaged status within mainstream society.

Literacy does not have the same meaning or even function in every community. For Kalthum, Saba, Aisha and Noora, literacy is not just about being able to read and write but also about being able to utilise these skills in a socially appropriate context. Literacy for the informants in this study is a socio-culturally constructed activity, as discussed further in Chapter Ten, which varies because of the different configurations that the women take in different social and cultural settings. As I discussed In Chapter Two, it is important that informants' definitions and understandings of literacy are explored because literacies come into being through larger political, economic and cultural forces in each community, and it would be impossible to understand such structures or functions outside of their own community contexts. Therefore to understand the women's literacies, it was important not to neglect the personal, social and political values in which such literacies occur. Literacy for the informants in this study is not simply a set of universally defined skills, (as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Ten) which are constant across time and space. Also, whether the informants are seen as 'illiterate' or 'literate' in society is dictated by policy makers. Street (1999) claims that 'school literacy' tends to frame what counts as literacy and this constructs the lack of 'school literacy' in deficit terms. And so those who are not literate in the terms determined by the 'school literacy' are seen to be 'illiterate', and intellectually inferior to those who have 'school literacies'. Such debates are centred on competence rather than injustice, where those who are not 'literate' in the majority language are not seen as a consequence of the very structures by which others are advantaged and enabled to maintain and extend their advantage.

## *Kalthum's Literacy World (See Fig.1)*

### Home Domain

Kalthum grew up in an environment where books and education were highly valued and respected. As a result, she claims she acquired a passion for stories and a longing for more knowledge. Kalthum has a love for stories because she feels that stories help her get through life. She also attributes most of her own literacy learning and textual encounters to her upbringing, and talks about wanting to raise her own children in a way that she experienced herself, inspiring them to develop a cultural awareness and a love for books. However, some types of texts enjoy more prominence in her life than others. Kalthum talks about reading 'official' types of texts, including handouts, manuals, brochures, application forms and information leaflets, which she describes experiencing as a purely functional task, required to get by day to day. Despite her family commitments and responsibilities, Kalthum makes time for literacy learning into her day. She notes down new words in English while at the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) class that she would look up in an Arabic-English dictionary when she returned home; she would also learn English by communicating with her neighbours, local schoolteachers, the milkman, the postman and anybody else she would converse with. Kalthum explains that such learning situations involved literacies, which relate to the survival skills she encountered on a daily basis.

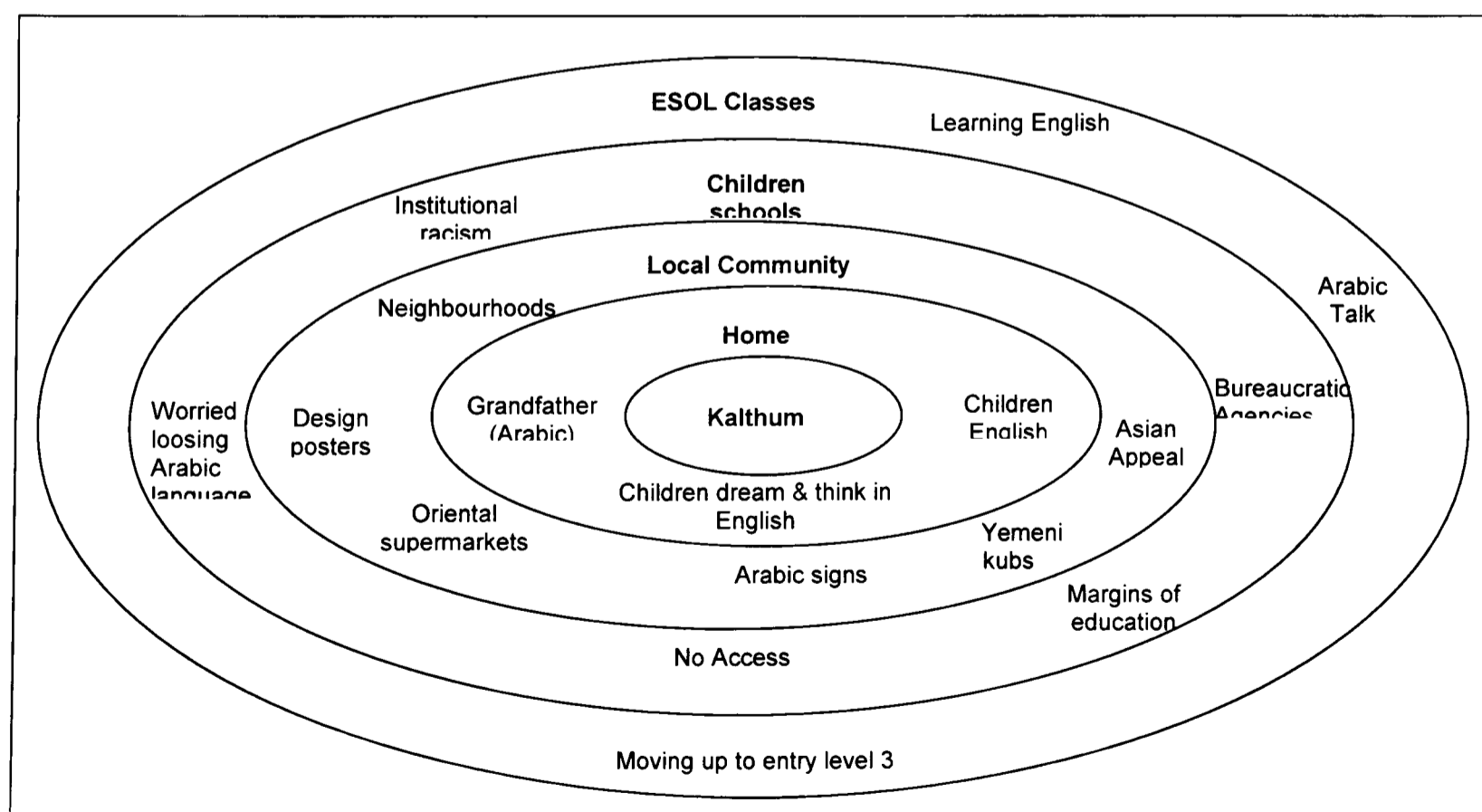


Figure 1: Kalthum's Literacy World (adapted from Kenner, 2000)

### Community Domain

Kalthum talks about spending time even when walking through the local neighbourhoods reading street signs, using cash machines, paying bills, going to the bank, and reading utility statements. These are all textual encounters providing her with opportunities to experience literacy practices. Kalthum also talks about spending time reading books, newspapers, magazines, which for Kalthum were also an opportunity for both entertainment and language learning. By literacy, Kalthum means not only reading and writing habits but the broader social and cultural contexts that provide for such habits to develop, to be sustained and to flourish even in a new linguistic environment, as she explains in the following quote.

*When I look at my own experiences of reading, I look beyond the written words. I think that in every culture reading and writing have a different meaning and a different way of being used. I think that reading and writing are just as important as each other, but it's the way we are involved with them that's more important, because for women like me this relationship is so deep in culture, in experiences of multilingualism, of displacement, and of migration (Kalthum)*

Kalthum's account points to the suggestion that her textual experiences vary and appear to be influenced heavily by her literacy practices in Arabic. Such practices influence predilections, values, attitudes and language knowledge, which intersect with the social, political, and cultural contexts in which she lives. Strong family influences are explicit in Kalthum's accounts of textual practices, describing her family's encouragements to read, to learn English, and to educate herself. Knowledge and books seem to have surrounded her childhood and continue to play an important role in her adult life, regardless of the language she uses. Furthermore, what Kalthum also carried into her adult life from home was a strong political consciousness. Even in a supposedly classless and egalitarian society such as the Yemeni society, education and intellectualism function as symbols that indicate one's social status. As Kalthum watched her family and relatives fully participate in British society, she began to learn to read and educate herself in order to be able to participate in conversations with people who had received more formal schooling than she, and she felt that literacy is empowering, in whatever shape or form.

### ***Noora's Literacy World (See Fig.2)***

#### Home Domain

Those literacy practices performed in Arabic by Noora appear to intersect with the literacy practices she is engaged with in various domains, although these tend to be somewhat modified due to different life circumstances. Noora pursues the kind of knowledge that she is hungry for,

although not entirely through reading in English but also through reading in Arabic. Noora also accesses the Internet in Arabic to read news, particularly on the political situation of the Middle East following events of September 11th, such as the invasion of Iraq, the war in Afghanistan and the conflict in Palestine and Israel. She also reads the Internet to check the weather forecast. She talks about selecting and recording various satellite and sky channels through reading the channel listings, and reports that these practices are not new to her, instead they present variations of the literacy activities which satisfy the same interests that match her values and beliefs. Noora reads officials letters and acts upon them. She writes points down which she needs to refer to at a later stage and would often bring correspondence letters to the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) class and ask the teacher or her peers for assistance with writing back. She talks about withdrawing money from cash machines, contacting different organisations and completing application forms. Noora's predilections and beliefs first emerging in Arabic remain and continue to influence her practices in English. Such textual encounters suggest that literacy practices do not miraculously appear and disappear when one enters a new linguistic environment, but they seem to be closely linked to the social, cultural and political contexts in which they were developed, as well as those of the new context in which they are modified and sustained.

*Reading and writing in different ways? Well what I mean is that none of us are the same, we all have different experiences of books, stories, poems, we approach it from a different angle, we bring our different cultures, different languages, and faith to the reading. Even though I can't write English very well, I still see myself, as being bilingual and I know it may sound strange. I approach reading from a different way to those who aren't bilingual (Noora).*

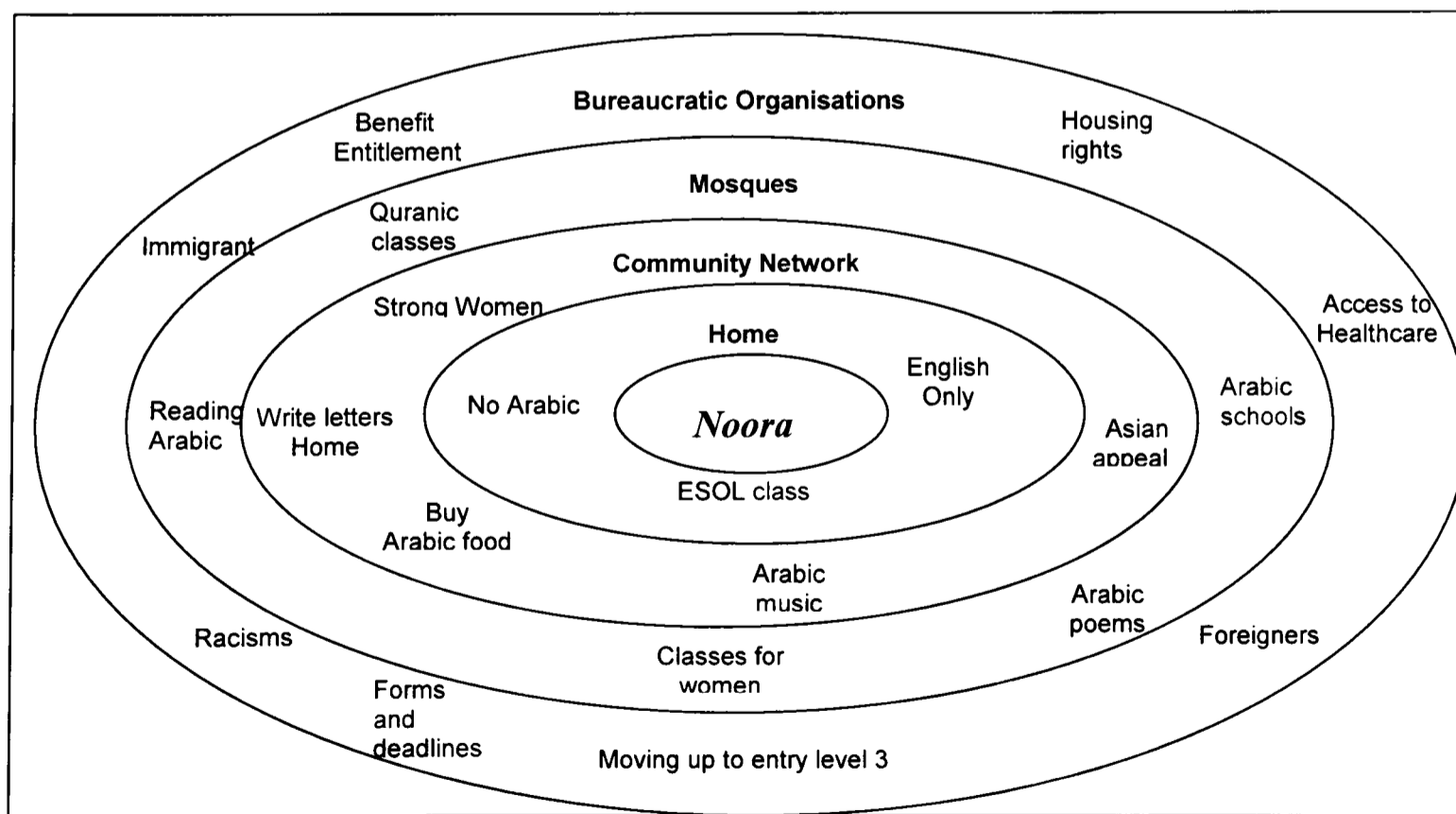


Figure 2: Noora's Literacy World (adapted from Kenner, 2000)



### Community Domain

When away from the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classroom. Noora tended to pursue literacy practices in Arabic. She talks about keeping notes like shopping lists, reminders of important events such as birthdays and weddings in Arabic. Writing, just like reading, appears to be an inherent and important part of Noora's life. Noora explains that she cannot imagine life without literacy, whether it is writing for self-expression or communicating with her children by leaving messages for them, or doing a homework task with them, or even doing her own homework. Noora describes herself as always with a pen scribbling notes on margins of newspapers or any writeable surface to comment on points she notices in the texts, or to emphasize interesting ideas. Writing for self-expression included writing short poems, of which Noora has shared a few with me. The community is a key domain for Noora, in which she contextualises textual practices that revolve around community organizing, planning and implementing events and activities within the community. This domain is particularly important for Noora, as she is heavily involved in coordinating community events, designing, making and distributing newsletters, posters and also helping to arrange committee meetings. These activities involved a diverse number of textual practices such as writing meeting agendas, booking rooms, taking minutes, typing them and later distributing them to the relevant people. Noora, for example, was often viewed as a community leader and activist, and she was often nominated by the community to sit on governing body panels. She would often mediate disputes and offer assistance to community members. She would also help organise and deliver charity events. These activities involved highly complex, diverse textual practices, in which Noora was involved throughout the year, yet little acknowledgment or even recognition of this was made at the ESOL class, even though the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) programme was being delivered at the same venue that all the other activities were taking place. It seemed that no matter what or where the activities were taking place, if they were happening outside the ESOL classroom they tended to stay out and Noora explains this further:

*Sometimes I really wish I could bring in some of the poems I've written at home, or some of the newspaper articles I've read but we don't really have much time and the teacher has lots of things to get through. It is difficult to bring in our experiences from home into the classroom. The whole thing kind of means keep your home experiences at home and stick to the ones in the class (Noora).*

### *Aisha's Literacy World (See Fig.3)*

#### Home Domain

Aisha did not restrict the deliberate switching between English and Arabic and the drawing of boundaries between the two languages to note-keeping and book selection. She expresses a strong belief that each language represents a unique culture, and must be preserved in its original form. As such she emphasises that Yemeni and British cultures are distinct and they should not be muddled by language hybridisations. According to Aisha, it is crucial to know one's own native language and know it well. She also talks about it being important that one is proficient and fully competent in the dominant language of the host culture, but at the same time developing an awareness of the two languages (local and dominant) and cultures as separate and distinct, each with their own values. Clearly, Aisha is making very conscious language choices. Her definitions and interpretations of literacy suggest that her underlying values and beliefs are related to these choices. In her own words Aisha explains:

*To me reading and writing is one thing and to my friends they are something else; I think that we all have our different views of what reading and writing are, and we can also develop them in different ways. Because I don't think it's just about being able to read a sign in the street or a title on a book cover. It's more than that, to me it's the way I engage with what I'm reading, what experiences I bring, it's a whole lot of other things. My feelings about reading and writing are always moving, they are not static, but for me because I reflect on my everyday things, I have to ask questions, and I think that the teachers should also do the same. They need to ask what we think reading and writing mean, rather than assume that they already know (Aisha).*

Literacy learning for Aisha took place mainly in the home, although mainstream education was also acknowledged as being important. Even though Aisha has not gone through a formal education system as such, she describes herself as being 'educated':

*Even though I have gone through an education system, it's been in Arabic, but I still see myself as being educated and just because I have not had a proper English education, it doesn't mean that I am any less. I value knowledge and education and I hope to get the most from the classes and I really aspire to going to university (Aisha).*

Aisha's definitions of literacy demonstrate the diversity of textual practices in her life and the different purposes to which they are put, which confirms the broad range of literacy use. Her definitions shift the focus of literacy beyond being solely relevant to learning and assessment. Aisha's definitions and interpretations of what is meant by literacy are broad and fluid. Her interpretations and definitions provide a way of understanding that writing is more than spoken language written down. Her definitions of literacy embrace more than the act of reading and

writing; they enable the discussion of literacy to move beyond the traditional formulations of the socio-linguistic and the psycholinguistics, as she explains.

*Because we are all from different linguistic communities, we have lots of different ways of reading and writing, hence we need to move away from seeing a one way to reading and writing and move to seeing many ways, if that makes much sense! Particularly when some of our learning takes place outside the classroom, in our homes, in our communities, at the mosques, and at the Arabic schools. We are always learning, and it's not just in the classroom (Aisha).*

Community Domain

The community is where Aisha exhibits the greatest variety and diversity of texts used. She writes in local newspaper columns, she writes letters to the editors of the community newsletter, she designs posters, and produces petition leaflets. She often accesses community bulletin boards, and the Internet for fast and easy access to news, particularly on the Middle East. She even designated a small area on the bulletin board to share latest news on issues in the Yemen. These were updated regularly and Aisha and the other women show a genuine interest, as they would regularly add to the notice board. These additions are sometimes in the form of cut-out e-mails, photographs, and used envelopes with Yemeni stamps on, artefacts and at times even samples of Yemeni sweets.

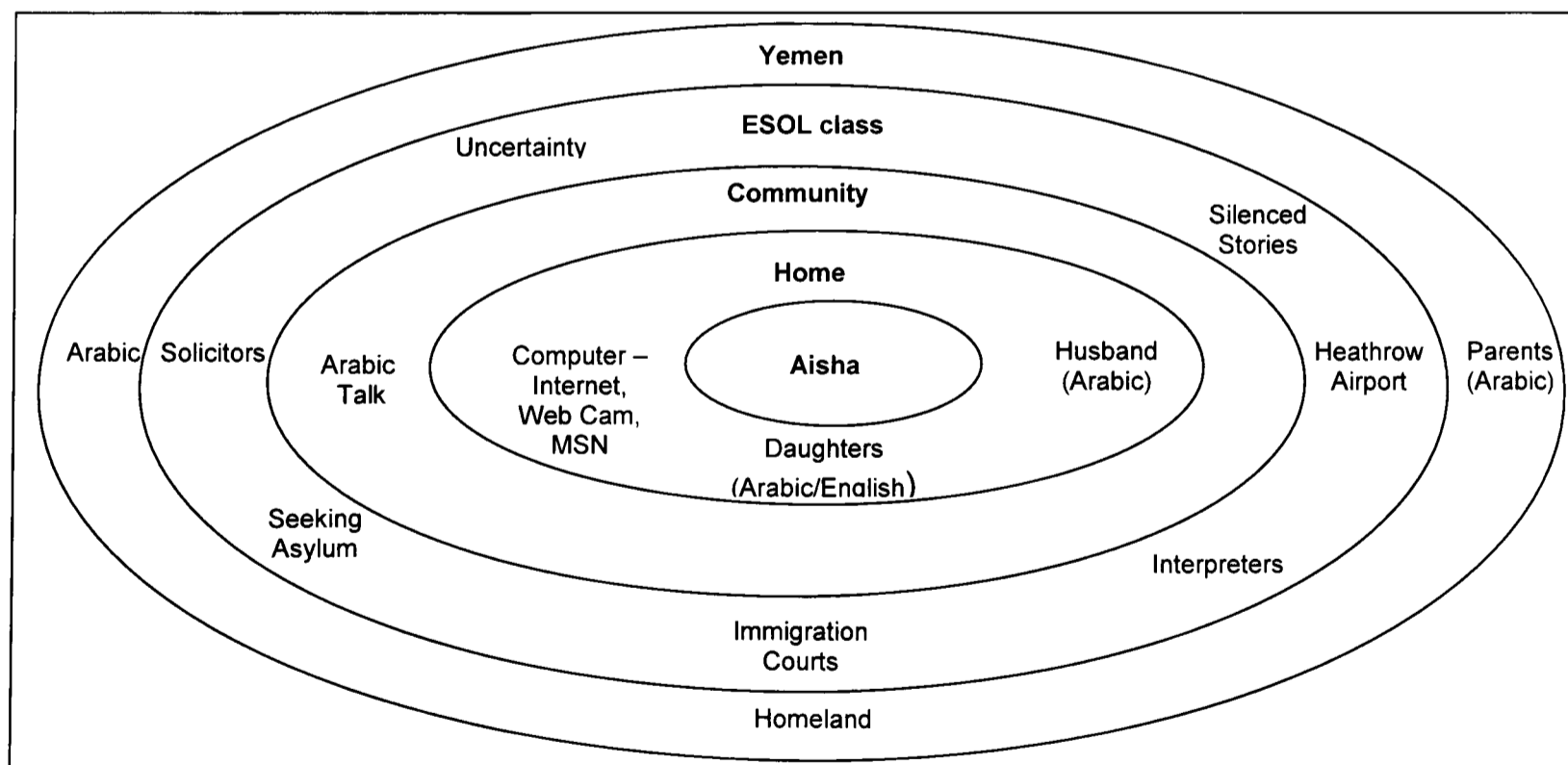


Figure 3: Aisha's Literacy World (adapted from Kenner, 2000)

### ESOL Domain

The bulletin board played an important part in Aisha's attendance at the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) class and an important part of her textual encounters. Aisha draws on various domains of literacy in order to design a committee-meeting flyer; she draws on complex skills of decoding and encoding print, viewing and representing visual communication, involving multiple literacies both in Arabic and in English. She also draws on various literacy events embedded in practices, including the practice of telling stories to her children. This illustrates the importance of the connection between the home domain and the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classroom for Aisha to succeed, and it being a way of overcoming possible distances between her home and the ESOL setting.

