

MUSLIM AMERICAN FEMALE IMMIGRANTS' INTERPRETATIONS
OF THEIR ENGLISH EDUCATION EXPERIENCES

by

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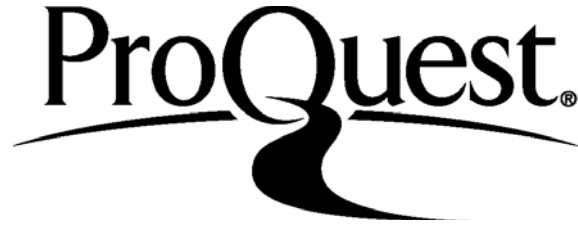
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ABSTRACT

MUSLIM AMERICAN FEMALE IMMIGRANTS' INTERPRETATIONS OF THEIR ENGLISH EDUCATION EXPERIENCES

Azlina Abdul Aziz

This research was focused on examining how Muslim American immigrant female youths were interpreting their educational experiences as second language speakers of English within U.S contexts, where provisions for immigrant education varied considerably from one state/region/school to the next. This study concurrently focused on my interpretations, which were framed by my own perspective as a Muslim woman, second language speaker and teacher, and an international graduate student, who have utilized postcolonial, third-world-women feminism, and poststructural lenses. I positioned conceptualizations of “English Education” in a local U.S as well as international contexts, where, I believe, the binary of native/non native or first/second language speakers of English potentially could be disrupted. Further, utilizing autobiographical forms of self-reflexive inquiry, I examined my own limited, partial and incomplete experiences as a Muslim woman, second language speaker of English and English teacher, as an international student who was educated in the UK for six years and who currently is pursuing her graduate study in the US. I did so in order to examine my relationship to English and English speaking communities as shaping part of my identities, possibly allowing me to make imaginative crossings, and enabling access to new knowledge. Learning English for me had entailed accessing British and American English grammar i.e. structures, vocabulary and

pronunciation. But, according to Pennycook (2002), “English is both the language that will apparently bestow civilization, knowledge and wealth on people and at the same time is the language in which they are racially defined” (p. 4). It is with this assertion in mind that I had constructed this research. How did the Muslim American participants and I in this research construct and were being constructed in our relationships to English and the English speaking communities? Is it possible then, I wonder, to transform language that was once and perhaps still is seen as a tool of oppression and exploitation into a language of justice, liberation and as reflective of the cultures and flavor of local realities instead of perpetuating the colonial discourse or are we all doomed to experience this constant tension?

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A. A. A.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Background of the Study

My research was focused on examining how Muslim American immigrant female youths were interpreting their educational experiences as second language speakers of English within U.S contexts, where provisions for immigrant education varied considerably from one state/region/school to the next.

The sign above the door was written in light green letters on white rectangular board. It looked faded in the glaring sun. Above it, in red, were Arabic scripts. It was quite an effort for me to read Arabic so I did not. I could read the Koran in Arabic but except for a few common phrases, I did not understand most of what I was reading. The Arab American Association of New York or its acronym, AAANY, was a non-profit organization aimed at providing services to the Arab American community in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. It aims to support Arab immigrants living in the U.S. by providing social, economic and literacy support. According to its mission statement, it aims “to support and empower the Arab immigrant community by providing services to help them adjust to their new home and become active members of society. Our aim is for families to achieve the ultimate goals of independence, productivity, and stability” (retrieved from: <http://www.arabamericanny.org/mission-statement/>).

Walking past the two doors, I saw a room with sofas and chairs and, on a brick wall, a mural. I was immediately drawn to it, and it was not difficult to see why. Against the drabness of the carpet and furniture, it was the most vibrantly colorful item in this space. In this ‘modern’ living of hyper enhancement, where photographs and images are magnified to flawless vibrant perfection, ordinary items pale even more in comparison. But this vibrant mural was both earthy and nationalistic. The elements of nature, like trees, sky, sun, clouds, plants, soil, and the earth, were juxtaposed against nationalistic symbols of the flags, the World Trade Center buildings, and the Statue of Liberty. It was the earth drawn and divided by real and imagined lines.