### ***Saba's Literacy World (See Fig.4)***

#### ESOL Domain

Saba talks about empowerment being linked with knowledge and cultural awareness. For Saba, an understanding of the standardised formal skills needed for ESOL participation has helped her gain access to the host culture and develop essential understandings of how British culture works. Saba believes that without fluent English skills, she would have been marginalized, unable to participate as fully as she does in British society. She explains that language skills gave her access to the host culture and made it possible for her to learn about many of its unwritten cultural rules and taboos. She explains that this way she is able to make sense of the local etiquette, and to comprehend more than words. This is what she means by cultural awareness and consequent empowerment. She goes on to explain that other multilingual women need to learn to acquire these skills, and she suggests that this learning can and should happen through explicit instruction in the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) setting. She emphasized, that at the same time, this cultural awareness must not only target the host culture, but also the local culture. Saba talks about there being different ways of reading and writing the world in a range of modalities, which are central to her textual practices:

*When I reflect on what reading and writing mean to me, I think it's lots of things, it's about the way I speak, the way I think, the values I bring to reading and writing, and the way I'm engaged with a text. We all practice reading and writing in different ways because we are from different social groups and from different backgrounds (Saba).*

Saba's different textual practices are linked to a wide range of social identities, which I have defined in Chapter Two, which are embedded in diverse social institutions, as such they provide the need and the means for reflecting on our own taken-for granted ways of saying, doing, thinking, and valuing. Saba acquires alternative and additional ways of being in the world - that is, new social identities. As she explains:

*The way I read will no doubt differ to the way my friends read, because for me it's not just about decoding a sentence, it's about what I bring to that sentence, it's about where my experiences are from, and how they've changed. The skills that I gained were acquired at home, through communicating with my mother, through my everyday perplexities and curiosities of my own life. They have not been acquired through formal learning, by sitting at a desk, but by being in my community, by being a local, by networking, and by being in control of my own learning (Saba).*

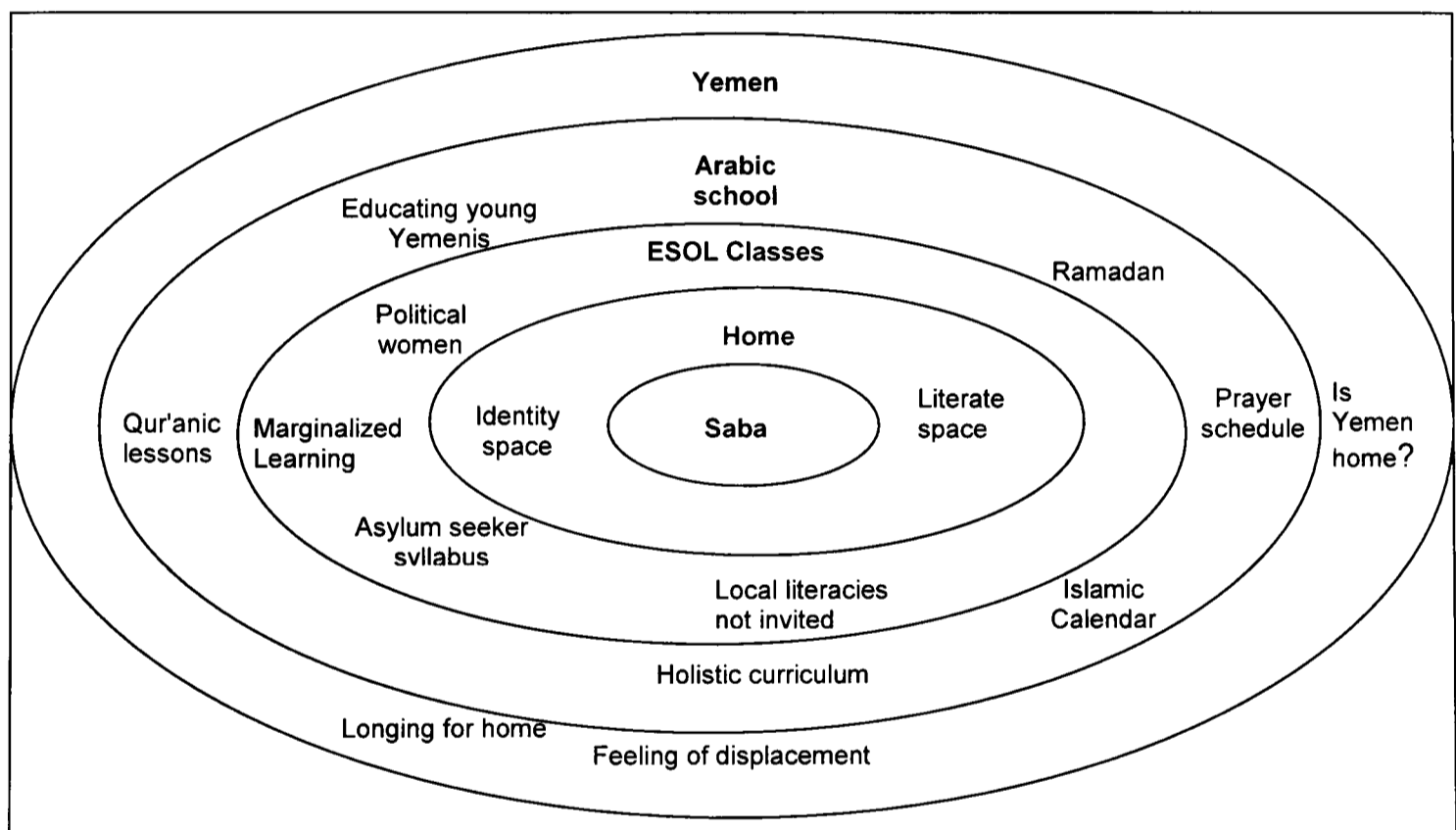


Figure 4: Saba's Literacy World (adapted from Kenner, 2000)

There emerged a significant variety and cultural specificity to Saba's literacy practices across different social contexts. Saba brings to the classroom a different sense of the rules for using language and texts in particular settings. Therefore at times there is a misinterpretation in terms of the textual practices Saba brings to the classroom where cultural differences maybe understood as absences or even failures, for example writing in Arabic in her diary during the ESOL classes. This way ESOL practice contributes to a narrow and rigid definition of literacy, as something being separate to social dialogue and defined more as 'decontextualised knowledge, which is validated through text performances' (Cook-Gumperz, 1986:80). And so

when literacy is taught in the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) setting simply as a skill of coding and de-coding, multilingual learners no doubt are neglected in terms of learning how to construct meaning through texts recognised by the ESOL curriculum.

### *Concluding Thoughts*

In mapping the informants' literacies across various domains, I have been able to highlight that literacy for the informants is bound up with their identity and practices. The shaping of their literacy practices takes place in a number of different domains, whether in the classroom, at home, in the community or at the mosque. Taking on an approach that looks at literacy as a social practice as discussed in Chapter Two, has involved acknowledging that the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classroom is only one of many settings where literacy takes place. It recognises that the literacy practices in the ESOL setting may be different from those practiced by the women in the community. Pahl (2002) considers that:

Who we are and who we are allowed to be, are shaped in part by the way we use literacy. The literacy practices, we use, however may include multiple forms of representation. Our understanding of what it means to be literate needs to include other forms of symbol making. This could include icons used on the screen, symbols and signs associated with the cultural spaces we occupy, drawings and photographs, which connect to oral and literacy practices (Pahl, 2002:24).

Finally, by mapping practices in this way, distinctive literacies in different domains are identified; literacies in everyday life, in the community, in the classroom and in the women's homes are contrasted in their practices. The domains tend to be more fluid, where practices are also more hybrid. In their lives outside the ESOL setting, the women are fully involved in society and participate in a wide range of diverse textual practices. In this chapter I have set the scene for the empirical chapter by providing contextualising information on the informants' literacy worlds. It is now time to foreground the informants' textual practices, through a themed analysis of the research data in order to answer the research questions as set out in Chapter One. I now turn to Chapter Ten, where I begin the themed analysis of the research data, the second stage of the analysis.

## CHAPTER TEN

### Threads and Themes

Drawing from the women's stories and classroom visits common threads began to emerge, which I grouped into categories in order to interpret meaning. Emerging themes were identified and grouped together into threads; narrative threads were the major themes emerging from the analysis of all the data (using thematic data groupings) enabling the diversity of informants views to be identified and interpreted and a depth of meaning to be created through this process. This approach positioned the interpretation of current experience within a broader past, present and future context (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Having introduced and discussed the way these themes emerged from the life history interviews and ESOL classroom fieldwork in Chapter Seven, I now go on to use these themes to frame the analysis of the research data. Six key themes were identified as they contextualise the informants' literacy practices and these are:

- *Blurring the Lines: Infused Hybrid Identities*
- *Literacy and Power: A Didactic Encounter*
- *Multilingual Practices: Discounted Literacies*
- *Religious Literacies: Words of Sacred Texts*
- *Digital Literacies: A New Communicative Order*
- *Spaces of Authoring: Literacy Narratives*

In this chapter I focus on how the informants' identities are constructed, and how their cultural experiences are inscribed within these practices. Through this themed analysis I hope to contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of social identity in and through literacy practices and literacy events-which can help theorize the dynamics of social identity and the relationship of social identity and literacy events and practices. I analyse how literacy is rooted in conceptions of the informants' identities, and how their literacy practices are infused/embedded into their identities as multilingual learners.

#### ***Blurring the Lines: Infused Hybrid Identities***

In the first theme which I have labelled 'Blurring the lines', I explore the notion of literacy entailing social identities, which are developed throughout the informants' narratives. Social identity has many meanings. Traditionally, social identity has been used to refer to the social

group to which an individual belongs, such as an ethnic group, gender, racial group, economic class and so on. Within an ESOL classroom, a student's social identity might include membership in a reading group or a peer group. Social identity has recently been used to describe more subtle, situated and dynamic social relationships. Instead of being fixed, predetermined and stable social identities (also described as social positions) are viewed as beings constructed through the interactions people have with each other (sometimes referred to as social positions) and as a consequence of the evolving social structures of social institutions. As I have explained in Chapter Two, this investigation conceives of literacy as a social practice, the potentials and limits of which are deeply embedded within and mediated by socio-historical contexts (Barton, 1994 and Cook-Gumperz, 1986). Hence, this investigation is a move away from the psychological model of literacy as a purely cognitive activity divorced from the 'political context of social relationships, representational and material production' (Cook-Gumperz, 1986:36). The skills-oriented approach embedded in ESOL policy (Basic Skills Agency, 1996; ESOL Consultation, 2008) makes the presumption that it is homogenous literacy which is the principle and focal literacy that multilingual learners would require and utilise throughout their lives. However as educators, classroom practitioners and researchers we need to question the existence of a single, homogenous 'literacy' of a universal set of skills of literate practices (Barton, 1994). Hamilton, Barton and Ivanic (1994) claim that instead there are a number of literacies that may coexist differentially within social spaces, including the literacies of multilingual learners, which are shaped by the social actions and imperatives of particular communities and institutions. Much of our everyday activities are mediated by literacy because society is textually mediated which needs to be investigated, not only by linking culture and cognition, but also by analysing the dynamics of textually mediated communities of practice.

Noora described a world of literacies outside the ESOL classroom, which may not be recognised within the ESOL classroom:

*The women and I have got a small group together and we help each other in different ways. For example because I can write Arabic and some of the women want to write letters to their families back home in Yemen without their husbands knowing, they dictate and I write the letters for them (Noora).*

Literacy happens in many places and situations, with varying degrees of emphasis on actual reading and writing. Noora's use of texts affects not only her own identity, but also the character of the social relationships and social institutions of which she is a part. Baynham and Prinsloo's (2001) fluid view of literacy is very much contrary to the rigid ways in which the



current phonics-based literacy learning is being taught in many ESOL settings (Basic Skills Agency and Skills for Life). Once broad definitions of literacy are used, with the notion that literacy is invariably attached to certain socio-cultural contexts, literacy environments can potentially be seen everywhere.

Noora and Aisha explain that literacies, like other uses of language, entail social identities:

*For me it's lots of issues, it's the colour of my skin, it's the way I dress and the way I speak. My accent, even when I call the housing department to report a repair, the staff make you feel very small, and they say that it would be better if I spoke through an interpreter. If we're not allowed to practice speaking English, how are we ever going to learn and not depend on interpreters all the time? This way I feel very reliant on someone else to speak for me, because that's what they are doing, they are speaking for me, and I don't feel like I'm in charge do you know what I mean? I want them to hear me and not the interpreter. But when I am telling you my story, it's my voice, it's me speaking, it's me that's coming through the story (Noora).*

*For a long time I resisted being called a refugee, I resisted being called an asylum seeker. How could I accept being anonymous, being camouflaged, being invisible; I refused to be a number, a statistic, and I refused to have my identity stripped away from me. When I reflect on who I am, where I am from, what community I associate myself with, and what language I speak, I find that I'm much more than a number on a file, I have lots of identities, not just one. I have a sort of relocated identity, an identity that has shifted in time, place, and culture (Aisha).*

Leaving Yemen and coming to England, an alien situation in many ways is not only a physical movement but also a migration of Yemeni women's ethnic identities and their ways of viewing the world. Norton (2000) proposes that identity formation is realised not only through language, culture, and politics but also through gender, ethnicity, social class, and religion. A part of identity may be packaged into what may be referred to as 'owned' literacy (Masny, 1999). Data from the current study suggests that 'being literate' and owning literacies are embedded in their ideological beliefs and values. There is almost inevitably a mismatch between the literacy practices owned by the women and the literacy practices owned by those mainstream groups.

For Saba, cultural artefacts play an important role in her identity formation. She uses cultural artefacts such as images and symbols (physical embodiments of cultural discourses and cultural practices) to modulate her behaviour, cognition, and emotion to overcome negative social positioning and become what Bourdieu (1991) might call 'legitimately literate'.

*At home I use Arabic for various reading and writing exercises, particular during Ramadan when I read the Quran, and read the Arabic calendar in order to use the exact times for the prayers and for breaking the fast which is not as easy as people think. It's not an ordinary calendar it's the lunar moon calendar in Arabic its called السنة الهجرية.*

*So I use this calendar quite a lot particularly for religious and cultural celebrations (Saba).*

Cultural artefacts play an important role in the formation of literacies and identities, but at the same time it is important to recognise that artefacts themselves are also not neutral, but instead are situated in relations of power. The texts the women study at the ESOL class are suffused with ideologies and an example is the text on sunbathing and beach holiday activities which I discuss later on this chapter. Dyson averred, ‘meanings do not come in any direct way from the stories themselves; meanings are constructed and reconstructed in the social world that takes upon the story’ (Dyson, 1994:229). In Saba’s reference to language she suggests that ideologies are not merely shared ideological beliefs within the Yemeni culture but complex social phenomenon involving the Yemeni culture, social class, and social institutions. Language ideologies have been defined in many different ways (Woolard, 1998), but for me as a multilingual researcher, it is a term through which notions of ideology are linked to ‘language or discourse to characterize the development of beliefs and attitudes toward the learning and use of a particular language’ (Woolard, 1998:27).

Saba talks about literacy as a social practice that is rooted in conceptions of her identity, knowledge, and being. As such, literacy is constantly being redefined by Saba and her social group (Gee, Hull and Lankshear, 1996). Therefore, it becomes important to realize that the acquisition of literacy implies acquisition of the values and uses associated with literacy:

*When I reflect on what reading and writing mean to me, I think it’s lots of things, it’s about the way I speak, the way I think, the values I bring to reading and writing, and the way I’m engaged with a text. We all practice reading and writing in different ways because we are from different social groups and from different backgrounds (Saba).*

By viewing literacy as a socially constructed practice, Saba becomes an active agent who constructs meaning while developing perceptions, values, goals and purposes about ways in which literacy is used (Carrington and Luke, 1997; Gee, 1990; Luke, 2004; Muspratt, Luke and Freebody, 1997). Saba explains that this is a process by which she participates in the Yemeni community for gaining group membership and, in turn, co-constructing the social practices of her community. Saba’s notion of literacies seems to be always situated within specific social practices with specific discourses. As such her literacy practices appear in multiple forms that have socio-political, cultural and ideological significance, and so I refer to the women’s practices as ‘literacies’ in multiple manifestations. Saba also talks of literacy as not being a set of static, decontextualised, discrete skills, rather literacy for Saba is dynamic, situated and multifaceted, and happens through local practices which are ‘embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles’ (Street, 2003:1). As such I have used the plural designation

'literacies' extensively in this investigation because I feel it supports the concept that competence cannot be absolute but only relative to specific contexts, communities and practices.

*The way I read will no doubt differ to the way my friends read, because for me it's not just about decoding a sentence, it's about what I bring to that sentence, it's about where my experiences are from, and how they've changed. The skills that I gained were acquired at home, through communicating with my mother, through my everyday perplexities and curiosities of my own life. They have not been acquired through formal learning, by sitting at a desk, but by being in my community, by being a local, by networking, and by being in control of my own learning. This way I feel that my learning, and my own way of reading and writing are valued (Saba).*

We are also living in a rapidly changing, culturally and linguistically diverse society, and I found the term 'literacies' and 'multiliteracies' to signal multiple communication channels, hybrid texts forms, new social relations and the 'interesting salience of linguistic and cultural diversity' (Schultz and Hull, 2002:26). The term 'multiliteracies', which I have discussed earlier in Chapter One and Chapter Two also encapsulates significant shifts in how I have come to view literacy. This term I feel helps to provide a bridge between community-based texts and classroom-based texts, which encourage an interdisciplinary approach to literacy learning through the use of knowledge across disciplines. This framework also acknowledges that 'literacy goes beyond the printed words by incorporating multiple modes of meaning found in new information and communication technologies' (Schultz and Hull, 2002:27).

Aisha talks about writing and reading letters, which are practices infused into her identity as a multilingual learner. She brings her identities into the making, and her cultural experiences are also inscribed within these practices.

*There are lots of activities that I'm involved in outside the class that I really want to take into the class and talk about but I am always worried about them being welcomed. My own experiences, my own sort of understandings, my own ways of reading and writing, my ways of switching between Arabic and English, my own accounts of how I read and write and what I read and write (Aisha).*

When Aisha was sending e-mails to her family in Yemen, her literacy practices were situated within a specific time and a specific space, and these practices are connected to her own identity. These identities are diverse and made up of hybrid and multiple experiences. Aisha's identities have helped shape her literacy practices, for example when in the community she engages in certain forms of textual practices and when in the ESOL classroom she engages in different textual practices. Kalthum on the other hand, talks about acquiring language and literacy by being informally socialized into the practices and values of contexts in which she is immersed.

*I couldn't even understand any of them; some parts were about policy, research and other government agencies. I kind of developed my own way of coping. There was a need for me to understand, a need for information, so I began looking for certain keywords, recurrent words and began to develop my own ways for coping with the difficulties of being unable to understand the document. Over time I noticed that my relationship with reading and writing had changed, and it's not stood still, and it continues to change because I came to England, and I experienced a change of culture, a change of life, and a new community (Kalthum).*

The array of literacy practices with which Kalthum and the other women are involved include interactions around texts in a range of domains, didactic encounters, community advocacy, including ways of dealing with bureaucracies, print managing practices, and community practices. It is clear that values and practices regarding their interactions with texts are culture-specific, patterned and variable, and the oral bases of literacy (storytelling) contribute to and shape their literacy acquisition (Literacy Harvest, 2003).

For Noora, cultural learning is an important part of communicative competence, where learning about culture is also part of learning English. She talks about language learning consisting of more than the ability to understand new linguistic structures, but requiring an understanding and appreciation of the cultural context in which these structures occur. Noora is critical of ESOL practices particularly that which solely promotes western values and approaches that are hegemonic and ultimately self-serving.

*We were asked to read extracts from a women's experience of being on a beach and to write about similar experiences of being on the beach. The women and I all felt a little bit lost, we just couldn't click with tasks we were given and we had to pretend like we were really interested because we needed to pass this module (Noora).*

Contrary to this, if multilingual learners are to perceive the target culture as dominant or their own culture inferior to the target culture, then acquisition, as Baynham and Prinsloo (2001) remarked, maybe hindered. Cultural teaching plays an important part of the ESOL program in this investigation and a significant amount of time is spent explaining British traditions (Conteh, Martin and Robertson, 2007).

Saba talks about the limited opportunities for effective literacy learning at the ESOL classes, because her potential as a multilingual learner is neglected. Such practice fails to recognise the dynamic implications between literacy and identity that the women navigate on a daily basis across multiple settings.

*And so I would hope that the ESOL class becomes more than a place where I'm taught the technical skills, which are required for using the written language, but a place where I feel safe bringing in those experiences. Our learning cannot be measured in terms of absolute level of skills, but with communicative practices with which we engage in various areas of our life. It's important that our teachers recognise this and invite our own communicative practices ( ممارسات الاتصالات ) into the classroom (saba).*

While the ESOL practitioner did not appear to disapprove of the use of Arabic in class, she revealed dissatisfaction when it was used, as Noora explains:

*The teacher sometimes shouts 'English ladies please, some of you have been here for years and still can't even read or write'. We find it really difficult to share our experiences in English, it doesn't feel the same and it feels like we are pretending to be something we're not. The teacher has a hard time getting us to 'speak English' to each other, but what do you expect? A group of Arabic women in a room, who have lots of things to say, and they need to say them quickly, they'll speak Arabic. Sometimes we even write small handwritten message in Arabic to each other so that the teacher doesn't understand. It's a shame that we're not allowed to speak Arabic in the class, because I find it much easier to discuss things in Arabic, or talk about particular experiences, I feel that I learn much more, I actually learn things much quicker, and I even find that I can concentrate on a task for longer (Noora).*

When the women were involved in classroom-based activities, a lot of talk was going on both in English and in Arabic. The collaborative learning practices of the Yemeni women combined with the use of their first language makes them a boisterous group in the ESOL classroom. The teacher would often shout out 'English only, ladies'. The teacher appeared to be heavily influenced by her views of language and literacy learning in which reading and writing are predicated on stages of development, beginning with smaller units of comprehension and graduating to larger ones. Similarly, in writing, the teacher was concerned that the women work within models of conventional writing. While one would have hoped that the cultural and linguistic experiences of the learners are brought into the ESOL classroom, from the informants' reflections on their classroom experiences the teacher did not seem to engage fully with experiences which give meaning to the women's lives. The teacher's responses drew my attention to the need for more research similar to the research done through NRDC by Celia Roberts et al (2007), into the attitudes and reflections of ESOL practitioners as major constructors and contributors to ESOL provisions.

Some of the Yemeni women struggled somewhat when they first entered ESOL education, and years later, some are still required to attend basic 'remedial classes', particularly those in the process of applying for naturalisation to become British citizens. This is due to a law that came into place in 2004, which states that all applicants for British citizenship must demonstrate that they have successfully completed Entry level three in English, and this must be evidenced by

accreditation and certification. Like many of the women attending the ESOL class, Kalthum was expected to complete the programme of study, despite the fact that she could engage in lengthy, in-depth, quite complex conversations in English. And similar to other women at the class, Kalthum was unable to enrol on the higher-level programme of study until she had successfully completed all the entry levels. Hence certification and accreditation were of high importance both to Kalthum and the other women.

*But when we come to the class, we are expected to forget about everything and talk about the assessment we have to prepare for next Tuesday, because if you don't do well then you cannot move up to level three. Who cares about moving up to level three, when you don't know whether you will still be in the country the following day? To be fair to the teachers they do ask and they say that they understand that it must be difficult to live this way, but that there is nothing that they can do, and they have a set amount of time to get through the modules and to pass you need to get through all of them. A new law also came into place a year ago which meant that even if you have been granted indefinite leave to remain in the U.K (which means you can stay in the United kingdom for as long as you want), to be naturalised as a British citizen you have to sit a citizenship exam and pass a certain level of English. The Home Office sent some of the women a book that they can use to help them prepare for the exam. The teacher sometimes goes through this and helps the women prepare. I find it really difficult to understand that in order for people to be integrated into British society they have to sit an Exam which asks whether they know how to queue at the Post Office, how to ask a Policeman directions politely. I feel very strongly about this document. I also feel that there is more to British life than queuing at the post office. Why do they not tell us about how to get a good education, a good career, and good schools for our children? What about our culture, where does this fit in to the exam? Do we not bring anything to the life we live here? which many of us consider 'home' (Kalthum).*

### ***Literacy and Power: A Didactic Encounter***

Through the theme of literacy and power, I have explored the question of power and cultural form as they are raised and developed throughout the women's narratives. I have analysed how power relations construct and privilege certain discourses and texts, in addition to analysing the role multilingual literacy practices play in shaping the women's literacies particularly in the formation of literate identities, by focusing on how power relations construct and privilege certain discourses and texts. Some literacy researchers view power as residing in structures, texts, and accumulated knowledge of society. The debate on whether literacy leads to cognitive or social development is argued by Levi-Strauss (2000) who states that:

Writing is a strange thing...The one phenomenon which has invariably accompanied it is the formation of cities and empires: the integration into a political system, that is to say, of considerable number of individuals, and the distribution of those individuals into a hierarchy of caste and classes...It seems to favour rather the exploitation than the enlightenment of mankind. (Levi-Strauss, 2000:291-292).

The literacy debate is important politically because it involves claims about 'great divides' (Finnegan, 1988; Scribner and Cole, 1981), which are also about essential differences in humankind, in particular in the cultural and cognitive development of 'literate' and 'non-literate' (Goody, 1987; Goody and Watt, 1963; Ong, 1978; Street, 1984). Such debates about the formal differences and similarities between 'literate' and 'non-literate' are said to underlie many educational problems, and the role of literacy in economic betterment of marginalized groups (Goody, 1986; Ong, 1982; Street, 1984; Havelock, 1963; Scribner and Cole, 1981). In examining the power-related aspects of literacy, as educators and researchers we can better understand the meaning making within wider contextual domains: 'the ideological antecedents and disjuncture of the existing order and transformations in representational technologies that have facilitated histories, imagined and real' (Levis-Strauss, 2000:292).

The view taken by myself as a multilingual researcher is that literacy is essentially embedded; its nature and meaning are shaped by, rather than determinate of, broad cultural-historical frameworks and specific cultural practices. The interviews with the women have involved discussions on education, politics, and power. An emerging theme that is apparent throughout the interviews is that the political context most definitely has some effect on what the women read and write in terms of what is made accessible as well as what is denied. What has emerged from their reflections is the role that literacy practices in the homes, community and ESOL class play in shaping their current literacy lives. I have explored this theme and the ways in which the women's literacy practices intersect with their lives in a society dominated by the English language. It is also clear from the women's stories that the complex issues of language, text, textual access, social and cultural domains, and power relations (Luke, 2003) all transact to contribute to a pattern of gains and losses for the women who have crossed linguistic and political borders in an effort to improve their lives.

Saba talks about power not adhering to text types alone but obtained from the social and institutional status of text user:

*I think that most of what I'm taught is just a surface level kind of learning more of basic skills. I'm not taught how to think critically, how to negotiate professionally; I'm not taught how to communicate with those higher up in society. I don't know how to interact with different social institutions, in dealing with professionals, in communicating, in acting and understanding. I don't have access to the knowledge controlled by those at the top, and I feel that it's these skills that I would like to develop at the class (Saba).*

It is important that elements of access and voice are combined in encouraging critical negotiation of identities and literacies within institutional hierarchies. Toohey and Waterstone (2004) claim this can be possible by providing analytic tools that link the micro-features of texts

with powerful, local and global discourse. Others have recommended an open dialogue and examination of the forms of discrimination encountered by many multilingual learners as a way of validating their experiences and resisting ESOL syllabus design. I sometimes wonder whether such discussions are themselves distancing or othering, as Luke (2003) illuminates how:

Our language and our realities are put into existence, how discourses, power and knowledge operate on and through our micro-interactions with learners and how labels we assign that are also systemic and discriminatory, functioning, in effect, to produce the social and educational margins that they name (Luke, 2003:46).

Luke (2003) views literacy as connecting the way texts arise within wider social practices by ‘focusing on texts, and their connection to other social worlds; a fruitful theoretical space is unfolded’ (Luke, 2003:67). In working from the entity of ‘text’ and examining relations of power with and beyond moments of reading and writing we are able to connect to larger discourse of power (Smith, 1999). Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic (2000) consider that by focusing on how power relations construct and privilege certain discourses and texts, ‘text-making can be traced across the way in which different discourses are called upon in social interaction and in texts in the context of homes, classrooms and communities’ (p.25).

As people, we all use literacy in one shape or another, and it can be a way of becoming empowered. Literacy for the women in this study is a way in which they express their identities, and has become a way of tracing their own practices. The women’s ‘unofficial’ literacy practices are just as important as the ‘official’ literacy practices they participate in. These practices are multiple, whether ‘official’ or ‘unofficial;’ whether ‘hidden’ or made ‘visible’, they all help shape the way literacy is used. Context, culture and community have all contributed to shaping the literacy practices of the women in this study. The classroom visits and narrative interviews indicate that literacy and education are highly valued among Yemeni women, because they tended to view literacy as something essential for their lives. They also equate literacy with education and with access to power. However, it is important to recognise that in ‘democratic nations’, it is generally assumed that knowledge is power and that knowledge is based on literacy. The more literate a person is, the more knowledgeable and more likely she/he is to access privileged positions as well as to gain the capacity to influence the thoughts and behaviours of others-that is, to exercise power (Lipdet, 1960). Galtung (1964) stratified citizens on a centre-periphery dimension according to their proximity to the centre of society. Those close to the centre of society were more literate, were more knowledgeable, and enjoyed the benefits of society, including political power, more than those in the periphery.



Saba explains that literacy is related strongly to social contexts, and as such lacking official literacy ability is not necessarily a major problem in her life:

*I don't feel that I have the standard of social skills to be fully involved in British society and I feel that's what I should be learning. I don't need to learn about the survival English because I feel that survival English comes automatically, it comes out of desperation, out of a need to be able to speak the minimum. I don't need the minimum anymore, I need to know how to converse with the professionals, how to further my knowledge and understanding, I need to know to develop myself intellectually, and the ethos of the ESOL curriculum I found to be pulling me back. I know it all sounds very negative, and I also have learnt a great deal from the classes and I've made some lifetime friends, but I also feel that intellectually I haven't progressed (Saba).*

Individuals can be lacking certain literacy skills in a normative sense, based for example, on a standardised literacy test, but still manage their lives well enough in the classroom and in the community. Only rarely did lack of an official literacy appear to seriously impede on how the multilingual women functioned in their own communities. For the women, there were other factors such as immigration status, material poverty, and lack of formal qualifications that appeared to be more significant to their marginalisation.

Noora also talks about the need to turn away from categorising people as 'literate' and 'illiterate'. Importantly, theories of everyday social practice need to be based on the premise that literacy practices are always and already embedded in particular social forms of textual practices. Such textual practices as Baynham and Prinsloo (2001) claim are 'fundamentally mutually constructed and shaped by both institutionalised and formal relations of power' (Baynham and Prinsloo, 2001:46). Noora's life is mediated by literacy. In various areas of her everyday life, for example in communicating with bureaucratic organisations such as jobcentres, the Home Office, Social Services, or even her social participation within her own community, her activities were mediated by literacy. She lives and participates in a textually mediated social world that is inflected with power:

*What I am trying to say is that I was managing, I was paying the bills, I was going to the shops, I would get on the bus and communicate to the bus driver, I would communicate using the little English I had and I managed to get by. I couldn't read fluently, my written language was not as good as it should be. Anyway I don't think because you can read or write that it makes you any better a person, or being able to prove that they you at a certain level in reading or writing. To me what's more important is what you do with those skills and how you use them to help others. Anyway we all read in our different ways and we write in our different ways (Noora).*

For Aisha, the ESOL programme did not replace 'illiteracy' with 'literacy'. Instead, her religious, community and home literacies have helped establish her literate self. Aisha indicates that being 'literate' has become a fundamental criterion of worth and standing, and part of this

criterion is a 'schooled' literacy, which has become a basic skill in establishing it as the criterion of educability. As such Aisha's identities are shaped by 'illiterate' vs. 'literate' dichotomy. This dichotomy is also associated with profound ideological promises as well as with 'ideological dangers for illiteracy which signify economic stagnation, political decay, and cultural disorder' (Janks, 2000:34):

*When I think about it, reading and writing play a major role in my life, being able to read and write didn't happen over night for me, it's not like I was 'illiterate' and all of a sudden I became a 'literate' person. I have been going to school since I was four years old and it's not like I have been 'blessed'. I'm quite an advanced reader and writer in Arabic, and over the last few years I have become more literate in English and it's mainly because there is a need for me to be able to read and write English for my immigration case (Aisha).*

Janks (2000) argues that an examination of the cultural differences associated with 'illiteracy' and 'literacy' need to more fully account for the colonial influences of the past (since the Yemen was colonised by the British for over twenty years), as well as the system of internalised colonization the women may impose upon themselves. For the women to internalize, or accept, a dominant-subordinate structure as 'normal' creates an internalised system of failure which Janks (2000) posits will no doubt result in low self-esteem and lack of motivation to transcend the traditional pattern of colonial domination for future generations of multilingual learners and their families (Janks, 2000:22).

Aisha talks about literacy being both a catalyst for social change and a result of numerous other types of social transformation. She reminds us that literacy is not a neutral, one-dimensional tool, but rather a set of lived experiences that will differ from community to community.

*I've learnt that being able to speak English properly helps to have access to better things; do you know what I mean? It helps in getting a better education, better medical care; it also means being more aware of my own rights. I'll be more accepted when my own way of speaking English is accepted, and so I decided to enrol on the ESOL programme (Aisha).*

Kulick and Stroud (1993) claim 'literacy itself does not have agentive force to change societies. It is humans who are the active force in any transformational process accompanying the introduction of literacy' (Kulick and Stroud, 1993:34). When Goody (2002) describes 'the transforming effects of literate activity on human life' (p.2), he assumes that the advent of literacy will produce the same social and cognitive transformations no matter who learns to read and write, and no matter where or when literacy emerges. In opposition to this view, I concur with Schieffelin (2000), who writes how a 'community takes up literacy, how it develops, how

it is understood and deployed depends very much on the ideology, and context of those to who it is being introduced' (p.293). Thus my approach throughout this investigation has been to situate the literacy practices of my informants socially, historically and, for my research purposes, intertextually.

Aisha talks about how language and literacy cannot be reduced to phonics in reading, spelling and grammar in the area of writing. She clearly feels that rather than thinking in terms of phonics, spelling and grammar, it is important to think about what kinds of literacy she and other multilingual learners need in order to read and think things critically:

*I feel strongly about the kind of learning that I'm involved in, the sort of technical skills I'm taught, and I know that that's why we are on the ESOL programme, but I can't help but think about the other skills we can be taught, there are other things that I bring to the class, that I would like to learn more about, but there is never enough time. The broader skills we need for survival, the skills that empower us as social and cultural beings. At times I feel kind of powerless in terms of my learning; what I mean is that we do sometimes get opportunities to air our views to talk about what we would like to learn, which the teachers make notes of and they promise to try to integrate more topics to the curriculum but it hasn't really changed anything, we still have to struggle with the learning modules that have been set (Aisha).*

Bill Green (in Comber and Green, 1998) refers to an 'instrumental literacy' which is made up of all those proficiencies one needs in order to be able to access a text and understand what it is doing to readers. One way of doing this, as Comber and Green (1998) propose, would be to integrate 'everyday texts' of multilingual learners into the ESOL programme. I strongly believe that multilingual individuals learn more about literacy and what it means to be literate outside of the classroom than they do in the classroom and so if in the classroom setting, multilingual learners are taught how to examine the literacies that they are involved in outside the classroom, they are then able to position and reposition themselves in the outside world. This way they become critical language users and will have a better understanding of how language works in order to reposition themselves in contemporary society in more powerful ways. By conceptualising literacy as a social practice, Aisha has not ignored the cognitive and semiotic processes involved in the production and reception of texts. Instead she talks about recognising that literacy practices which are deemed basic, functional, or of a higher-order, are embedded in issues relating to unequal distributions of power within communities and institutions.

English is clearly important in terms of oral and written communication for Kalthum and Noora but they also feel strongly about the need to develop print literacy in Arabic as a local language and as a way of preserving their cultural identity and in a way resisting and refusing to privilege mainstream and dominant literacies:

*This worries me. Because like any other parent in my situation ideally I would like my children to grow-up being bilingual but this seems to be more and more difficult. My children say that when they dream it's in English, and until they begin to dream in Arabic they will then become bilingual. I am not just worried because they're at risk of losing their mother tongue, but along with the mother tongue there are lots of other factors, such as cultural identity, religious beliefs, cultural values and so on that are at risk of being lost. It's these that I worry about. I want my children to know their roots, to understand their culture, to understand the accomplishments people from our sort of backgrounds have made, but at the same time to be integrated into British society. It is possible to be both at the same time, I don't think you have to compromise who you are to be accepted... it just wouldn't feel right. For this reason I decided to enrol my children at an evening Arabic school (Kalthum).*

*I have even noticed that the younger generations from our community have become more westernised and some can't even speak Arabic. I get worried because even though they're not my children they are part of our community and if we don't help them then we will lose them (Noora).*

Noora fears that the lack of print literacy development in her community language would spell the end of her culture for future generation of Yemenis. She views Arabic print literacy as a means to resisting the dominance of English to gain access to power in her native language. It became apparent through the interviews that she and the other women believe that obtaining an education is one way of helping their community move forward and they feel that Arabic print is one very concrete way that these Yemeni women can resist language domination and assimilation, even for the future generations of Yemeni women. The women talked about being worried that their children would lose their home language and become more associated to British cultures rather than Yemeni cultures. The women felt inferior within the dominant culture; however they had a sense of strong cultural identity, which they were keen to preserve. They constantly reveal their experiences of life at the cultural margins. They talk about a cultural bias commonly held against them and characteristics such as 'asylum seekers', 'refugees', and feelings of 'cultural inferiority' are revealed by them. Therefore as researchers we need to continue to investigate this world, by linking cultures and cognition and analysing the dynamics of textually mediated communities of practice (Goody, 2000). This research has, in turn yielded contrastive studies, which examine the relationship between dominant, class-based practices and those of multilingual learners (Martin-Jones and Jones, 2000; Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Kress, 1995; Street, 1993, 1995, 2001; Rockhill, 1993; Cummins, 2000; Blackledge, 2001; Saxena, 2001; Kenner, 2001; Hornberger, 2003). These studies suggest that the idea that there is a universal set of basic skills does not hold ground. Within this framework, typical classroom-based literacy is seen as just one of many kinds of literacy, namely, the one that comes closest to the literacy practices of socially powerful communities. This view argues that one source of educational problems for language minority learners is the fact that only one

particular set of literacy practice is valued and elevated to the status of the universal standard, not because of any inherent value, but because it is the discourse of those in power. Clearly these findings have strong pedagogical implications, which I will go on to discuss in Chapter Nine.

### ***Multilingual Practices: Discounted Literacies***

This theme focuses on literacy use in contexts beyond the classroom, which I labelled ‘discounted literacies’ as an indication of how multilingual literacy practices are regarded outside the ESOL setting. Through this theme I analyse discounted literacies as those which are not regulated or valued by social institutions, but which have proven to play an important role in the lives of the informants. This is not to say that there is a shift of gaze away from classroom-based literacies, but at a later stage in the study, I re-engage with questions of literacy instruction, understood as ‘situated teaching and learning’. As Szwed (1981) writes:

I propose that we step back from the question of instruction, back to an even more ‘basic’, the social meaning of literacy; that is the roles these abilities play in social life; the varieties of reading and writing available for choice; the contexts of their performance; and the manner in which they are interpreted and tested, not by experts, but by ordinary people in ordinary activities (Szwed, 1981:45).