Within this context, then, we spoke of crossing political and social boundaries. We spoke of a sense of belonging and acculturation. We spoke of political activism and allegiance. By ‘we’ I am referring to the group of researchers from Teachers College, Columbia University, of which I was a part, headed by two post-doctoral fellows, who were affiliated with the Institute of Urban and Minority Education. The aims of the research project were threefold. The project was to serve “a) as part of your academic project/training; and b) as part of the larger research project addressing various forms of youth’s academic, social and community engagement; and also c) to identify the needs of the youth and the Association.” (Personal communication, 2011, November 6). Each member of the project team was to choose to be part of one of the following activities available at AAANY:

- 1) Elementary tutoring: working with an after school program for K-6 students which pairs high school student volunteers with the elementary school youth for 1:1 tutoring (facilitating the pairs and program)
- 2) Kitaab Club: ESL class for elementary school students (teaching)
- 3) Working with the Youth Advisory Council of the Association on developing leadership skills, researching community issues/needs, and building programming for and/or by youth to serve the needs of the young people in the community (advisory/mentorship role)

4) the AmplifYer: the youth run Arab American online newspaper. This would be almost like an 'out of school' journalism advisor/teacher role. (Personal communication, 2011, November 6)

The research team would then meet up every 2 – 3 weeks to discuss what each member felt was prominent and significant in their involvement with their respective activity, and we also submitted our field notes to the two post-doctoral fellows. I chose to teach the *Kitaab* club, which consisted of a group of Arab American ESL elementary children, and so every Monday afternoon I made my hour commute from Teachers College to here to teach a two-hour class.

I remember the first time one of the post-doctoral fellows brought us to AAANY. I walked past another door to get to the offices and reached my classroom on the first floor. As I turned to close the door, I saw a piece of blue paper glued to the back of this door and the part that caught my eye, was “What do you do when approached by FBI agents.” I was immediately reminded that I was serving a community whose way of life was under suspect and under constant surveillance and that blue paper was relevant to me too.

In a series of report from the Associated Press, it was revealed that, since 2006, the New York Police Department (NYPD) in collaboration with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had been hiring informants to gather information on the Muslim community, monitoring their social, religious and online activities at various mosques and online websites, recording Muslims’ political and religious views, mapping out the various patterns of Muslim community living in NYC, and infiltrating Muslim student groups in colleges and universities (Goldman & Apuzzo, 2012). These revelations have led to protests from various organizations, culminating in a lawsuit against the NYPD for a series of actions considered unconstitutional and as having impinged upon the rights of the Muslim community (Goldman & Sullivan, 2013).

The first time I became aware of how my identity as a Muslim could possibly be perceived as a threat was when I checked in at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport to begin my journey to New York as a doctoral candidate in English Education. Obtaining

my boarding pass, I was told by the attendant I would have to wait half an hour before I could get 'clearance' from Washington. This was the first time I had to get any form of clearance while traveling.

“Reading the word and the world”

In the first class I enrolled at Teachers College (TC), 'Literature and Teaching,' I had written the following in response to Rosenblatt's transactional theory by way of discussing how a person's psychological state affected how one might possibly “read the word and the world:”