It is important that literacy practices are related to relations of social power and dominance. This investigation is motivated by a desire to make the ‘invisible’ literacies and meaning orientations of the multilingual home visible and accessible to the ESOL classroom, in the interest of improving outcomes for multilingual learners. Recent work by Pahl (2002) is also driven by making ‘ephemeral’ local family practices visible and available to be taken into account in the mainstream environments of the classroom. There is a powerful argument for the relevance of such studies, and as Baynham and Masing (2000) propose, it needs to be accompanied by some attempt to theorise the relationship between the local, home literacies and those of the classroom. Baynham and Masing (2000) add that ‘we live in a literacy-saturated world; we live in a pedagogised world, where questions of pedagogy, implicit or explicit are never far from discussion’ (p.21).

Diverse texts and diverse features of language are becoming increasingly complex and increasingly part of everyday use. One of the central themes that run through the interview data is that there is no single literacy that can be taught or inculcated with simple equivalent value in cultural capital. Rather there are multiple literacies both taught and learned in the classroom, in the community and in the home. The very nature of the women’s lives, as mothers, as learners,

as refugees, and as asylum seekers involves an extensive array of literacy practices. Some of these practices include writing personal letters to and from family members in the Yemen; there were also myriad legal formalities and correspondence for the women to go through from the Home Office, job centres, local colleges, and their children's schools. Throughout the interviews it was evident that literacy for the women is not a singular concept of a set of skills which they possess to varying degrees and which determine to a large extent their life circumstances. Instead, literacy for the women has proven to be plural, and there are many literacies, depending on what they were doing and where they were. The women talked about different literacies, depending on the contexts, and as Street (2001) explains 'literacies are social practices, and they occur within webs of people and institutions' (p.8). This way all literacies are dynamic, and they are intimately related to 'relations of geographies of power' (Street, 2001:8). Street claims that:

Engaging with literacy is always a social act even from the outset. The ways in which teachers or facilitators and their students interact is already a social practice that affects the nature of the literacy being learned and the ideas about literacy held by participants, especially the new learners and their position in relations of power. It is not valid to suggest that 'literacy' can be 'given' neutrally and then its 'social' effects only experienced afterwards (Street, 2001:8).

The women talk about participating in literacy activities that are rather more complex than those recognised in the ESOL setting, especially when the definition of literacy was extended to include literacy tasks which take into account the informal social networks that promote such tasks. Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005) have advocated an understanding of this social network, termed 'funds of knowledge', which I have discussed in Chapter Two, as a method of enhancing teachers' understanding of learners from multilingual backgrounds. Throughout the women's narratives and their reflections on classroom experiences it is evident that through deploying multilingual and multimodal resources (by which I mean texts that use several modes of communication i.e. speech, writing, images, which are a characteristic of the many kinds of texts in the modern world) the women demonstrate a sophisticated meaning-making capacity, which can be set against the restricted version of literacy in the ESOL setting. However it would be right to say that some mainstream educational settings have been inherently limited in their ability to use more authentic contexts of instruction that could potentially benefit culturally and linguistically diverse learners (Au, 1993; Cummins, 1986; Foley, 1990).

Discounted literacies, as described in Chapter Two, are literacies that are not regulated or systematised by the formal rules, and procedures of social institutions but have their origin in the purposes of everyday life. They are not highly valued by formal social institutions although sometimes they develop in response to these institutions. They are at times disapproved of and can be contrasted with regulated literacies, which are seen as rational and of high cultural value.

They are more common in private spheres than in public spheres. Some discounted literacies are hidden. These include those which are personal and private, where reading or writing are ways of creating a personal space. These are, to use Janet Maybin's (2007) phrase 'Over and Under the Desk' activities, which are more private and hidden. Contrary to this there are the regulated literacies defined as those which are privileged by their association with formal organisations, such as those of the school, the Mosque, the community, the legal system, commerce, medical and welfare bureaucracies. They are part of the specialised discourses of bounded communities of practices, and are standardised and defined in terms of the formal purposes, rather than in terms of the multiple and shifting purposes of individuals and their communities. In regulated literacies there are professional experts and practitioners through whom access to knowledge is controlled, to the extent that such regulated literacies, when grouped together, are given high value, legally and culturally. Regulated literacies are powerful in proportion to the power of the institution that shapes them.

The areas of 'discounted' literacies described here can be compared with those, which Luis Moll identified in his research of Mexican-American households in the United States. Moll (1992) refers to 'funds of knowledge' in communities as the practical exchanges and responses to needs for information and resources shared across families, between siblings, neighbours, and friends. My informants have also developed knowledge of various legal and medical topics. Literacies are embedded in the social relationships that give them their meaning. Discounted literacies tended to be defined in relation to the regulated, the dominant and legitimised practices. The fact that some literacies are supported and legitimated by powerful institutions implies that others are de-valued. Many of the literacies that are influential and valued in the women's day-to-day lives are also ignored culturally; they do not count as 'real' literacy. Neither are the informal social networks, which sustain these literacies, drawn upon or acknowledged, as Kalthum and Aisha explain:

*I have lots of stories like this to tell and I have never really had the opportunity to tell them or even think about my experiences as 'real reading' or 'real writing' (Kalthum).*

*The class should be a place where we can reflect on who we are, it's where we are supposed to be able to talk about the real us, it's a place where we should be allowed to bring the realities we live in our communities into the class (Aisha).*

The women talk about experiencing situations in their everyday life that had motivated them to develop a specialised expertise and launched them into new areas of learning in which they mastered all the resources they could find, including literacy. Often the activities involved encounters with social institutions, dealing with professionals, ways of communicating, acting and understanding. To interact with these situations and to have access to the knowledge

controlled by those in power, literacy became a key tool. At times these practices ranged from reading instruction booklets and guarantees for household items, devotional reading of religious and other inspirational books and deliberate investigations of unknown topics to do with the challenges their children faced at schools. There were also encounters with schools, where the women were acting on behalf of their children and dealing with systems which they found quite mystifying and opaque. Their efforts to obtain resources for their children were often frustrating and consumed a great deal of their time and energy:

*I call their children's school and talk to the teachers and head teachers and interpret what the schools are saying. I know what it was like. When my children were young I would go to the school and want to see and talk to somebody about my daughter, but because my English wasn't very good it was difficult. As a parent I felt powerless, I didn't know the system, it was not easy to enter the school, you had to understand the culture to be able to make sure that your children achieved. Even if I took an interpreter with me, I felt that the school would immediately assume that there was a problem. My aim was to understand the curriculum, and look at how I could help my children. Instead they gave me lots of government documents and told me to read them and if I had any questions to come back. I couldn't even understand any of them; some parts were about policy, research and other government agencies (Kalthum).*

The women also frequently confronted welfare benefit-related problems, where for example completing forms, translating birth certificates meant entitlement to benefits. Other legal problems were related to issues and encounters with the police, the Home Office, courts and insurance companies. A variety of legal problems arose for the women at different stages of their lives. The skills involved in discounted and local literacy practices were learned informally, they were acquired in the women's homes, in their neighbourhoods and their community through the everyday perplexities and curiosities of their lives.

On examining the women's literacy practices it was possible to expose some of the injustices of bureaucratic texts. An example is when Noora was denied the right to housing assistance and was at risk of homelessness, and whose suffering often seemed irrelevant. Noora's account deconstructs the prevalent ideology and pathology around the welfare system which views those on state benefits as a drain on resources, instead portraying the reality of the lives of people who suffer poverty, poor nutrition, poor medical assistance and dental care, in sub-standard housing, and without work or a sound education. Noora explains:

*I still think it's important for me to continue to learn English, because I get lots of forms from the social services department, from the housing department, and when I don't fill them in, I lose money and the rent doesn't get paid.... But now it seems that everything depends on these forms and being able to fill them in is really important. I still try to fill them in, like the TV licence, the meter readings, the change of circumstances form and*



*even the ones we get from the passport office.... But I find that most of our lives are tied to these forms, and we have to keep the social benefit department updated if anything changes in our circumstances. I wanted to go to Yemen a year ago for a visit, but I basically had to get permission from them to say if it was okay for me to go. Because had I not told them, they would have discontinued my benefits and sent me more forms to complete. The forms make me feel like a number on a file that needs to be regularly reviewed otherwise I would lose my entitlements (Noora).*

Norton (1995) considers how negative experiences related to schooling, feeling of fear and low-esteem follow people into adulthood and the discourses around literacy uncover the way in which 'schooled' literacy is the only valued literacy, leaving the many who cannot easily access this abandoned (Norton, 1995). Examples of the women's engagement with bureaucratic literacy practices such as the homeless section, the benefits department, the Home Office, Asylum seeker and Refugee organisations assert that without extensive mediation, only powerful 'schooled' people can easily 'get things done' and so gain access to even more resources and more power (Norton, 1995:67). Studies have shown that literacy, as a resource in itself is not enough for those people disadvantaged by society. The examination of the women's social uses of literacy clearly show that literacy is not the only key to social inclusion, there needs to be cultural, economic and structural changes such as affordable housing and a more inclusive educational policy for there to be any impact on social exclusion.

Blommaert's (2001) study explores narrative inequality in the Belgian asylum procedures by means of a complex of preconditions for communication, noticeable in recorded interviews with African asylum seekers in Belgium. According to Blommaert one of the characteristics of the administrative world we live in is the unchallenged assumption that bureaucratic and administrative clients should have complete control over the medium and communicative skills in which bureaucratic and administrative procedures are being carried out. In England administrative procedures seem to require highly developed literacy skills as well as access to standardised variety of a language. It is interesting to note, as Blommaert (2001) highlights, that literacy requirements seem to increase in size and scope the lower one gets in the hierarchy that is society. The women in this investigation were generally on low incomes and often had to go through complex paperwork in order to receive social welfare benefits, access to social housing, medical treatment and even education for their children. Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic (2000) regard bureaucratic literacies as 'mechanisms for cultural control and surveillance as well as reflections on how globalized capitalist routines and procedures are replacing local interactions and local languages' (p.78). Recognising that language and literacy are never power-neutral is essentially important, because if educators fail to recognise this, the languages, literacies and cultures of multilingual learners will continue to be neglected. Thus, Jim Collins' (1995) comments that 'modern educational systems produce stratified literacies; where elites are

socialized to an interpretative relation to texts, and non-elites to a submissive relation to texts' (1995:84) become pressingly relevant. The classroom setting itself also seems to reflect and reproduce a stratified social system, in which national bourgeoisies have been defined by reading, especially book reading. Collins (1995) speaks about the development of a 'schooled' literacy as being a hegemonic project involving the displacement of non-standard varieties of language and 'a shunting aside or discrediting of alternative literacies' (Collins, 1995:48). One result of such system is the discrediting of the practical knowledge of out-of-classroom literacies of non-elites and an enduring marginalisation of out-of-classroom literacy as 'impractical and unrelated to life and its struggles, combined with an embracing of a realist, dramatic aesthetic literature' (Collins, 1995:56). The literacy practices that the informants are fully involved in take place in different spaces; these are at times at the local oriental supermarkets, on the streets of the local neighbourhoods, at the mosque, at home or even at the community centre. If ESOL educators allow multilingual learners' literacy experiences into the classroom, the ESOL classroom then becomes a space where local and global domains can be reflected, as Kalthum explains:

*The class should be a place where we can reflect on who we are, it's where we are supposed to be able to talk about the real us, it's a place where we should be allowed to bring the realities we live in our communities into the class. Our class is a small family, made up of women who have rich life experiences. It's a cultural place and we have even tried to make the displays reflect this cultural diversity. The displays are full of memories of happiness and sadness, sadness at the loss of our friends, those who have been deported. We aren't really prepared for this part of the asylum process, I know it's always a possibility, but the people around us never know, they don't know if their friends have been deported, where they have gone to, or how we can stay in touch with them. I just wish we had more time to talk about these sorts of experiences in class, particularly in Arabic, because many of us suffer in silence no one is able to talk us through this sadness of having friends taken away from us. But we are always expected to focus on the more important bits of learning that we need to complete (Kalthum).*

The literacy practices the women identified are rooted in everyday purposes and networks. The women draw upon and contribute to such knowledge, which is often local, procedural and minutely detailed. Literacy learning and use are integrated in the women's everyday activities and the literacy elements are an implicit part of such activity. These literacies are as diverse as the social practices. They are hybrid in origin and often it is clear that a particular activity may be classified in more than one way since the women have a mixture of motives for taking part in a given literacy activity. The integration of discounted literacy practices in the informants' everyday lives leads to other kinds of embedding where literacy events written and spoken language are often integrated. Denzin (1991) explains that print and other media are integrated: literacy is integrated with other symbolic systems, such as numeracy, and visual semiotics.

Different topics and activities occur together, 'making it challenging to perceive the boundaries of a single literacy event or practice' (Denzin, 1991:82).

### ***Religious Literacies: Words of Sacred Texts***

In consulting various literature I found that religious literacies are often misunderstood, neglected and even, at times, disparaged. Through the theme of 'religious literacies', I seek to demystify this literacy practice by providing a detailed description, which includes an analysis of the religious literacy practices in the lives of the informants. Through this theme, I have also highlighted that Qu'ranic literacy in particular is an intense, vibrant and esteemed cultural practice which I hope goes some way to laying to rest some of the more pejorative notions that it is predominantly a matter of rote learning with little or no recourse to meaning (Gregory, 1997; 2000).

The informants are from a community which is multilingual, multiliterate and multicultural. The languages, literacies and cultures of this community are woven together, and the informants combine these processes into their lives. It is a dynamic, ever-shifting and evolving process. The informants talk about classroom practices being modelled not only in the home, but also in other community-based locations such as the Mosques. Furthermore, they talk of aspects of both classroom literacy and community literacy meeting in a third space (Gutierrez et al, 1995), that of the Mosque, where they are fused into a practice that can no longer be termed home, school or community, but is a complex and vibrant amalgam of all three. Third space explicitly emphasises the role of the physical and social place in which people interact. There are three main theoretical views of third space. One view positions third space as a way to build bridges from knowledge and practices often marginalized in classroom settings to the conventional academic knowledge and practices (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, Alvarez, et al., 1999; Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, Heath, 1983; and Moll et al., 1989). This third space is particularly important for the informants attending the mosque because it provides opportunities for success in a learning environment while also making a space for their marginalized voices. The second view is one which considers the third space as a navigational space, a way of crossing and succeeding in different linguistic communities (Lee, 1993; New London Group, 1996). In this third space learners are taught navigational skills through their everyday knowledge and practices which in turn help develop conventional academic knowledge and literacy skills (Wong, 1996; Hammond, 2001; Lee, 1993). The final view of the third space is one of cultural, social and epistemological change in which the competing knowledge of

different spaces are brought into 'conversation' to challenge and reshape literacy practices (Moll and Gonzalez, 1994; Seiler, 2001).

Through a mapping of the literacy worlds of the informants, it became evident that attendance at a Mosque school or a Qur'an class where the women learn the basics of Islam and how to read the Qu'ran is a common practice amongst my informants. Most Mosques in the United Kingdom cater for men, women, and children, though there has traditionally been a problem of adequate numbers of female teachers, and Mosque organisers often find it difficult to recruit qualified and experienced female teachers. This often results in girls and women being educated in Islam and in how to read the Qu'ran at home. Qu'ranic literacy, its acquisition, its practice, and its maintenance play a vital role in the life of many British Muslim families (Rosowsky, 2006). From a multiple literacy perspective, readers give meaning to texts in culturally and historically embedded ways. In focusing on the under-researched and under-represented area of religious literacy practices, I have highlighted the repertoire of reading/writing genres, with which the informants are engaged, because multiple literate practices define communities, personal identities and power relations. My focus on religious literacy comes out of the desire to represent an under-represented set of literate practices. Rosowsky (2004) describes religious literacies as situated practices pertaining to a model of multiple literacies. Religious values and practices are part of the communicative competence that individuals navigate in modern, multicultural societies (Rosowsky, 2004). Baker (1993) notes that in some instances there are very distinct contrasts between religious and secular practices. Religious and secular literacies represent diglossia where the use of different languages for various functions in different contexts (Baker, 1993). He goes on to add that scriptural texts and their associated text-based practices can serve a variety of functions, all of which carry an element of a 'socially-ratified sacred character' (Baker, 1993:18). Purves (1998) argues that group performance of liturgy and the individual reading of sacred texts can bind communities, and provide spiritual sustenance.

Oral recitation of sacred texts such as the Qu'ran is a practice through which the Yemeni women ratify and transmit texts. Purves (1998) suggests that recitation can also form a foundation of an individual's membership in the community. Writing about Qu'ranic literacy in Indonesia, Baker (1993) comments:

Submission to a single, complete and unchanging scripture is the bedrock of Islam's radical monotheism. The ability to affirm a faithful commitment to what has been revealed in this one text by reciting the words precisely as they have been written must extend to all Muslims. Qu'ranic recitation, then, is especially noteworthy as a mode of

literacy that cuts across all segments of society; it serves to absolutely distinguish believers from non-believers without yet distinguishing the more from the less literate' (Baker, 1993:102).

Thus in liturgical and Qu'ranic study group settings (which most of the informants attend), sacred texts are performed, for the most part orally, ritually and communally, not silently by lone individuals. These practices link religious reading to older strategies of literacy history, when oral, communal reading was the norm rather than the exception. Literacy values and practices in one sphere can also facilitate literacy in another sphere. Street (1984) considers that on the personal and societal plane, literacy skills that come from a religious sphere may have application to other aspects of life. Street (1984) found that traditional Islamic reading practices in Iran facilitated commercial literacy, where 'Maktab' students learnt various types of transferable literacy skills including conventions of Arabic script, conventions of layout and presentation and strategies of non-sequential reading.

It is important to bear in mind that as individuals we belong to multiple and overlapping communities, and these identities and affiliations are mediated by and signalled by language differences (New London Group, 1996). Religious literacy values and practices can dominate a culture, as in orthodox cultural groups, or they can be part of a repertoire of values and practices that many modern individuals control. Many of us navigate multiple literacy communities, some less visible, mainstream and less researched than others. Secular and religious values and practices co-exist in many of our lives (Sarroub, 2002). Throughout the interviews with the informants, but in particular with Noora, religion seems to play a central role in much of her Yemeni culture, which suggests that there is a close link between her religious beliefs and identity. The critical role of religion as it contextualised literacy practices was observed amongst Noora and the other women. The women attended a local mosque for regular teachings of the Holy Qu'ran, some also attended to learn Arabic. Religious texts and texts that had religious connotations such as prayer schedules (see Glossary of terms), the Islamic calendar (see Glossary of forms) were always at hand whether in the women's homes or at the ESOL class. During numerous visits to the women's homes, I noticed entire shelves of religious texts, most in Arabic with some English translations. Religion and education are clearly linked for the women. Historically, schools in many of the villages in the Yemen were built and run by religious missionaries, and they tended to provide the only opportunity for women and girls to become literate in the Arabic language. The religious-orientated schools provided women with opportunities to learn Arabic literacy in addition to bringing religion into the daily routines of the school and home life, as Noora explains:

*I began learning to read Arabic about three years ago at the mosque. All the women used to attend the mosque twice a week to learn the Holy Qu'ran but I was always very*

*embarrassed about going because I couldn't read. The committee at the mosque realised that many of the women were unable to read and write Arabic so they began running a beginners class. Lots of women enrolled at the class because they felt it was okay to say 'I can't read or write', nobody would criticise them, after all that's what we were there for, to learn. I felt Arabic was much easier for me to learn to read; maybe it was because I spoke Arabic and I could relate to the meanings. When I was eventually able to read Arabic fluently I felt like I had accomplished something huge, I felt like I could pick up any Arabic book and read at the top of my voice because I could now read. Since I have been going to the mosque my reading has really improved, but I was getting a lot of support and encouragement there. Learning to read Arabic has enabled me to write letters, read Arabic newspapers, write Arabic poems, and of course learn the Qu'ran (Noora).*

The women would often share religious texts at the ESOL class, although this tended to be in the form of 'Over and Under the Desk' activities (Maybin, 2007). These texts were often about Muslim women's rights in Islam, issues relating to marriage, divorce, Muslim diets, raising and educating children in western society, and even ways of dealing with aggressive and violent husbands. I also noticed at times that their discourse in Arabic was peppered with religious references, indicating the importance of such texts on their textual encounters. The boundaries between language, literacy, religion and education were blurred and in many cases, religion seemed to determine opportunities for education, which in turn determined the languages and literacies learned and practiced. Religious literacies seemed to play a prominent role for Noora. For Noora language, literacy, religion and schooling were very much intertwined into a whole.

Purves (1998) explains that since 9/11, the language of scripture has been heard more frequently in national and international discourse, and with ever more urgent appeal to cultural and national identities and allegiances (Purves, 1998). The language of sacred texts is a powerful tool; it is authoritative and poetic, evoking strong responses from listeners. Purves (1998) highlights how the language of sacred texts articulates and evokes shared values, it can also be used to articulate and mobilize cultural identities, especially in these times of cross-cultural conflict. Noora talks about the horrific events of September the 11<sup>th</sup> and London bombings which seem to have had a major impact on the Yemeni community and more so on individual women, where they talk about a feeling of their faith being under attack, and young Yemeni men suspected of having terrorist links, being arrested and detained without trial.

*The terrorist attacks have put our communities at the centre of all of this conflict. Before September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and the London bombings everybody was okay, there were no problems between the local Northtown people and the Yemenis. You know the Yemeni community has been here in Northtown since the 1940's and like other immigrant communities we faced racism and discrimination but we have never felt like we were being watched. Now people have to be careful even though they may not be doing anything wrong, the police raid people's homes, they detained two young men a few weeks ago (Noora).*

In describing the informants' religious literacy practices as diverse, culturally based and culturally created, the informants explain that these practices are connected to social actions and relationships through performance and authority. Baker (1993) states 'all texts comprise sets of genres-typical texts and utterances that perform typical; pragmatic, information. and aesthetic actions' (Baker, 1993:77). Rohde (2002) argues that literacy researchers and educators, policymakers and the general public need to be cautious in demanding conformity with western practices and values. In the years following 9/11, much attention has focused on Islamic literacies (Rohde, 2002; Schulevitz, 2002; Stille, 2002). Discussing issues on the origins of the Qu'ran and Islam, Andrew Rippin at the University of Victoria in British Columbia reportedly cautioned that:

Freedom of speech in the Islamic world is more likely to evolve from within the Islamic interpretative tradition than from outside attacks on it. Approaches to the Koran that are now branded as heretical-interpreting the text metaphorically rather than literacy were widely practiced in mainstream Islam a thousand years ago (Stille, 2002:10).

As Rippin's remarks suggest, religious literacy practices and values have historical as well as cultural dimensions. Current international conflict highlights religious texts as being tied up with cultural and religious ideologies. It has become common since 9/11 for national leaders to brand international enemies as 'evil' and 'satanic' labels that call forth historically based religious ideologies. Current world events suggest an era in which ideological battles will be fought increasingly through worldwide mass media, and where different literacy practices come into increasing contact. Purves (1998) suggests that national leaders will continue to use sacred texts to lend spiritual authority to their words. Understanding how sacred texts are read will be part of understanding how we live in the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The growing visibility of religious ideologies and their relationships to political agendas, including the use of Biblical and Qu'ranic texts in speeches by international leaders, highlights the importance of understanding religious literacy practices.

### ***Digital Metaliteracies: A New Communicative Order***

Through this theme I explore the fundamental role of new technologies in the lives of my informants. Communication environments in today's society have been altered by new technologies and media, and so people's literacies are redefined in terms of new texts and practices (Kress, 2003). Through this theme I also analyse the informants' use of digital literacies as evolving and augmented by new information technologies.

The society we live in is increasingly mediated by information and communication technologies, and we cannot afford to ignore the implications of new technology use for literacy practices. Some academics have gone as far as to suggest that 'researchers who fail to acknowledge technology issues in their work may have to face the reality that their findings may be seen as outdated, incomplete or irrelevant' (Labbo and Reinking, 1999:486). Through a review of the literature on digital literacies (Snyder, 2001; Kress, 2003; Kenner, 2004; Lankshear and Knobel, 2003) I found that some researchers (Lankshear and Knobel, 1997: 2003) have openly embraced information and communication technologies, claiming they enhance communication, empower and democratise the classroom setting. On the other hand fundamental models of schooling offer a discourse that is more cynical of new information and communication technology because of the apparent power enforced which they see as yet another form of social control. One cannot dispute that new technologies have and continue to alter everyday models of communication and as such they play a fundamental role in our lives and we have all been affected in one way or another. It would be true to say, as Baynham and Prinsloo (2001) have indicated, that the communication environment and literacy practices have been irrevocably altered by new technology and media, such as the internet and e-mail, in ways that communication has been similarly altered in the past by the introduction of writing technologies, innovations such as typewriters, printers, the telephone and now mobile phones. Goody (2000:155) states that 'changes in modes of communication do matter and have fundamentally altered the life of mankind', but how things have changed, for whom, why, and with what results needs to be looked at carefully. Schieffelin (2000) also reminds us, 'we know that societies differ significantly in ways of taking up and organising literacy factors, therefore ideology cannot be separated from literacy; since multilingual learners acquire literacy skills in the context of certain social forces that emphasise the importance of formal education as part of becoming 'modern' and 'developed' (p.293). Multiple literacies emerge with technological changes (Kress, 2003), for example the development of e-mail conventions and the recognition of digital and multimedia texts as standard in domains from bureaucratic communications to language arts curricular. The concept of multiple literacies is imperative for studying literacy practices and values within culturally and historically defined contexts (Health, 1983; Street, 1984, 1993). This broader cultural and historical view helps researchers to see general patterns of literacy, which have been implicated in the educational disadvantage of ethnic minority learners or individuals from non-mainstream groups (Au, 1980; Delpit, 1995; Health, 1983). In a time of rapid evolution of the technology of communication and rapid increase in global intercultural communication, there is a need for models of multiple, situated literacies that can guide literacy research, teacher education and reading instruction for the future (Kress, 1999; Pare and Smart, 1994; Reinking, 1995). Furthermore, a variety of communal and solitary reading and writing practices continue to coexist and to be redefined by changing technologies



and social conditions. Emerging digital text genres and reading and writing practices coexist with more traditional texts and practices are redefined in terms of new texts and practices. Marsh (2006) explains that:

New kinds of readers and writers are emerging from the current proliferation of digital practices in which children, young people and adult read and write using a range of technologies (Marsh, 2006:4).

Digital literacy allows an increased amount of individual control over text production, transmission and reception. Some have argued that, with the advent of digital communication, the time when ritual use and school curricular can dictate authoritative texts and interpretations is passing (Graff, 1994). According to Alan Purves (1998:93) 'centres of learning' have shifted, historically, from the oral words of rituals to the written words transmitted through libraries and schools, and they are now shifting in digital Cyberspace.

Aisha talks about understanding and being able to draw upon the cultural dimension of literacy involving a realisation that the ability to operate language and technology systems is always in the service of participating in 'authentic' forms of social practice and meaning.

*Writing and reading particularly through e-mail has also helped me establish aspects of my own identities, because like I was saying earlier, I don't just have one identity (هوية), I have many (Aisha).*

Aisha and the other women use texts and technologies to do things in the world, and to achieve their own and at times other's purposes, whether in the context of the ESOL classroom or in the community.

*Nowadays I use the Internet on a daily basis; I use it for lots of things. I use the MSN chat, but only in Arabic because I can't type very well in English. But in Arabic I am really good, I sit and chat with my family who are still back home in Yemen for hours, particularly during the evenings, because then the children are in bed and I can just type away freely (Aisha).*

These examples of their digital literacies show sophisticated intertextual and intermodal processing. Such modern literacies open worlds of literacy for the women, and lead to immense learning. Lotherington (2004) argues that modern literacies are a hallmark of the educated person, and foundational to social conceptions of education. Given their historical evolution, modern literacies will not be simply supplanted by new modes of knowledge transmission. However, literacies are continually evolving and modern constructions of literacy are being continually augmented and transformed by post-modern literacies in the classroom (Lotherington, 2004). The informants are learning for the future, not the past. However learning for the future is not the main focus of the ESOL curriculum or ESOL testing which

seems to be the final arbiter in the informants' literacy acquisition. The women are able to access knowledge, to navigate data field, to write themselves into the world - skills that they use on a daily basis in digital practice, but such skills go unrecognised on the ESOL programme. The informants' multiliteracies will help the women to create, access and problem-solve the sophisticated digital communication that increasingly characterizes contemporary social and economic life. As such these literacies should be recognized and incorporated in the sort of gate-keeping instruction of ESOL programmes that will ultimately validate or invalidate their education. ESOL practitioners need to examine multilingual learners' sophisticated digital metaliteracies, which are increasingly required in contemporary communication (Simpson, 2002). Kress makes the point that communication has always been multisemiotic (involving visual and actional multimodes of communication) and illustrates how text has changed in its form as the 20<sup>th</sup> century has progressed (2000; 1997). Increasingly, we are sending and receiving more information through imagery and less through print in our texts. This is evident in print vehicles such as newspapers, but it is exacerbated in information and communication technology where multimedia potential is highly dynamic, as Warschauer (1999:8) explains:

Whereas print has some graphical features, the ability to include a broad range of media is greatly expanded on the web, thus potentially challenging the textual emphasis of print literacy. It is in the computer-based multimedia on CD-ROMS and on the World Wide Web that the integration of text and audiovisual material is most complete, with the processes of reading and writing transformed into multimedia interpretation and authoring (p.8).

Cope and Kalantzis (2003) also point out that the elemental structure of text as understood in modern terms has been revolutionized through digitisation:

Linguistics, visual and audio meanings are constructed of the same stuff in the digital environments. This contrasts with the world of print in which the physical production and rendering processes for the visual and the linguistic were more conveniently separated. The consequences in the digital era are a trend to multimodality, to the fabrication and distribution of texts, which integrate linguistic, audio, and visual modes of meaning (p.2).

This means putting the emphasis on 'authentic contexts, forms and purposes, of learning along the axes of literacy and technology, text and information' (Lankshear and Synder, 2000:65). Aisha talks of being 'literate' in the digital rhetoric, which she sees as more than the capacity to encode and decode, to grasp meanings inscribed on a page or a screen or within an established social practice (Street, 1984). Being literate also involves the 'capacity and disposition to scrutinise the practices and universes of meanings within which texts are embedded' (Lankshear and Synder, 2000:65). Being literate also entails the capability to enter actively into creating, shaping and transforming social practices and universes of meanings. When Aisha talks about reading or writing, she draws on the cultural experiences she has had in her life. These at times

may come from different parts of the world. If literacy is understood as a global and social practice it is then possible to begin to understand why multilingual learners need to communicate not only across different cultures, but also in relation to changing global communication. When Aisha was talking about e-mailing her family she was drawing on her identity as an individual who uses the Internet and she seemed to be locating her global identity alongside her local identity within the ESOL classroom. The e-mail system has also made communicating in any language a local practice where one does not have to go very far to communicate.

Here, Aisha illustrates the need to move beyond narrowly defined explanations of literacy in digital rhetoric to ones that capture the complexity of real literacy practices in contemporary society.

*Communicating with my family this way has kind of helped me survive, survive the uncertainty I've lived since I arrived in England and survive the episodes of longing for home. Writing and reading particularly through e-mail has also helped me establish aspects of my own identities, because like I was saying earlier, I don't just have one identity (هوية) I have many (Aisha).*

I found the women to be highly motivated by the use of technology. This motivation was tied very closely to specific uses, ones that met their need to settle into a new country, but to also maintain links with the Yemen. Through Aisha's use of the Internet, her identity is formed during interaction and she is creating identities via digital literacies not only in the home language but also in English. Turkle (1995) has noted that the Internet provides opportunities for multiple identity opportunities. Digital literacy also provides contexts for multilingual learner identity formation through hybrid uses of language(s), in diverse ways that help to empower them. Literacy needs to be conceived within a broader social order, what Street (1984) has called a 'new communicative order'. Significantly, this new order takes account of the literacy practices associated with screen-based technologies. It recognises that print-based practices are associated with only part of what people have to learn to be literate in today's society. The emergence of this new order is directly associated with the development of an electronic communication system characterised by 'its global reach, its integration of all communication media, and its potential interactivity' (Castells, 1996:329). The study of literacies and languages in homes, schools and communities has recently become more spatialized. Recent work by Leander and Sheehy has considered that literacy practices produce space, that they need to be seen as spatial as well as temporal (Leander and Sheehy, 2004). Kenner's (2004) work in homes has documented the importance of satellite television on upholding home and community languages. Digitised literacies cut across institutional

boundaries and the growth of Internet cafes in inner city urban areas has increased access to many other cultural groups and identities than previously. The tracking of these new digitised literacy and language practices is under-researched. Attention needs to be paid to the multiple linguistic and symbolic resources multilingual communities draw on when using web-based texts (Lankshear and Knobel, 2003). Models of these forms of change have enabled researchers to identify how people take hold of these practices in new and improvisatory ways. New information and communication technologies also have significant implications for literacy practices (Snyder, 1997, 2001), so much so that a new communication order is emerging. With the changes associated with the use of new technologies, language and literacy educators are beginning to take account of the increasingly blurred boundaries between different areas of knowledge and different theoretical perspectives. Denzin (1991) argues that to regard 'literacy and technology studies' as separate enterprises is becoming increasingly untenable. Theorists in this field now have a common concern: 'making sense of the construction of meaning within a new communication order' (Denzin, 1991:56).

This investigation highlights the importance of understanding diversity in relation to the everyday use of literacy by Yemeni women who have distinct cultural practices related to literacy use. Even within the group of women who are from the same linguistic community there are different literacy skills and uses of literacy from each other. They have different values and life experiences. Amongst the women there is a wide range of literacy, language, culture and life experiences that are tailored closely to their values and identity and the purposes of using literacy in their cultural and social context. An example highlighting this reveals that the women were able to use advanced communication and information technology. When I visited the women at home, I found that they were very confident at using satellite receivers, television, video players, DVD players, mobile phones, computers and surprisingly Ipods. All of the informants were confident about using various forms of technology to help them maintain their own culture (by watching films on Arabic satellite channels) and at the same time to have contact with the dominant culture.

At various stages of the interviews the women talked about being involved in highly diverse and complex interpersonal communication, which seem to play a central role in their lives. Kalthum would regularly send e-mails, attachments and SMS texts to her relatives back home in the Yemen, updating them on her situation and important events that have taken place in her life. She would often also send photographs as attachments from her e-mail account, which she had scanned using the scanner at the ESOL centre:

*Since then I have been fascinated with computers and when we first came to England I insisted on buying a computer for me and the children to use at home. When I was at college in Yemen I learnt how to use the Internet and since then, my fascination of computers has developed even more. Nowadays I use the Internet on a daily basis; I use it for lots of things. I use the MSN chat, but only in Arabic because I can't type very well in English. But in Arabic I am really good, I sit and chat with my family who are still back home in Yemen for hours, particularly during the evenings, because then the children are in bed and I can just type away freely. Typing in Arabic feels very normal, kind of natural, I think of what I want to say and as I'm typing it's like I'm having a conversation with the person at the other end so I can type quite fast. The Internet has become a kind of a lifeline (Aisha).*

Aisha also uses the Internet regularly to make contact with her family in the Yemen. She would often set up the web cam, and chat on line for hours. She also talked about using MSN messenger and texts to communicate:

*The Internet has become a kind of a lifeline. I really look forward to going home and having my own space to chat with my family and friends, I feel warm, comfortable and close to them, I don't feel as far as I am, miles and miles away. When I e-mail them, it's usually through my hotmail account and it's all in Arabic (Aisha).*

Such textual practices illustrate the advanced skills these women have acquired but which do not seem to be recognised or shared in the ESOL setting. At times, I observed Aisha sharing printouts of photographs (sent to her e-mail account as attachments) with the other women in the class, but once more this seemed to be more of an 'Over and Under the Desk' (Maybin, 2007) activity discussed just before the teacher began the lesson or at the end of the lesson. Such textual practices provided the women with an array of opportunities to discuss and share their textual experiences. These examples are indications of the women's extensive engagement in digital literacy practices in the home which have significant implications for ESOL educators, in that there is a need to recognise and build on the women's competence as 'text bricoleurs' and designers in the communication, language and literacy curriculum (Lankshear and Knoble, 2006). At present, there is limited recognition of these digital literacy practices in ESOL settings, which means that multilingual learners have restricted and at times limited opportunities to develop confidence and expertise in information technology in the ESOL setting. Multilingual learners need opportunities to engage reflexively in technologies in order to engage in complex, multi-layered reading of popular culture (Marsh, 2006).

### ***Spaces of Authoring: Literacy Narratives***

A recurrent theme highlighted in the data analysis is the important role stories play in the lives of Yemeni women. 'Story' has been identified as a site where the informants explore

representing differences (Bruner, 1984; Polkinghorne, 1988; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Measor and Sikes, 1992; Phillips, 1994; Goodson, 1992; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Connelly and Clandinin, 1994) and this representation of differences is a core interest of this investigation as I explained in Chapter Five. This study indicated that telling oral literacy narratives provides an imaginative space through which the women were able to develop a cultural sense of the literate self. This theme also addresses narrative inequality in the asylum seeking process, as described in Aisha's story. In this theme, asylum narratives are explored, with a particular emphasis on their role as localizing discourse. Here the role of narratives in the asylum process is discussed, and the contextualizing role of narratives and 'text trajectories' (Silverstein and Urban, 1996), particularly in Aisha's story is highlighted. Having worked as an immigration translator/interpreter for a number of years, I have come to appreciate that the asylum procedure relies heavily on an investigation of applicants' stories. On her arrival in England, Aisha was interviewed as to the causes and motives of leaving Yemen and seeking asylum in the United Kingdom. The general format applied in this procedure is that of a criminal investigation, as Aisha explains:

*Walking through the court doors, it brought memories back of the days at Heathrow airport where we were searched and interviewed under police caution. At the immigration court, the children and I were asked to walk through metal detectors to empty our pockets, bags and present our documents; I felt like a criminal (Aisha).*

Aisha's asylum narrative played a central and critical role in her application for asylum. The basis on which her application was examined is a textual set of statements taken from her, in which she explains her motive for seeking asylum in England and provides reasons and motives for that desire. Inconsistencies in the stories are a major cause for refusing refugee status to asylum seekers (Blommaert, 2001). Through my work as an immigration translator/interpreter, I was astonished by the fact that in a highly advanced contemporary legal system, which is backed by complex, sophisticated and high-tech forensic sciences, the British asylum procedure relies and continues to rely heavily on narrative analysis. Through Aisha's story I have highlighted aspects of the structure and functions of narratives in an attempt to show how they represent crucial textual encounters for multilingual women.

Aisha and Saba talk about certain forms of narrative being privileged over others:

*This wasn't a chance for us to speak our voices. The immigration officers didn't want to hear our stories, they didn't want to hear about our experiences and difficulties. We were not allowed to tell our stories, instead we were interrogated about places we had been to, it was like they didn't want to know who we were and why we were here, they just wanted questions to be answered with short brief answers, no feelings and no emotions (Aisha).*

*We all have our own stories to tell about our journey to England, and most of the time I feel that our stories are silenced, because other stories are more important, other stories may fit in more comfortably with what stories are about. My story doesn't really fit in anywhere, I'm not sure if I fit in anywhere either! (Saba).*

Dell Hymes and Courtney Cazden (1980) investigated 'the possibility that one form of inequality of opportunity in our society has to do with rights to use narrative, with whose narratives are admitted to have cognitive function' (Hymes and Cazden, 1980:126). They found that the use of particular ways of narrating which focused upon the expression of emotions and personal experiences voiced in an 'anecdotal' mode were easily dismissed, while other narrative modes in which academic voicing and emotional detachment were more prominent, were clearly privileged, as Aisha illustrates:

*There wasn't an opportunity to elaborate; to tell the story like it really was, without all the legal jargon. When my barrister read my statement out to me, I kept thinking, 'I didn't mean this and I didn't mean that' but because it was a question and answer session that had been turned into my story, but in their words. I kept asking the barrister about why my own words couldn't be used?' he insisted the words had to be 'acceptable' and my exact words wouldn't be 'acceptable to the courts'. I couldn't help but feel powerless. I realised that I really didn't mean much to the immigration officers, my story wasn't important; I just became another case file that needed a decision (Aisha).*

Aisha is confronted with a continued fundamental problem of narrative inequality where 'access to the discursive resources that shape who can talk, when, in what ways, and with what effects' (Briggs, 1996:13), is not one that can be captured, as Briggs rightly points out in 'negotiation', which suggests some degree of equality and fairness and a facility of choice for those marginalized. Briggs (1996:13) notes that the power asymmetries and conflicts are invisible because their:

Embeddedness in administrative procedures are normalized for members of the autonomous middle class, which are imbued with great prestige as the symbolic custodians of a socio-political system qualified as just, egalitarian and democratic (Briggs, 1996:13).

Without recourse to the long and detailed narratives about home, escape and fear of persecution, Aisha was unable to make her motives and causes for seeking asylum fully understood:

*We were all treated the same; like we had done something wrong, and today we were going to be punished for it. Our names were not read out; instead our case file reference numbers were read out. We were told to speak only when asked to speak, and we were told to give as brief as possible answers to any questions asked. How can my answers be*

*brief? How can I tell my story in a few sentences? How can my struggles be told in a few minutes? Did that mean that it would only take the courts a few minutes to decide on my fate, on my destiny, on where I would be living, on the future of my children?* (Aisha).