A&HE 4050 Literature and Teaching
Azlina Abdul Aziz
June 2010

My journey began almost three weeks ago as I checked in at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport on the way to New York via Los Angeles. Obtaining my boarding pass, I was told by the attendant I would have to wait half an hour before I could get clearance from Washington. At this point I had absolutely no idea what type of clearance and what process would be involved in the procedure of getting clearance. Bear in mind my travel plans happened within weeks of the Times Square bombing attempt so I would imagine the U.S. security would be on high alert as to the travelling arrangement by Muslims from other countries, particularly those enroute to New York City. My surname being Abdul Aziz is a glaring indicator of my religious background, which I imagined caused a great blip in some operation room in the Pentagon or is it the FBI? Did it matter that I am female? Well sadly there are such things as female suicide bombers although perhaps not on US soil but surely it would be best not to take any chances. The weeks before of sitting down with my father, who told me to remove my veil if I should ever find myself being targeted in a violent rage against the religion I profess, only served to inflame my fear. After gaining clearance I boarded the plane for a long journey to L.A. When I arrived in L.A. I went through custom checks, as was the normal procedure. I declared the amount of USD I had brought with me. I even volunteered to open my luggage for the custom officer who told me it was unnecessary. I then had my luggages rechecked for the next flight to New York the following morning, which would have turned out to be a mistake (or not we'll see). When I boarded the plane, there was a man seated next to me who was in conversation with the flight attendant. They sounded friendly but reserved. I began to assume,

given their friendliness with one another, that they probably had met before but were not too familiar with each other. I overheard them talk about safety regulations, on why carry-ons were allowed to be placed underneath the seat. He spoke of having a place in New Jersey; he was married (judging by the ring on his finger). On the whole one would come to the conclusion that he was a typical guy from New York -- but not in my mind for two pivotal reasons. Firstly, when I excused myself to go to the toilet, he followed me. There were two toilets and yet he didn't go into the other one, instead waiting to enter the one I was in. Second, once we arrived in Newark airport he did not get off the plane immediately. Instead he went to the back of the plane talking to the flight attendant while all the while I could feel his eyes on me. I overheard him say to her before we got off the plane "We'll do this again on Monday". It got me to thinking: wouldn't a typical response by any passenger after a long flight be to get off the plane as soon as he can instead of lingering on? So I drew the conclusion that the cute married New Yorker was not a typical guy after all. He was an AIR MARSHALL! The suspicion was further fuelled when upon retrieving my luggages, I discovered that an item i.e. a laptop was missing. The luggage was intact. The perpetrator had removed the item by unlocking and locking the TSA lock with the master key in possession by each custom officer. I wonder if my laptop is with some FBI agent/hacker going through my lesson plans and lecture notes. Although I prefer to think it was taken by a lowly paid worker at LA airport to help his children become computer literate or maybe sell it off to feed his family. Perhaps in the end this just revealed the paranoid person that I am. Perhaps this story simply reveals my psychological state, i.e. my fear of coming to New York as a Muslim. And the married Air Marshall who lives in New Jersey could be a businessman who makes regular trips on Continental airline going home to his wife and family. Will I ever one day know the complete truth? Probably not. I don't have all the information to reach it. The psychological states and the identity of the reader or rather what the reader identifies with do have an effect on the interpretation of the text, as postulated by Rosenblatt. In the vignette presented above, it is my fear of coming to New York and my attachment to my identity as a Muslim as well as my knowledge of current events and background knowledge that have guided these interpretations. But had I been Chinese and my name was Chang Siew Lee instead of Azlina Abdul Aziz, perhaps it would have been a completely different story. Perhaps, it would have been a case of a missing item in a luggage and a married guy sitting next to me.

As a Muslim, I was more conscious that my identity became more marked in certain countries like the U.S. and the U.K. as well as settings -- especially at airports. As I passed through the security screening, I would be subjected to extra screening such as going through the Advanced Imaging Technology and an inspection of my veil for fear of hidden items. While I have had to acquiesce as part of ensuring security, no where was it

more jarring than when on a flight back from Vancouver in June 2012 after attending a conference: the check-in attendant told me in a matter of fact that I was on the security list. Unsure what would be the appropriate response I said, 'ok'. I was not sure what it meant to be on one and I certainly had no idea how to get off it. He made a call and within minutes I was 'cleared'. I have heard of situations where passengers were taken off the airplane to be screened again or forbidden from taking the flight. One woman was removed from the airplane when other passengers misheard her saying 'It's a go' when she actually said 'I've got to go' (Moran, 2011). In another case in 2005, a Malaysian Ph.D. scholar, who was studying at Stanford University at the time and was on her way back to Malaysia, was taken into custody by airport security in San Francisco International Airport and interrogated for at least two hours before later was released and placed on a "No-flying" list. She has not been allowed to enter the U.S since then (Stellin, 2013). I learnt to be extra vigilant of my own behavior so as not to draw attention or suspicions to myself. However, I was surprised to hear that the NYPD was also surveilling Muslim students in Columbia University. In response to an outrage expressed by the Muslim students, the Columbia University's chaplain organized a town hall meeting on the 22 February 2012 with Muslim students in order to hear our grouings and concerns (Stallone, 2012). A student stood up and spoke of the unfortunate fact that he was born both a Muslim and a Pakistani. Before coming to Columbia, his father had advised him to never search on Google certain words such as the word 'bomb' that would draw suspicion to himself. If you are from the Middle Eastern countries, you have Islamic names or you are perceived to be a fundamentalist, you would be considered more of a threat. After all that was said, I left the meeting afterwards feeling that nothing was resolved. We still had to live with it. I learnt the 'rules' of conduct from each case I had read and heard from the news and other Muslim students' experiences.

The children I had taught may or may not have been affected by issues of surveillance as I was. Another research group member reported that most of the youths at

the center felt that the NYPD surveillance was acceptable if the purpose was to maintain security. Issues of surveillance did not impinge themselves on our day-to-day conduct but, like that blue paper at the back of the door, it was a knowing tucked away somewhere in our consciousness to be referred to when the situation arises. As an organization, AAANY has been part of the protests against NYPD Muslim surveillance, which has recently culminated into a lawsuit citing unlawful conduct (Francescani, 2013). The latest report by the Associated Press revealed the NYPD had planned to infiltrate AAANY by placing an informant in their committee board but it was not certain if they had been successful. This has caused a deep mistrust between the organization and the NYPD. Linda Sarsour, the executive director of the Arab-American Association of New York said, "'Getting someone on our board, that kind of takes it to the next level," she said. "When you see your own name and your own organization on a document, it becomes personal. I felt hurt." She went on to say that the NYPD's action had ended their previous relationship, trust and cooperation (Moskowitz, 2013).

I was not the only instructor teaching this program. It was in collaboration with three others, two of whom were students at NYU and one from TC. Evelyn¹ and Dalia² were learning Arabic and taking classes on Islamic arts at NYU. Leah was doing her MA at TC in Bilingual Education. The program coordinator was Christian,³ who had been with AAANY since 2010 but then left to further his studies at Columbia University in the summer of 2013. He was the overall coordinator for the various programs here such as the Youth Advisory Council, Brooklynat, Kitaab Club and the Amplyfier. I saw Christian as the person to go to for advice, consultation, getting resources, as liaison with the high

¹I will use pseudonyms for all the individuals and participants in this research paper, with the exception of a few people (i.e., my friends, family and my instructors at TC).

²A pseudonym

³A pseudonym

school volunteers and the children's parents. The program also involved high school volunteers who had chosen this site as part of their community service. Two days of the week were devoted to teaching while another two days were spent on providing homework support. The program operated on voluntary basis, and while there was consistency of instructors and high school volunteers' presence, they may not be the same people serving the community year in and year out. People moved in and out of the center constantly.

The students (18 boys and 12 girls) ranged in age from 6 to 15 years old and varied in terms of their English proficiency from beginners to highly proficient. They were from Yemen, Egypt and Palestine. So for six months from January to June 2012, I went once a week to the Arab American Association in Brooklyn to teach the Kitaab club, which consisted of a group of elementary ESL students. As I was beginning to learn at Teachers College about Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and the importance of affirming the students' mother tongue and culture, I was eager to put these ideas in place. However, I saw how even in this third space, the discursive system of an "English classroom," where the emphasis was on English language instruction, may supersede the students' and my own agency in determining the dominant discourse.