Hymes (1981, 1996, and 1998) and Haviland (1996, 1997) emphasise the importance of narrative-textual shape and narrative-textual dynamics as crucial ingredients for interpreting and understanding texts. Blommaert (2001) explains that these approaches to text need to be set within a:

Wider project that bears affinities to that of critical discourse analysis that can be summarized as investigating language as a social process in order to gain a more precise insight in power relations (Blommaert, 2001:74).

In my work as an immigration translator, I came to appreciate that there is an obvious narrative inequality in the context of asylum applications in England, and this is mainly because the asylum procedure involves a complex set of discursive practices and language ideologies that are in practice being used as criteria for ‘truth’, ‘trustworthiness’, ‘coherence’ and ‘consistency’ (Blommaert, 2001). Such discursive practices require access to communication practices that are often far beyond the reach of women like Aisha and others seeking asylum, not only linguistically, but also narratively and stylistically (Blommaert, 2001:75). Aisha talks about the way in which communication practices are mobilized for ‘making sense’ of her asylum application; but at the same time it suggests narrative inequality when measured against the expectations inscribed in the discursive patterns of the asylum application procedure, of which I am often too familiar. Briggs (1997) notes that the fact that ‘talk is often structured vis-à-vis mediated relationships it bears to objects and texts that are dispersed in time and space’ (Briggs, 1997:454-5). Such preconceived criteria of textuality and narrative appropriateness are inscribed in practices of noting, summarizing, reading narratives, and translating within the asylum procedure, which themselves form part of a huge text tradition, accepted within British law. This process of re-structuring talk into institutionally sanctioned texts involves a dynamic of entextualisation that is based on power asymmetries. Briggs (1970) suggests that the lack of attention to the critical functions of densely contextualised narratives is due to the particular treatment of texts in bureaucratic procedures, particularly the shaping of textual ‘trajectories’ (Silverstein and Urban, 1996; Kell, 2006) in which ‘original’ stories are continuously reformed and reformulated.

Aisha’s asylum narrative may maybe be seen as being too messy for the immigration courts to be easily inserted in the asylum procedure. Aisha told her asylum story in Arabic to an interpreter, this was then handed over to someone else, who translated and transformed it into an ordered and patterned written narrative, which was later squeezed into the boxes of a standard form:



*The immigration officer was taking through an Iraqi interpreter who we found really difficult to understand, because she spoke a different kind of Arabic, the accent and dialect were different and so I remember asking her to repeat the questions time and time again. I was asked about everything from the moment I was born to the moment I left Yemen (Aisha).*

Consequently, her asylum story is edited several times by other people, who select from the story parts that look 'truthful' and the ones that seem 'unlikely'. What is lost in the process is the narrative of space, place and time that is at the core of such stories and as Blommaert (2001) comments:

Those parts of the stories in which applicants bring international conflicts and phenomena such as war, famine, and poverty into their own experiential space, related personal motives to them, and offer this as arguments for obtaining asylum. However, as soon as this 'noise' has been cut off from the applicant's story, the chances of being understood, believed and supported are very slim (Blommaert, 2001:444).

Aisha talks about stories being a site where she can explore representing difference, and this representation of difference is at the core of this investigation's attempts in highlighting multilingual learners' textual experiences. As a significant site of struggle are literacy stories, which exemplify the 'arts of the contact zone', which, in Mary Louise Pratt's (1994) terms, can be seen as 'social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power' (p.34). Because literacy narratives so often focus on the meeting and clashing of identities, languages, and cultures, literacy stories allow multilingual learners –those 'others of the academic landscape hitherto largely represented by teachers speaking on their behalf-themselves to enter into and influence the contemporary debates surrounding ESOL education' (Soliday, 1994:55).

Bartlett and Holland (2002) assert that the literacy practices and traditions of disadvantaged linguistic communities are typified by paradox and contradiction. Seen as an 'at-risk' social group, Yemeni women are also inheritors of a tradition of social struggle in which literacy is the signifier of liberation and literary endeavour is one aspect of a multifaceted cultural achievement that combines oral and literate traditions. Bartlett and Holland (2002) note that:

Sustained literate encounters with European scripts and literate traditions are now more than three and half centuries old. For various native people, that encounter has been marked by the painful awareness that literacy and schooling bring cultural genocide and self-loss that literacy can provide essential tools for cultural documentation and preservation and that contemporary circumstances make necessary a reworking and transcending of the oral vs. literate, tradition vs. assimilation dichotomies (Bartlett and Holland, 2002:46).

The literacy narratives in this investigation provide a space where women like Aisha and others can defamiliarise their ordinary language use and perform imaginative acts of self-representation in order, as Eva Hoffman (1989) puts it, to translate 'between the two stories and two vocabularies, without being split by the difference' (p.87).

Noora's story of everyday life is a tool she uses to enhance her own personal success as a learner on the ESOL programme; and her story can be an important resource if used effectively in ESOL practice, which can be used to enhance her teacher's understanding of difference and shape the practitioners' response to the different versions of literacy.

*I used to dream about telling stories to my own children, in the same way that my mother used to tell me stories, but now I just share my stories with husband, but it's not the same. Men don't really like to listen to stories; I don't think they like to listen full stop!! But it's good you're listening to my story, because I think that everybody has a story to tell, and it's okay telling your story but whose listening? I have lots of stories to tell, about our community, about our struggles, about our future, but they're not really important stories for everybody else (Noora).*

In this way, literacy narratives contribute to the broader goal of building a more dialogical, effective ESOL curriculum that both respects and responds to the voices and stories of individual multilingual women (Baynham and Prinsloo, 2001). Examining the multilingual literacy practices of the women through an oral narrative framework can provide insight into the ways in which literacy is practiced and valued within a specific community, and these insights may, in turn, help educators design a literacy curriculum that is more relevant and authentic to this community. Street (2001) claims that an important task of literacy research is to make visible the complexity of local, everyday, community literacy and textual practices. Through oral stories, the women in this investigation have been able to bring to light some of these issues, and because traditionally, Yemeni women have tended to rely on their memory for record keeping, (they seem to pride themselves in their memories), their stories have been an opportunity for them to exercise such skills. A link between the tradition of storytelling and the desire to tell memories of struggles and the migration experience emerged from their stories. Stories are also an important aspect of traditional Yemeni culture, and this tradition has helped shape various current literacy practices amongst the women. In the Yemeni culture, story telling is also a form of traditional education, as Kalthum explains:

*I've never really talked about my experiences this way, even though it's quite natural particularly in the Arab culture to tell stories. We live for stories, we breathe stories, my great, great grandmother, told stories, my grandfather even tells us stories about his life. This is the way we learn, it's a part of who we are, storytellers (Kalthum).*

While stories play an important part in the Yemeni culture, the women felt that stories do not seem to be valued highly in the British culture, which they believe was due to fewer extended families, and a more contemporary lifestyle, which has meant there is limited time for stories. Whereas in the Yemen it was the elders who often told the stories, as Kalthum explained storytelling happened in the evenings, when people sat together and shared stories. Kalthum believes that this lack of interest in traditional storytelling, even within second and third generation of Yemenis in the United Kingdom, is a direct impact of migration, because most stories were passed down from generation to generation, but due to migration, there is now a generation gap where stories seem to have been lost. The women's stories appear to be a place where they can explore what Victor Turner (1980) calls 'liminal' crossings between worlds. In focusing upon those moments, narratives become sites of self-translation where one can 'articulate the meanings and the consequences of their passages between language worlds' (Soliday, 2001: 157). Aisha talks about narratives allowing her a way to view her experience with literacy and language as normal and acceptable. By foregrounding her acquisition and use of literacy and language as acceptable and a natural process, Aisha has the opportunity to explore the role of literacies in her everyday life. When given the opportunity to evaluate her experiences, she is able to achieve 'narrative agency' (Holland et al, 1993) by discovering that her experiences are, in fact, interpretable. I found through the interviews that literacy narratives can also help to expand the women's sense of personal agency when they discover not only that their own stories are narratable, but also that through their stories they can engage in a broader critical dialogue with other multilingual women and with the wider audience (Briggs, 1997).

Here Kalthum talks about stories being a rich and complex social practice through which she is able to establish her identity as a language user in culturally diverse ways:

*I have lots of stories like this to tell and I have never really had the opportunity to tell them or even think about my experiences as 'real reading' or 'real writing' (Kalthum).*

Importantly, telling oral literacy narratives provides an imaginative, although not fully understood, avenue through which individuals can develop a cultural sense of the literate self. As Arabic women, within our families we routinely practice representing, even fictionalising the nature of literacy to ourselves in ways that are also culturally specific; my parents told stories of my achievements with literacy at school, they told stories of their own successes and failures in learning to read and write, and even my own children tell literacy stories by embedding literacy events within the plots of other stories they tell, and so as Arabic women ours is an oral tradition, and we continue to tell stories.

Noora's story exemplifies that she and the other women are lifelong learners who have overcome barriers in an effort to create the lived experiences they hope to have. The narratives in this study have allowed Noora and the women to tell their stories. In it they discuss and reflect on their experiences and learning and they seem to have a much deeper appreciation for themselves as learners who have grown because of their life experiences. They believe that they have an important story to share, as Noora explains:

*But it's good you're listening to my story, because I think that everybody has a story to tell, and it's okay telling your story but whose listening? I have lots of stories to tell, about our community, about our struggles, about our future, but they're not really important stories for everybody else (Noora).*

Gee (1985) writes 'one of the primary ways human beings make sense of their experience is by casting it in narrative form' (p.11). Thus, as humans we tell stories about our lives in order to understand ourselves, and these stories, in turn, affect who we are and who we become. Grumet (1991) remarks that 'We are, at least partially, constituted by the stories we tell to others and to ourselves about experience' (p.69). Bruner (1987) adds that this concept of the self as formed through discourse narration and dialogue-is similar to O'Connor's (1989) notion of voice as a 'socially orientated construction' (p.48). Bruner (1987) posits a connection between individual and cultural autobiographies, similar to O'Connor's relation of individual and cultural voices:

Given their constructed nature and their dependence upon the cultural conventions and language usage, life narratives obviously reflect the prevailing theories about 'possible life' that are part of one's culture. Eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narrative achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-build the very 'events' of a life. In the end we become the autobiographical narratives by which we 'tell about' our lives. And given the cultural shaping to which I referred, we also become variant of the culture's canonical forms (Bruner, 1987:15).

Both O'Connor (1989) and Bruner (1987) regard that individuals and their cultures shape and are shaped by each other; 'individual selves are formed within the limitations of culturally possible narrative, and cultures depend on individuals adopting and expressing cultural voices for their reconstruction' (Bruner, 1987:65). These dialectical relationships-between story and self, voice and culture, suggest that narrative can play a powerfully positive role in the multilingual classroom (O'Connor, 1989). According to Witherell (1997), 'the teller or receiver of stories can discover connections between self and other, penetrate barriers to understanding, and come to know more deeply the meanings of his or her own historical and cultural narrative' (p.94).

To conclude, the women view literacy as an empowering tool in the struggle against educational inequality and injustice in England. They frequently expressed a belief in the importance of education for them and for their children if they are to succeed in British society. They equate education with improving the place of Yemeni women in mainstream society and even back home in the Yemen. They felt that if they were better readers and writers they would be able to tell their stories better. Stories for the women seem to be a powerful motivator for many of their literacy practices. They speak about the powerful need to share their stories. For many displaced asylum seekers, refugees and multilingual learners' storytelling has been transformed from a way of passing down cultural and linguistic traditions within their own ethnic groups to a way of educating the wider world about their experiences, both through oral histories and written texts.

### *Concluding Thoughts*

Finally, through this analysis it has been possible to observe how in daily life multilingual women draw on different literacy practices at different stages in their lives and how they read and write in diverse ways. The results of the analysis paint a multifaceted picture of literacy use in the Yemeni community. Two of Barton and Hamilton's (2000) elements of literacy as social practice have proven to be especially pertinent to this study; firstly that literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices, and secondly that literacy is historically situated, and literacy practices are dynamic and changing. These literacy practices are historically situated within the contexts of the women's lives. Their practices are also dynamic and changing as the women incorporate the relatively new communicative technology of the Internet and as they transform traditional storytelling practice into print literacies. These discussions will now be summarised and presented in the overall findings of the investigation in the first part of the next chapter. The discussions and findings also have important implications for Policy, Research and Practice, which will be discussed in detail in the second part of the following chapter, titled 'Conclusions and Reflections'.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### Conclusions and Reflections

#### *Introduction*

In this chapter I begin by presenting the overall findings of the study. The discussion then takes a reflexive turn as I debate the limitations of this particular study and provide a detailed presentation of the implications of the findings for policy, research and practice. The chapter will end with a personal reflection on the researcher journey.

#### *The Overall Findings of the research*

I begin by presenting the overall findings of the study by revisiting the research questions and addressing each one in relation to the findings. As I have previously stated, it is my belief that if a study conducted with multilingual learners is to be soundly based, the findings should address important implications. In an effort to demonstrate my commitment to this principle, the implications of this study for policy, research and practice will be discussed in this chapter .

#### *Textual Practices of Yemeni Women*

In order to investigate the textual practices of Yemeni women, I asked:

What is the nature of the textual experiences practiced by Yemeni Women?

In order to investigate the textual experiences of Yemeni women I have explored their literacies through their life histories and from these, considered the ESOL classroom that they attended. In a mapping of their literacy practices in this way, distinctive literacies in various domains were identified; literacies in everyday life, in the community, in the learning setting and in the women's homes are all contrasted in their practices. The domains tended to be more fluid, whereas the practices were more hybrid. The findings show that in their out-of classroom lives, the women were engaged in a wide range of diverse textual practices. Their literacy practices appeared in multiple forms that have socio-political, cultural and ideological significance. I have engaged with the informants' narratives to explicate how literacies flow from and within their everyday social practices and how they make sense of their everyday literacies. The findings demonstrate that there is a privileging of certain literacies and the marginalisation of others through certain social practices and contextual features. The informants' narratives illustrate that they are involved in a wide range of literacy activities where the use of Arabic and

English texts is an integral part of their daily life. The women felt that literacy was key to their own social mobility and to changing their disadvantaged positions within mainstream society. The findings also revealed that their literacy practices came into being through larger political, economic and cultural forces from within both the Yemeni community and mainstream British society. The findings suggest that it is impossible to understand the structures and functions of such forces outside of their own community contexts. This investigation has also revealed that Yemeni women's literacies tended to not be highly valued by the social institutions of which the women are part. Their literacies were not seen as regulated literacies or as those which are privileged by their association with formal organisations of the workplace, the legal system, commerce and welfare bureaucracies, since such practices are defined in relation to the regulated, the dominant and legitimised.

A number of implications, which will be discussed in greater depth in the second part of this chapter, follow from the findings in relation to the above research question. The first is that it is important that ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) education becomes more inclusive of multilingual women's diverse languages and literacies. An understanding of the women's literacy narratives can enhance classroom practitioners' awareness of multilingual literacies. In this way literacy narratives of multilingual learners contribute to the broader goal of building a more dialogical, effective literacy curriculum that both respects and responds to the voices and stories of individual women (Roberts et al, 2007). Examining the nature of Yemeni women's literacy experiences provides insight about the ways in which literacy is practiced and valued within the Yemeni community, and these insights may help educators and policy makers design a literacy curriculum that is more relevant and authentic to its community of learners.

### *Social and ideological approaches to languages and literacies*

I used a critical lens to investigate the informants' textual practices further, and posed the question:

How are Yemeni women positioned with regards to a social and ideological perspective of literacies?

Through this research question, I have unpacked the informants' understandings and perceptions of literacy. It was important to investigate their response as part of the larger fabric of social practices and cultural beliefs in relation to literacy. The women viewed literacy as not

just about being able to read and write but also about being able to utilise these skills in a socially appropriate context. Literacy for the women is a socio-culturally constructed activity, which happens in various social and cultural settings. The findings revealed literacy for the informants as being bound up with their identity and practices. Taking an approach that looks at literacy as a social practice in this investigation has involved acknowledging that the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classroom is only one of many settings where literacy takes place.

The findings in relation to this research question demonstrate that there are various literacies that coexist differentially within social spaces, which are shaped by the social actions and imperatives of the Yemeni community. In view of these findings, the main implication for practice is the importance of educators advocating a pluralized notion of literacy to help multilingual learners negotiate a broader range of text-types not only via print, but also sound, images, spaces and their multimodal integration. A further implication is the importance of examining the framework of literacy that underpins ESOL practice, in order to reveal how particular literacy pedagogies are prioritised, and at the same taking a close look at the learners' own views of literacy.

#### *Textual practices, identities, and intercultural encounters*

Here I set out to explore the informants' literate identities in order to answer the question:

What impact do the textual practices of Yemeni women have on their identities, intercultural encounters and the social institutions of which they are a part?

The findings to this research question illustrate that the informants' use of texts affects not only their own identity but also the character of the social relationships and social institutions of which they are a part. Literacies, like other uses of languages, entail social identities. Identity for the women is recognised as entailing figured elements and aspects that relate to culture, which include socially shared meanings (Holland and Cole, 1995). The findings reveal that cultural artefacts play an important role in the informants' identity formation and they use cultural artefacts to modulate their behaviours, and emotion to overcome disadvantaged social positioning. The findings revealed that the informants' textual practices are infused into their identity as multilingual learners. The informants bring their identities into the making and their cultural experiences are also inscribed within these practices. An obvious implication for practice is that educators will benefit from understanding the historical existence of a



traditionally subordinated learner identity within a dominant educational framework. If multilingual learning settings are to reflect the changing orientations of society, educators have to enquire of themselves and their practices in order to address their understanding of multilingual learners' identities.

*Literacy practices being recognised and narratives being heard*

In relation to narrative inequality and recognition of particular literacies, I addressed a third research question:

In taking account of power relations, what are the struggles that Yemeni women encounter in their literacy practices being recognised and their narratives being heard?

Through this question, I have explored the question of power and cultural form as they are raised and developed throughout the women's narratives. My findings in relation to this research question suggested that the complex issues of language, text, textual access, social and cultural domains and power relations all work together to contribute to a pattern of gains and losses for the women, who have crossed linguistic and political borders in an effort to improve their lives. It has been revealed how the power relations construct and privilege certain discourses and texts. The women's literacies are embedded and their nature and meanings are shaped by broad cultural-historical frameworks and specific cultural practices. The findings also illustrated how one particular form of literacy practice is valued and elevated to the status of universal standard, not because of any inherent values, but because it is the discourse of those in power. This question has helped to make local practices more visible and available to be taken into account in the multilingual classroom. The findings revealed that the use of particular ways of narrating such as the use of expressions, emotion and personal experiences were easily dismissed, while other narratives in which critical voicing and emotional detachment were more prominent, were clearly privileged. This study reveals that there is a fundamental problem of narrative inequality, particularly in the context of asylum applications.

The above research question has highlighted various implications, the first being the importance of recognising multilingual learners' literacy practices outside the classroom setting and ensuring that multilingual literacy practices within the classroom also account for learners' identities outside the classroom. When the women's out-of-classroom identities are recognised alongside their classroom identities, a positive link is created where both 'home' identities/literacies and 'classroom' identities/literacies are brought closer together through their multilingual textual practices. Another implication highlighted through this research question is

that educators need to move from the tendency to value more highly learners who more closely represent the mainstream in their language, ethnicity, socio-economic background and life experiences than those from non-mainstream groups. It is important to engage in a pedagogy of inclusion by providing an environment in which multilingual women are not silenced, where they can voice, through narrative their histories, their way of learning and can claim a place in educational discourse. A further implication is that educators need to exploit the relationship between the outside world of multilingual learners and the classroom in terms of how such learners relate to curriculum topics and explore their different ways of reading and writing (Conteh, Martin and Robertson, 2007). A way of doing this is by bringing in their experiences and placing such experiences in central educational discourse, both in research and practice (Hornberger, 2003). We also need a pedagogy that legitimates their histories and narratives. This involves having a clear understanding of multilingual women's backgrounds in order for their literacies to be recognised and incorporated into their learning as a way of validating their literacy experiences.

### *Informing Classroom Practice*

In view of classroom practice, I addressed a fourth question:

In what ways are the informants' literacy practices accounted for in the ESOL setting?

The informants' stories and reflections on their experiences in the ESOL classroom reveal limited opportunities for recognising the dynamic implication between literacy and identity that the women navigate on a daily basis across multiple settings. The classroom setting, a culture in its own right, constructs classroom-based ways of thinking and behaving. The informants engage in classroom-based literacy to the degree they tended to be enculturated into ways of thinking, talking, valuing and behaving that underlie classroom culture. When the women were presented with culture rooted in mainstream ideology they were reluctant to relate to such culture and ideology and talked about being disengaged.