At the beginning of the semester, I received the following email message (personal communication, December 1, 2012) from Christian after a discussion with Dalia and Evelyn on the goals for the program.

We spoke about our goals for the semester.

-relearning how to learn (focusing on a "Western" education)

-tracking student progress (in innovative ways -- determining measurements and evaluations)

-Using New Tools (i.e. media -- we have a projector, games)

-Balance HW. with educational activities

-Assessments: written/oral/innovative

-Attendance policy (call parents if student does not show up, talk to students about why they weren't present)

I found the first goal “relearning how to learn (focusing on a “Western” education)” problematical. According to Merriam-Webster online, the word ‘relearn’ means:

Definition of RELEARN: to learn again (what has been forgotten)

Perhaps they meant to say undoing the previous way of learning and learning a new one, which was synonymous with a ‘Western’ education. It suggested a shedding off of a particular way of learning as opposed to adding to an already existent one. If so then the goal was consistent with a deficit perspective of immigrant education. The term ‘Western’ was also problematical because it supposes there was an ‘Eastern’ education. This created another binary but more importantly it suggested the superiority of a so-called ‘Western’ education. In a meeting later with Dalia and Evelyn, I queried over the first goal of the program. Dalia explained that Arabic speakers’ writing was usually non-linear and circular. I asked further if there were any skills that they felt were particularly ‘Western’ but I did not get any response. I felt the word needed to be unpacked and, apart from learning a linear form of writing, it did not warrant much use of the term. Perhaps implicit in the term “Western education” is also teaching the ‘American’ culture. Leah later helped us compose the following program overview and objectives a few months later (personal communication, May 3, 2012).

Table 1. Kitaab Club’s Program Plan

Kitaab Club: A Youth Program of the Arab American Association of New York
<p>Program Overview:</p> <p>Kitaab Club is an after-school English literacy program aimed at providing critical learning support for your child in the area of reading, writing and listening comprehension. The program consists of two key components: group classes and individual tutoring/homework help. Through language assessment, group activities and educational games, the group classes help improve language skills and academic performance for children, grades 1-5. The tutoring program allows Kitaab Club participants to receive one-on-one attention from our teachers and high school volunteers who assist students with homework and address specific problem areas. The program also provides a safe, supportive environment where children can build important social skills and confidence, allowing them to express themselves through storytelling, writing and play.</p>

Table 1 (continued)

<p>Program Objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide English language and other educational support for students struggling to perform at grade-level for students grades 1-5* 2. Provide a creative outlet for students to express their ideas and interests 3. Build social skills, team work and confidence among participants 4. Build grade-appropriate vocabulary, reading comprehension and writing skills 5. Provide individualized attention/tutoring for students that addresses their specific needs and interests (not sure if this is something we want to say or not...)
--

However, what was written on paper may not necessarily be what was enacted in the classroom. One's assumptions and ideology are constantly enacted and negotiated in our lived experiences and not necessarily fixed on paper like words etched in stone. Nor did it resolve the daily struggle of shaping this space every time we made decisions on the activities in the classroom.

In another instance when Mawa,⁴ one of the volunteers, began tutoring Mesi⁵ in Arabic, I felt uncomfortable with what I felt was an excessive use of Arabic. I later reflected on the reason I was uncomfortable with her use of Arabic in the class. Was it because it made me feel like an outsider? Evelyn and Dalia preferred they only spoke in English while I felt there may have been some need to use Arabic when it aided the students' learning and also to honor their home language. Was I enforcing the 'rule' that Evelyn and Dalia had set for the classroom? After all, I did not understand what was said, so how could I have assumed that Mawa was not teaching Mesi in Arabic and thus aiding her learning. Was I assuming she was conversing on other matters not related to the topic? At another time in class, I overheard one of the students said to the other students who were speaking in Arabic, "This is an English classroom." It silenced the other students. I had never told the students explicitly they were not allowed to use Arabic so I