The findings in relation to this research question highlighted a number of important implications. Educators, researchers and policy makers need to chart possibilities for inclusion by weaving multiple literacies. Policy makers need to begin to look at ways of empowering ESOL practitioners and multilingual learners, in order for the learners to become active participants and fully engaged in the decision-making process of their learning. In recognising that education is political, multilingual learners are able to critically negotiate their role in society in order to develop the capacity to transform their world.

### *Limitations of the Study*

As I approach the end of this investigation, I have realised how research is not without dilemmas and looking back, I ask how could I have improved this study?

Firstly, I could have pursued in greater detail what the women had to say about literacy practices specifically in Arabic, as the use of the Arabic language was an important aspect of their textual practices. Secondly, I could have extended the focus beyond the ESOL setting and the home and have addressed their literacy practices specifically in the mosque setting. By doing this I would have been able to trace the influence of Qur'anic literacies on their textual practices and the on-going construction of their literate identities.

In terms of methodological limitations, life history research requires extensive time to collect, transcribe, translate and analyze the data. While it is true that life history research is more time consuming, it nevertheless has proved to be compatible with understanding the subjective reality of multilingual womens' textual experiences in this study, placing each informant squarely in the context of her own life experiences. Life history research is also often criticised for its limited generalisability due to its small sample size as opposed to a statistically representative sample of cases. It is acknowledged that the findings from this study are based on a small scale sample which cannot purport to be representative of the Yemeni community or of multilingual women generally. However, the desire in this study is not to present a set of findings which can be generalised, but to use this data to draw out themes and patterns which may offer 'crystallisation' (Richardson, 2000) of theoretical concerns with regard to the literacy experiences of multilingual women.

Within the investigation, the ethical and moral implications of doing research within one's 'own community', as discussed in detail in Chapter Four, led me to question the ways that I acted, the way I dressed and how I presented myself as an ethnic female novice researcher. My ability to speak Arabic, and my understanding of the Yemeni culture inevitably involved moving between the private and the professional space and so I acknowledge that the interpretations I have made are provisional and are informed by my ideological standpoints. I am accountable for the ways I have conducted my research and constructed this text and my justification is in my ongoing attempt to bring to the fore the textual experiences of multilingual women. I will now go on to discuss in detail the implications of the research findings for policy, research and practice.

### *Implications for Policy*

Through the analyses as presented in Chapters Nine and Ten and based on the view that literacies are embedded in cultural, linguistic, ethnic differences, validating these differences within mainstream education culture is important in order for multilingual women to be empowered as learners. The findings from this study have provided examples that legitimate multilingual womens' histories and stories. By proposing pedagogy of difference, I believe that educators, researchers and policy makers can chart possibilities for inclusion by weaving multilingual literacies into policy, research and practice.

Janks (2000) explains that a better understanding of critical pedagogy in multilingual learning has the potential to influence educational policy. Current policy concerning ESOL learners, which reflects the trend towards national standard-based education and standardized assessments, is often perceived as conflicting with the philosophy of critical pedagogy because it does not take into account the specific backgrounds, needs and interests of individual multilingual learners. Imposing the same standards and the same measure of success on all learners, no matter where they live or what their current social or economic situation is extremely problematic. Lankshear and McLaren (1993) regard research that looks at the individual successes of multilingual learners in a critical program, not on the basis of standardized tests but in terms of how they use literacy and other skills to negotiate successfully with institutions such as welfare departments, employers, schools, and housing authorities, as having the potential to provide policymakers with examples of the utility of non-standardised measure of success. Luke (2004) notes that the standard framework associated with ESOL education has long been criticised for relying on an under-theorised understanding of literacy as a fixed set of skills, developed independent of the context of learning and the informants being studied and which rely on codification of standards and levels of progress. Luke (2004) comments on how policy makers have to date tended to focus upon this autonomous mode of literacy where measurable norms of literacy acquisition are directly linked to employability such as the Skills for Life ESOL Framework (2006). Therefore, there remains a need to document such policy interaction and its impact upon the development of multiliteracies in wider society. Although I do not wish to give the impression that I am making the naïve assumption that this study has significance beyond its unique situation, I hope that the findings, when disseminated, will be illuminative for policy makers, researchers and educators who work with multilingual learners.

### *Implications for Practice*

Literacy is synonymous with literate behaviour. It incorporates ways of talking, reading, writing, valuing, that is, ways of being in the world (Gee, 1991). Through the analyses of the research data as presented in Chapter Eight, it has become evident that the ESOL setting, a culture in its own right, has constructed classroom-based ways of thinking and behaving (Michaels, 1989). The informants are engaged in classroom-based literacy to the degree that they are enculturated into ways of thinking, talking, valuing, and behaving that underlie classroom culture. Classroom-based literacy practices are also less accessible to multilingual learners since their personal and community literacies are seldom represented in the culture of the ESOL classroom (Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Gee, 1991; Heath, 1983).

Differences between the home socialisation and classroom expectations have contributed to educational disadvantage, where the women's limited knowledge base and resources are often perceived to be the reason. But what about the role of institutions and educational agents? Several studies cited by Davis and Golden (1994) point out that educators often adopt programmes and practices that are not responsive to the needs of learners from diverse backgrounds. Pre-service and in-service programmes have failed to change attitudes, and providing information and opportunity for reflection about ethnic minorities have been limited. Davis and Golden (1994) highlight that some ESOL educators may have beliefs and attitudes on language, literacy and social behaviours that reflect mainstream classroom culture and their own socio-cultural experiences. These beliefs and attitudes are supported by and embedded within the educational system (Roberts and Sarangi, 2001; Roberts, 2001). There is tension within establishments attempting to move away from such values while at the same time holding on to mainstream classroom culture that represent mainstream values (Baynham and Prinsloo, 2001), as Noora explains:

*The teacher doesn't know what we're talking about, and any chance we get to talk we do. The teacher sometimes shouts 'English ladies please, some of you have been here for years and still can't even read or write'. We find it really difficult to share our experiences in English, it doesn't feel the same and it feels like we are pretending to be something we're not.... Sometimes we even write small handwritten message in Arabic to each other so that the teacher doesn't understand. It's a shame that we're not allowed to speak Arabic in the class, because I find it much easier to discuss things in Arabic (Noora).*

Noora talks about literacies emerging from 'contexts of struggle' (Lave and Holland, 2001). As such we need to consider the extent to which stressing particular ways of reading and writing and interacting with texts are a part of capitalist tendencies, which need to be critically

addressed. But importantly, educators need to recognise how they are contributing to particular ways of reading and writing, and Barton and Hamilton (1998) suggest that this can be done by distancing themselves from 'dominant text and discourse', and instead by exposing themselves to new sites and possibilities through engaging in the 'simultaneous learning and unravelling that is so central to multilingual literacies' (Barton and Hamilton, 1998:38). Hence it is important to ensure that multilingual literacy practices within the learning setting also account for learners' identities outside the learning setting. When the women's out-of-classroom identities were recognised alongside their classroom identities, a positive link was created where both home identities and classroom identities were brought closer together through multilingual textual practices.

Macedo (1994) argues that those who defend a 'Western cultural heritage' fail to recognize that disadvantaged groups do not possess the same cultural capital as those in dominant groups; this failure contributes to unequal power relations in educational institutions (Moll, 1992). Macedo (1994) also explains that some educators tend to value learners who represent the mainstream in their language, ethnicity, socio-economic background, language, and life experiences than those from non-mainstream groups. Taylor (1997) writes:

Race, gender and socio-economic status are all factors that critically affect whose 'literacy' counts. There seems to be a limit to how much success there is to go round, and not all types of knowledge or ways of knowing are recognized (Taylor, 1997:2).

The informants' stories reveal that when they were presented with a curriculum rooted in mainstream culture and ideology, they were unable to relate to that culture and ideology and they became passive learners. Shor (1992) notes that all people enter the learning setting as motivated learners, but when they sit year after year in classrooms that are not tuned into their backgrounds and experiences and where their own ideas are not valued, they lose their motivation to learn and become passive or even non-participant. Auerbach (1993), Canagarajah (1999), Phillipson (1993), and Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) have been critical of some ESOL professionals and materials alike for their hegemonic tendencies, particularly in their representations of the target culture. They claim that some ESOL practices are hegemonic in that mainstream British cultures are portrayed as dominant and superior to the culture of the multilingual learner. In addition, I would argue that such criticism needs to go beyond simply being culturally sensitive, but rather examine the impact of the perception of the target culture on the native culture. By this I mean that when multilingual learners perceive the target culture as well as their native culture in positive terms, then proficiency in the additional language can be enhanced (Baynham and Prinsloo, 2001).

Reflecting on the findings of this study, I highlight a number of implications for practice in relation to community cultures. One implication is that cultural differences can take on new meanings within pedagogy of difference that encourages multilingual learners. According to Giroux (1992):

To engage the richness of their own communities and histories while struggling against structures of domination. To move in and out of different cultures, so as to appreciate codes and vocabularies of diverse cultural traditions in order to further expand the knowledge, skills, and insights that will need to define and shape rather than merely serve, in the modern world (Giroux, 1992:246).

Working within a 'pedagogy of difference' framework involves supporting learners to challenge dominant discourses orders to reshape their own knowledge, to reshape new hybrid identities and possibly change configurations of politics and power (Rodriguez-Brown and Mulherb, 1993). A second proposal is that educators should promote 'weaving multiple literacies' (Masny, 1999:3) in the learning setting. By adopting a broader vision of literacy as one that incorporates reading the world, it is possible to view literacy as transformative. Collins (1995) explains that multiple and competing literacy practices point to notions that becoming literate has more to do with reading the world than reading the word. The challenges to literacy in reading the world are all the more urgent when constructing identity with multilingual learners. Through interventions at the initial stages of learning, Collins (1995) proposes that it is possible to engage in a 'pedagogy of inclusion' (p.23) by providing an environment in which multilingual women are not silenced, where they can find a voice through narratives, their histories and their way of learning and claim a place in educational discourse. This is a significant way to make sense of their own experiences. In addition, it seems that if learning supports dominant attitudes and discourses, this will only further marginalize learners whose languages and cultures are different from the mainstream (Ernst-Slavin, 1997). Ernst-Slavin (1997) explains that a pedagogy of difference that affirms home, community and classroom cultures reproduced through multiple literacies constitutes a basis for reading and writing critically, with the view that literacy is embedded in relations of power and that certain forms of knowledge are privileged over others. Classroom-based discourses can be a resource not to serve mainstream positions, which reproduce marginalisation and alienation in society. but as a basis to engage in discourse practices that transform social inequalities in the multilingual setting, in the community and in the broader segments of society (Cummins and Hornberger, 2007; Creese et al, 2007).

The findings from the womens' stories illustrate that it is important that ESOL practice becomes more inclusive of the womens' diverse languages, literacies and textual practices. This way we can ensure, as Heath (1983:64) indicates, that learners' 'different ways with words have a place

in the classroom'. Importantly, for the women in this study, this 'place' need no longer be in the periphery. We cannot continue to ignore their experiences; instead we need to invite them into the classroom setting, the women need to be encouraged to look at the language they use, to discuss, to debate the textual practices they are involved in, and to draw on their out-of-classroom literacies to be able to engage more fully in their learning. We also need to look at ways of empowering multilingual learners to become active participants and fully engaged in the decision-making process of their own learning. One way of doing this is by focusing on the individual learners' involvement and participation in their own learning. This would mean taking a learner-centred approach, in which multilingual learners set their own learning goals and determine their own curriculum. This would also involve educators placing value on multilingual learners' prior experiences, backgrounds and culture, and thus reshaping the curriculum to work towards the multilingual learners' goals. As such, educators would need to stress the active role of the learner in creating and defining the value of what is learnt, and placing emphasis on the value of education for its contribution towards a just and fair education (Janks, 2000).

The findings illustrate that the women's literacy experiences have been shaped by culture in diverse ways, which reflects their histories and social locations. ESOL provisions have often overlooked cultural issues when teaching multilingual learners. Such issues include taking into account the traditional values and practices of multilingual learners. Giroux (1997) advocates that one of the most important things educators, curriculum designers and policy makers can do is to learn about the culture, everyday experiences, language and community that make up the reality of marginalized multilingual learners. Giroux (1997) believes it is necessary to develop a pedagogy that is 'attentive' to the histories and experiences that such learners bring to the learning environment (p.140). It seems that only when educators are attentive to multilingual learners' realities can they develop teaching practices that access and validate the different kinds of cultural capital that influence the way multilingual learners make sense of their learning (Hornberger, 2003; Cummins, 1989; Bhatt, 1998).

Research indicates that educational goals have fallen short of validating the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of ethnic minority learners in mainstream and community education. The informants in this study share the belief that even though learning English is critical for their effective participation in British society, they also recognise the cultural barriers they encounter in their own attempts to learn English, as indicated by Noora and Kalthum:

*The teacher doesn't know what we're talking about, and any chance we get to talk we do. The teacher sometimes shouts 'English ladies please, some of you have been here for years and still can't even read or write'. We find it really difficult to share our experiences in English, it doesn't feel the same and it feels like we are pretending to be*



*something we're not. The teacher has a hard time getting us to 'speak English' to each other, but what do you expect (Noora).*

*Well at the class I live a different life to the one I live at home. The experiences I have had in life, my country of origin, the language I speak, the faith I associate myself with, the cultural background I'm from, all of these kinds of things feel like they're taken away from me when at the class (Kalthum).*

In Noora and Kalthum stories they talk about being silenced in a process that devalues their culture and their unique perspectives on life, literacy, language and identity. Noora and Kalthum, like the other women, were placed in low-track, entry level classes that may have overlooked their needs for effective literacy instruction. The women felt that the ESOL practitioners were well intentioned, but it was often misguided beliefs that prevented them from effectively learning English and participating in wider educational spheres. The women were informally measured by their ability to speak and communicate in English. The lack of validation for the women who maintained a positive attitude towards learning English resonated with Macleod's (1995) findings that reveal how learners with similarly positive attitudes were consistently 'thwarted by diminished social expectation for their progress' (p.47). An implication of the classroom fieldwork data is that multilingual women need to engage in meaningful activities in the learning setting, and not be limited to routine activities that remain at the periphery of what is validated in mainstream learning.

Having a broader and more accurate understanding of the literacy practices and activities that occur in the homes of multilingual learners can also help classroom practitioners be better equipped for meeting the needs of multilingual learners. The women's stories in this investigation have provided a way of gaining insight into the lives and literacy practices of multilingual women as well as promoting some of the neglected aspects of their learning needs, such as supporting the developments of home language and culture, addressing learners' home literacies in the classroom setting, and examining factors which have an impact on their learning experiences. An important finding highlighted in this investigation is the belief that educational systems are political (Shannon, 1992). Decisions about who is to teach, what curriculum to follow, what material to use and what language to use are all political decisions. Shannon (1992) remarks that the decisions educators make regarding literacy programmes, lesson goals, materials to be used, teacher-learner interactions, are 'negotiations over whose values, interests and beliefs will be validated at school' (p.2). Hence, all of these decisions are indisputably political. As such, educators need not only teach curriculum content but should also educate multilingual learners about the political and social inequalities that have prevented them from accessing wider educational spheres. I also feel that classroom practitioners need to educate

themselves in terms of understanding that what happens in the larger society has a significant impact on what happens in the learning setting. This involves recognising that educational institutions are not isolated from larger socio-cultural realities, and the achievements of disadvantaged learners can be seen as a by-product of what is occurring at the societal level. This understanding can also help classroom practitioners to transform the curriculum, so that the classroom culture does not mirror society's inequalities. In recognising that education is political it can also serve as the means for multilingual learners to critically understand their role in society in order to develop the capacity to transform their world and for ESOL practitioners to begin to resist privileging mainstream cultural practices, languages and experiences.

Freire (1998) refers to the importance of dialogic communication between educators and multilingual learners as one means of actively involving such learners in their own education. Freire (1993) writes:

Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication, there can be no true education (p.73).

In his work with adult literacy students in Brazil, Freire (1993) developed what he called 'generative themes', which were used to help adults learn to 'read the word' while simultaneously learning to 'read the world'. Based on his observations and discussions with community members and learners, the 'generative themes' were designed to bring up issues important to particular students in his classes. This demonstrated the importance of engaging learners in discussions of relevant issues, which help them understand that even without the ability to read the word, they are capable of reading their world and therefore are active subjects in their learning (Masny, 1996). Such ways of allowing learners to critically examine their lives and the society, in which they live, enables them to realize that they are capable of reading and writing, and naming their world, and they start to question the culture that has been imposed on them, starting to see themselves as key players in the decisions concerning their learning (Masny, 1996). Most educators are hopeful that critical literacy pedagogy will promote the sort of social awareness and critique necessary to challenge social inequalities. However, I feel that this pedagogy should be extended to the multilingual learning setting, in order to promote the empowerment of multilingual learners. Along with empowering multilingual learners, it is important that these learners are given access to powerful discourses, which in turn gives them greater access to power in society. This I think needs to be made an explicit part of what multilingual women should be taught, with opportunities for them to talk about why such conversations exist, question why educational discourse is constructed and reproduced as it is

and ask who has traditionally benefited from this approach. If multilingual women are supported in investigating and reflecting on the various social inequalities and in appreciating relations of power, they are then better prepared to make choices in relation to their learning.

In the informants' stories the women talk about the classroom practitioner in this being motivated to include the 'home' literacy practices of the women into classroom based practices but she was often limited by the constraints of standardized tests and had little time to bridge the home-classroom divide. Although inviting learners' experiences and stories into the classroom is an important and valuable part of good practice, practitioners seeking to encourage hybridity of home literacy practices still remain without guidelines and support. As such, there needs to be more concrete guidelines for ESOL practitioners about how and in what ways they can support their learners through a social literacy framework. I also believe that responsibility lies with classroom practitioners in deciding whether and how to teach dominant literacies without becoming complicit in the reproduction of power. Street and Roberts et al (2000) suggest that a way of doing this and bridging the home-classroom divide is by encouraging classroom practitioners to be ethnographers of their own classroom. ESOL practitioners need to find out what knowledge multilingual learners bring to the classroom and to build upon that knowledge

A further implication is that a social practice approach to literacy argues for the importance of researching local culture and perspectives on literacy and building this knowledge into the teaching of multilingual learners, as well as using it as a basis for the discussion and investigation of multilingual learners' literacies. Lankshear (1997) explains that this is about acknowledging and respecting the existence of 'other' literacies and recognising that they are part of a specialised and powerful set of practices which need to be used to complement and enhance the practices of the home and community. Bianco (1998) asserts that as educators we also need to find ways of developing a reflective partnership with multilingual learners, which can mediate between homes, communities and the learning setting. This partnership can enhance the multilingual learners' sense of their own expertise and authorship in helping them to take control of their literacies and put them to work in benefiting themselves and their communities (Lo Bianco, 1998; Kalantzis and Cope, 2000).

From my experience of being in the ESOL classroom, I recognised the important role practitioners play in encouraging multilingual learners to make the classroom space their own, through their linguistic resources, their languages and their support for each other. I also found the women welcomed the opportunity to bring some of their life experiences into the classroom. There was a value of creating a space for the women to talk about their lives, where learning another language is partly about taking on a new voice and a new set of identities. The women

have a clear sense of the value of their home language and literacy, and they operate successfully in their home, the community and in the print society in which they are a part. Being able to speak, read and write Arabic are also important features of their cultural identity, which can be seen as a symbolic response to the cultural domination represented by English instruction in the learning setting. Therefore it is important to incorporate multilingual learners' languages into practice, and provide access for learners to become more involved in the planning of their own education. A final implication for practice is the need to continuously re-evaluate practitioners' notions of access, acknowledging that in order for multilingual women to want to attend ESOL classes, they must negotiate strategic identities which will enable them to 'invest' in learning English, without compromising their 'investment' in their home language. As such, it is important to consider their role in this process. Luke (2003) explains that if multilingual learners are to invest in multilingual learning, they need to see the multilingual classroom as a real place where their identities are central to the teaching, learning and programme development. The classroom context needs to tap into their identities as women, as learners, as mothers and as community members. As illustrated through the informants' narratives, their interest in attending the classes shifted across time and space as they took on different roles and identities in and out of the learning setting. Pierce (2000) has proposed that we think in terms of 'investment' instead of 'motivation', where there are sometimes multiple and sometimes conflicting identities of learners, we should focus on how shifts in identities within particular contexts shape the level of investments in learning.

### ***Implications for Research***

I started this investigation by saying that my own interests lie in the areas of education for social justice. I am interested in those aspects of research which entail collaborative relationships with informants as active agents in the research process. I am also interested in research paradigms that work at directly benefiting community members and those which support action for change in informants' lives. In short, I am interested in blurring the lines between research, pedagogy and activism and aligning this work with a social justice research paradigm. This investigation has highlighted the importance of literacy research exploring cultural differences in order to explore the relationship between power-situated knowledge and the ideology that serves to maintain the relative power of individuals in ESOL settings. Since power-knowledge relationships are maintained in terms of inclusion/exclusion, we need to examine who, what and how certain educational practices disadvantage particular communities. Research needs to examine which literacies are taken up, by whom and in what context. In the process, it maybe

possible to find out how a given discourses can be legitimated. Moreover, the findings in relation to home and classroom literacies have led me to propose that classroom practitioners need to engage in a pedagogy that legitimates voice in diversity, recognising that multilingual learners reading/writing the word and the world differently is rooted in and influenced by social cultures and social histories.

Multilingual literacy research needs to look beyond the reductionalist model in order to consider the complex social features of language and literacy. Street (2005) explains that this would involve viewing language and literacy as ‘a process rather than a fixed entity and as a resource, rather than a set of rules’ (2005:137). This perspective, as Street suggests, will help researchers explore the role of language and literacy in implementing social agendas and in establishing relations between multilingual learners and their role in establishing and challenging power relations. Through this perspective I recognise that the women in this study deploy ‘hidden knowledge’ of literacy and language, which they use to accomplish their daily tasks. My role in this investigation has been to bring to the surface and to unpack these hidden dimensions of multilingual literacies. Hopefully by identifying the ‘hidden’ features of multilingual literacies, classroom practitioners, policy makers and researchers may begin to recognise the diverse textual practices multilingual learners are engaged with.

Moll (1992) advocates that theory and research need to take a different direction which challenges the popular, but narrow skills-based perspective of literacy in addressing changing literacy demands and practices. There is growth and diversification of types of texts and so access to emergent and diverse literacies implies changes in what it means to be a literate person in today’s society. O’Connor (1994) notes that the challenge for researchers is to devise research initiatives that will inform effective practice, mediated by new information and communication technology, at all levels of education (O’Connor, 1994). An important implication for research is the need to extend and enhance our understanding of the ways in which the use of new technologies influences, shapes, and at times even transforms textual practices. More importantly, apart from the work done by Simpson (2002, 2005) there seems to be a major gap in screen-based and digital research informed by the notion of multilingual literacy as a social practice. And so the challenge for researchers is to also devise research initiatives that will inform effective practices for multilingual learners, mediated by new information and communication technologies. Phillipson (1992) argues that the advent of information technology needs to influence educators because information is being visually encoded and decoded in a shared symbolic system that has new capabilities. The processes by which multilingual learners today are creating and accessing contemporary texts and generalizing these literacies across digital media are highly instructive to educators. Hence,

educators need to explore ways of including digital literacies in the lives of multilingual learners, to plan inclusive educational practices, and to validate the acquisition of new literacies. An implication for research in this study is the need for systematic investigations that examine both process and product of the linguistic and cultural dimension of multilingual literacies and that account for the influences on language learning. Research needs to explore the literacies multilingual learners are learning and creating through media and question and whether these innovative and expanding literacies are being recognized and incorporated in multilingual learners' literacy learning. There is much to be said about the emerging digital literacy practices of multilingual learners and what is learnt from the content of the digital literacies they are engaging in. Research also needs to question the epistemology of digital literacies, questioning how the borders of the encoded world have shifted now that encoding and decoding information has gone beyond the literal boundaries of alphabetic print form. Literacies are being continually transformed by post-modern practices. Therefore literacy agendas should acknowledge such transformations in order to engage with digital literacies that are increasingly framing social communication.

The findings have illustrated that there are imbalances of power across sites of the home and the learning setting, and the issues of whose literacies count and in what context is of importance. As such, research needs to identify what languages and literacies are recognised for whom and by whom, and research need to pay attention to issues of identity, language and institutional forces in considering this question. Phillipson (1992) explains that, increasingly, research is focusing on the relationship between identities and migration and the need to support the linguistic resources of migrating communities. However, through conducting this investigation, I realised that in-depth ethnographies of home and community literacy practices, particularly in multilingual settings, remain under-developed. There is also an urgent need for more researchers from local communities with the linguistic resources to examine literacies across multiple domains.

In adopting an ethnographic approach to studying the literacy practices of multilingual communities, Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic (2000) suggest that researchers can 'reflect broader social relationships' (p.12). Such research will give rise to broader understandings of how in a particular community, literacy is regarded and practiced. Rockhill (1993) advocates that researchers need to build on addressing what types of approaches and methods would suit different communities in order to examine the literacies of those communities. Rockhill (1993) also suggests that the literacy field would benefit greatly from a better understanding of what exactly is taking place in multilingual classrooms. Also, research designed to capture the degree to which different aspects of multilingual learning across the country can help broaden our

understanding of the prevalence of critical practice is needed. In addition, Silverstein and Urban (1996) propose that it is valuable to conduct in-depth research which attempts to modify their services to reflect multilingual learners' needs. A final implication for research is the need for further studies that look at how literacy pedagogy can contribute to social justice and social change for multilingual communities. Spradley and McCurdy (1997) advocate that research needs to yield insight into literacies in the lives of multilingual learners with the aim of contributing to research that challenges injustices. Therefore one needs to examine how the social practices of multilingual learners empower them to challenge inequalities and change in their lives.

### ***Concluding Thoughts***

The women's voices and narratives in this study are important components for a truthful account of their literacy practices and I believe that Yemeni women have very important stories to tell which will, hopefully, help bridge the gap in the theoretical knowledge on multilingual women's literacy practices. I hope that my study will contribute to shaping theory to critically shifting the paradigm in literacy studies. I also hope that my study plays a role in challenging and denaturalising dominant beliefs regarding perceptions of multilingual learners' values of literacy and education. A close examination of the informants' literacy practices has unearthed, identified and named previously invisible literacies. This, I hope, will serve to affirm and validate local literacies and cultural diversity in the hope of resisting what has been called 'linguistic imperialism'. I also hope that in adopting an ethnographic approach to studying 'my own people', I have assisted in shifting traditional power relations between researcher and informant and broadened the analysis of issues from the social contexts of informants' lives', leading towards a fair and just education.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

### Reflections on Researcher Journey

#### *New Understandings of Literacy*

Through this investigation, I feel that I have had a breakthrough in my own understanding of literacy. Two of the most important insights for me have been the concepts of ‘multiple literacies’ and literacy as a ‘social practice’ (Street, 1995). The notion of multiple literacies has had several implications for this investigation, because linguistic communities have different ways of making meaning and so literacy means different things to different groups. Instead of thinking about literacy as an entity (something you either have or don’t have), thinking about literacy as a social practice has been revolutionary for as me as a novice researcher. Coupled with the notion of multiple literacies, literacy has been framed as a social practice that a particular community values (Street, 1995). Therefore in order to change autonomous definitions of literacy, the social practices that keep such definitions of literacy in place have to change. As I have explained throughout the thesis, for me literacy entails knowing not only the skills associated with the ability to understand the printed word, but also the range of practices associated with the printed word and the social uses of these practices. In this perspective, literacy is affected by the historical, economic, political, and socio-cultural context in which we all live, and so it must be viewed in terms of its use and value in our own communities. Different communities practice different literacies (Heath, 1983; Scribner and Cole, 1981; Street, 1984), and these literacies develop out of and interaction with spoken uses of language within these communities. I appreciate that this perspective of literacy is a broad one, but I feel that it takes into consideration the plurality of literacies, it acknowledges that literacy practices involve not only the use of print but the social interaction associated with the use of print, and affirms the critical importance of investigating the wider context in which textual practices are embedded (Street, 1995).

It was not until my postgraduate studies when I discovered the New Literacy Studies and I began to consider literacy as being socially situated. It was here that I encountered the debate between the whole language approach (Goodman, 1986; Goodman & Goodman, 1981; Smith, 1999; Blau, 1999; Weaver, 1988; Newman & Church, 1991; Watson, 1989) and phonics-based approach (Chall, 1983; Foorman, 1995; Adams, 1988; Dykstra, 1974; Haskell, Foorman and Swank, 1992) which I believe is extremely limiting and marginalizing of the multiplicities of literacies that surround us. In addition, I entered the realm of social literacy because I felt it was more aligned with my stance of working towards a more just vision of education. In



discovering the New Literacy Studies, I also learnt that if a social practice approach is to have influence beyond academic readers, then the work needs to be made more accessible to others. We need to move away from situating literacy research firmly in the academic field, where there are limited avenues to getting classroom practitioners and others interested in literacy, into the field of New Literacy Studies making research and theories accessible to those outside of mainstream academia, otherwise we will continue to reproduce systems of power that we claim to be trying to eradicate. Therefore, if the New Literacy Studies is to become a real and practical movement within the education system, and not just an academic philosophy, we need to find ways in which practitioners, learners, and policy makers can and do hear, and as Barton and Ivanic (1991) assert 'if a progressive educational theory is shouted in the forest, and no teachers or students are there to hear it; does it really make a noise?' (Barton and Ivanic, 1991:77). My attraction to the New Literacy Studies has also grown out of dissatisfaction with concepts of reading and writing throughout my own school experience. I very much felt that the concepts of reading and writing that I was taught as a multilingual young person were based on oversimplistic psychological models of literacy, which failed to take account of social phenomena and did not look beyond pedagogy and the learning setting.

Growing up in a working class family on an inner city council estate immersed me in the discourse of marginal educational experiences that made it challenging for me to succeed in school. My background, the housing estate and my parents' limited English meant I had to learn about being critical, analytical and about rhetorical conventions and literacies valued in mainstream education. When growing up, I found the cultures of the school world uncomfortable and unrecognisable and at the same time I found the literacy practices in my home in conflict with those at my school. I was often told by my teachers that I had to leave my community to succeed. I never left. The literacies that I learnt at home amongst my family and community were not like those that dominated mainstream literacy education. Shaped by the cultural forces of social class, ethnicity, and language, these differences became more significant over time. My home literacy was shaped by culture and context, which influenced the way I approached literacy in school. My home literacies were a way of knowing, a way of making meaning, and a way of performing my identity. My home literacies were not aligned with those valued in school; at times I felt I had to make choices between my identity within my home and community and the identity valued and rewarded in the classroom. Nevertheless, I grew up in a print-rich environment of newspapers, books, Internet, mobile phones and computer games. This environment prepared me for a literate life, but not necessarily an advantage in adapting it and succeeding in mainstream education (Alzouebi and Pahl, 2006).

## *Native Researcher and Native Methods*

As an ethnic minority researcher, this study has inspired me to look critically at existing methodologies in order to create research methodologies that work from a native perspective. Researchers like Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Kaegley (1990) assert that native researchers have not only the right but also the responsibility to develop their own native research methods, which must be congruent with native values and traditions accountable to native communities (Smith, 1999). However, I strongly feel that if this is the case, such methods need to reach mainstream academia and not just remain for the purposes of the community. Tuhiwai Smith (1999) suggests that:

As native researchers we need to utilize such methods not just at institutions controlled by the natives or the locals, but even at the most prestigious Western universities and in academic fields which are not related to native life and native ways (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999:41).

A widely accepted aspect of many Western research methods, which I have always been uncomfortable with even during my undergraduate studies, is that as a researcher one must remain neutral and unbiased and removed from one's personal opinions and from the whole research process (Patton, 1986). As a researcher from a multilingual minority ethnic background, I bring to every stage of the study my own style and my personal powers, which include my strengths and weaknesses. I also bring my personal skills and experiences, my dreams, my visions and my family history. These experiences influence how I am involved in the study as a multilingual woman, a mother, a daughter, and a sister, which in turn influences my behaviour as a researcher and educator. Therefore I feel that I need to be part of my research and I need to actively participate in the process.

Making a social impact was an intention of the current study. My intention was to make a positive difference for the informants, and I hoped to be able to bring about a positive change for the Yemeni women participating in this research, to help the Yemeni community and to enhance readers' understanding of the history of the Yemeni community. Initially, I felt that I could do all this through my doctoral study. Tuhiwai Smith (1999) wrote that research which involves native people as individuals or as communities should set out to make a positive difference for those researched. This is also congruent with the notion that if research is to:

...play a useful and progressive role in the process of decolonisation; it will ultimately require a political commitment in support of indigenous peoples and an unambiguous recognition of the colonial role, played by mainstream paradigms (Smith, 1999:193).

Tuhiwi Smith (1999) also argues that when native individuals become the researchers and not merely the researched, 'the activity of the research is transformed, questions are framed differently, priorities are ranked differently, problems are defined differently; people participate on different terms' (p.193).

### ***Where do I Stand?***

As a female, multilingual novice researcher, my own philosophy stems from being marginalized not only in mainstream education but also in my career as an educator; as such I seek to promote equality in educational research. My own values are formed by the community I have grown-up in, my faith, my social status, and my home language. As such, my philosophy stems from experiences as a disadvantaged individual, and so I seek to challenge the status and promote equality for those othered in similar ways. Here and throughout this investigation, my voice as the researcher has and will continue to be heard as I negotiate and reflect on my own positionality. In my earlier discussions of researcher positionality in Chapter Three I talked about literature often referring to the researcher as predominantly an 'insider' or an 'outsider', where each carries with it certain advantages and disadvantages. However, through this study I feel that I have unveiled some of the complexities inherent in either status and have acknowledged that the boundaries between the two positions are not all that clear, and not that simple, because as researchers we can be insiders and outsiders to a particular community of research participants at many different levels and at different times (Steier, 1991). It was not just a matter of identifying myself either as an insider or outsider, but rather making explicit the factors that have influenced my understanding of and approaches to the research. For me, there were two main factors that contributed to debate positioning; firstly my ontological assumption and secondly my epistemological assumptions. These assumptions are shaped by my own values and beliefs that are based on my political allegiance, faith, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, historical and geographical location. The way I am situated in this study and all the above assumptions, inform the sense I make of the world and no doubt have implications for my research. Hence I have had to be reflexive and reflective throughout my study in acknowledging and being honest and explicit about my stance and the influence it has had on the research process. Being present and visible in the research, I cannot pretend that I do not exist; I cannot forget my personhood, my history and all that it entails. As such my research cannot be and has not been value-free, neutral, objective or even uncontaminated by my presence, and I reject hiding myself behind discourse which attempts to neutralise, minimize, standardise, contain, control, distance, and disengage my personal experiences.

For me, credibility has been important. When I initially entered one of the research sites, the ESOL setting, I did not feel that I was perceived as being competent; I had to counteract the negative perceptions of my credibility because of my race and gender. Such experiences may not be universal to all ethnic minority researchers but I felt that I had to set out to prove myself credible and combat credibility challenges from various gatekeepers to the research site. It would have been impossible for me to enter the research site unmarked by my social position in society. I cannot help but feel that if a white, middle class male had entered the research field he would immediately hold the privileged status of 'researcher', whereas I am considered as 'one of the people', I am constantly forced to move between worlds and identities. I hope that seeking out and recognising my own positionality with respect to my own research area and reflecting on my own positionality has provided a reflexive account of my research journey. Throughout this study, it has been important for me to discuss my personal influences, to acknowledge my personal and cultural history, and to discuss the impact it has had on my research. My personal influences have come from a belief that educational policies and reforms are viewed solely through the lens of educators and policy makers where learners' voices have been suppressed. Therefore, policies, reforms and hierarchical structures have not been viewed from the learner's point of view. Through a reflection on my own positionality in this study, I have come to appreciate that positionality is determined by where one stands in relation to the 'other', and more importantly that these positions are not static, but shifting. At the same time as reflecting on my positionality, I feel that the power-based dynamics inherent in my research needed to be exposed, because as Merriam and Simpson (2000) argue, power is not only something that one needs to be aware of, but something which needs to be negotiated in the research process. As a female researcher from a minority ethnic background, I was concerned with foregrounding the experiences of my informants and in my informants having an equal relationship with myself to ensure an empowering research experience for them in their construction of knowledge, in the hope of them being equally in control of the research (Merriam and Simpson, 2000). I was very conscious of the power-dynamics of the research from the start, and in particular of my position and the positions of my informants. The power dynamics of the data collection process were negotiated both by myself and by the informants. I had to negotiate the power dynamics of my situation because being affiliated to the university and having gone through a university education, I felt this carried weight with the women. This, however, was not enough because I had to draw upon my personal skills and understandings of the Yemeni culture and Yemeni women's roles within their own community in order to establish rapport with them. A close look at my fieldwork experience revealed multiple positioning and complex power dynamic factors bearing on eliciting information and representation through the research process.

In the initial stages of the data collection process, I felt angry when the women talked of experiences that I initially found to reflect acceptance of their marginalisation. However, I came to see that my anger was of a deeper historical past. I am a daughter of this generation of women and on one level these are my mothers. As the women spoke of living within their particular patriarchal world, I was angry and saddened for my mother and mothers, because in many ways this is the world I have actively rejected through my process of 'growing up'. It became apparent to me that I rejected that world without critical thinking and certainly never strove to understand how my mother may have thrived within that world. Just as I hope that my daughter will not see me as 'Other' this awareness has alerted me to rethink my own positioning. This experience has also enriched my life and my study. As researchers we need to address, and not to hold aside, our own subjectivity. Okely (1992) notes that this is not a 'navel-gazing' exercise, but one that 'strives to use self-awareness in order to contextualize the specificity of ourselves and to transcend it' (Okely, 1992:34). Opie (1990) also states:

Our own reactions indicate the historical subjectivities of self as we have constructed them, thus the acknowledgement of discomfort or non-comprehension allows competing or compatible discourses to become visible. They force us to identify and question our own values, stereotypes, and truths. They draw attention to the paradoxical, the contradictory and the marginal as well as the compatible (Opie, 1990:42).

### *Writing with all my soul*

When writing this thesis, I wrote with all my being, my soul, my mind, and my heart. I realized that words were only artefacts until 'they' became 'me' and 'I' became 'them'. Writing this thesis has given narrative coherence to my experience and the links in my lived experience have given coherence to my writing. In writing this thesis I have also come to realize that I thrive in discontinuous spaces that are always shifting. During the course of the investigation, it came to light that a running theme of my family history has been physical displacement, from my grandparents, who moved to Jordan as refugees, to my parents who moved to England as refugees, to my fathers' career moves and struggles within educational establishments, and later my own displacements. Uprootedness appears to be a family legacy, and I have come to appreciate how this discontinuous space is the site from which my reflexivity emerges. My being, my narratives, and my identities are familiar with finding their roots intersect in liminal spaces. Some may even characterise my writing as:

Anxiously crossing various theories, texts, intertexts, and spheres of practice, unable to settle into clear linear course, neither willing nor able to stop moving, transient and

transitive, traversing the criss-crossing of spatial, temporal, experiential, and narrative realities (Pollock, 1998:91).

Through this study I have reflected on my past, I have found that interwoven with my narratives is my fragmented identity. The experience of writing this thesis has helped me to trace back patterns in my life in order to understand that discontinuity is my ritual and have learned continually to inhabit marginal emotional and physical spaces. The process of co-constructing the women's stories was for me a recollective process because I entered the various textual layers and stages of my life as a reader and writer. In the process of writing, rewriting and performing their past I have a better understanding of the women's literacies, and being engrossed in a reflexive epilogue I have been able to reflect on this process of writing. Denzin (2002) reflected on this performative and therapeutic nature of his writing and stated:

I seek a writing form that is part memoir, part essay, and part autoethnography, a form that uses the techniques of minimalist fiction: plot, characterization, dialogue, more showing than telling. I write from the scenes of memory, rearranging, suppressing and even arranging scenes, forgoing claims to exact truth, or factual accuracy, searching instead for emotional truth, for deep meaning (Denzin, 2002:259).

### *Final Thoughts*

Finally, and in many ways similar to Denzin (2002), through the process of telling I was also showing my fragmented identities to myself and to my informants. Yet each re-reading of the women's stories is another event that triggers more memories and connections. Using Denzin's (1997) construction of reflexivity, and as a reflexive researcher, I have attempted to acknowledge my own positioning in the telling and the told. I have attempted to acknowledge that I 'produce a partially situated text that opens up a previously repressed, ignored, or over interpreted corner of cultural life' (Denzin, 1997:221). In my own writing, I find myself in that liminal space of writing and my own personal and critical processes. I now know that I am involved in the construction of messy texts. Denzin (1997) described these messy texts as:

Text that are aware of their own narrative apparatuses, that are sensitive to how reality is socially constructed, and that understanding the writing is a way of framing reality. Messy texts are many sited, intertextual, always open ended, and resistant to theoretical holism, but are always committed to cultural criticism (Denzin, 1997:23).

To conclude, it would seem that goodbyes represent a ritualistic ending to social dramas, but in this research goodbyes are my own family rituals. Goodbyes are of particular significance in my family. My grandparents bid farewell to their homeland and so did my parents. They have never recovered a sense of place, and home for them became a roof over their heads. They

accepted these geographical relocations and embraced displacement as a way of life. These displacements have led me to construct goodbyes as a liminal space.

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