⁴A pseudonym

⁵A pseudonym

was somewhat surprised by the comment. And yet, it showed how the normative discourse can be established as “the rule,” as “the only discourse that ‘counts.’” Further: perhaps my presence as a non-Arabic speaker cum teacher had also contributed in shaping the perceived acceptable normative discourse in the classroom. This demonstrates how a discursive system supersedes the students' and my own agency, which we still could choose to resist. In a discussion of agency, Smith and Watson (2001) argue that as much as we would like to think ourselves as individuals with complete agency, we are nevertheless influenced by the cultural as well as social scripts and sanctions. They argue, "we have noted that discursive systems emergent in social structures shape the operations of memory, experience, identity, and embodiment. People tell stories of their lives through the cultural scripts available to them, and they are governed by cultural strictures about self presentation in public" (p. 42).

The above instance demonstrates how the students and I were enacting the discursive dominant narrative of an English classroom in the U.S. and I saw how I could be complicit in perpetuating this discourse. The program's goals were not etched in stone but were rather lived experiences by the activities we had chosen and the explicit and implicit assumptions enacted in the classroom moment by moment. The site was at times a contested space of differing motivations where the parents and students had attached different meanings to activities such as homework support, learning and socialization. At the same time, I had to consider that this was not a school but a center established for Arab American immigrants to help them “transition well” into the local community.

My six-month teaching experiences at AAANY brought to light one version of ideology of immigrant education in this “third space,”⁶ where the assumption was a

⁶I use this term rather loosely here to refer to a setting, outside the ‘official’ educational institutions, that has been set up for the purpose of providing for the needs of a particular community. This setting could be redefined and may or may not reenact the discourses of the ‘official’ educational institutions. However, throughout the larger dissertation, I will be exploring various conceptualizations of ‘third space,’ from

curriculum that exposed the students to the dominant English language and American culture would result in a smoother transition and assimilation into the U.S. community and gain access to economic and political power. The ‘importance’ of English in immigrant education is not dissimilar with the role of English in international contexts, particularly for postcolonial developing countries that might see English as a language to gain access to political and economic power. There were two other incidents at Teachers College that made me think of the growing role and influence of English as an international language. During a discussion in a class on literacy and development, one American student asserted English's dominance in the world and claimed that everybody should learn English. I was somewhat surprised by the assertion and argued against it, while secretly acquiescing to the growing dominance of the English language internationally. I struggled with her statement and I struggled with my role in perpetuating English's dominance in Malaysia. In another instance, an international graduate student at TC related a story about a friend who went to one of the European countries and while traveling, she had a miscommunication at the service counter at a train station, which had caused her to miss her train. She was exasperated and complained about the person's inability to speak in English. I asked my friend: since she was in a foreign country, why did she expect the person to speak in English since it was not the country's official language? These two incidents made me think of how the predominance of English can sometimes lead people to assume and expect its use in international contexts, where they may not have had a hundred years ago. Therefore, I felt it was important to examine the role of English within conceptualizations of English Education, within both local and international contexts from the perspectives of second language speakers of English.

postcolonial perspectives, especially as these conceptualizations pertain to my particular study site and my researcher desires and intentions.

My six months of teaching and researching at AAANY formed the impetus for my research interest. This research was focused on examining how Muslim American immigrant female youths were interpreting their educational experiences as a second language speakers of English within U.S contexts, where provisions for immigrant education varied considerably from one state/region/school to the next. The literature on immigrant education showed the tensions that immigrants face in accessing the language and culture of power; that same literature often examined these tensions by researching the production and circulation of knowledge, while simultaneously attempting to retain and validate particular immigrants' cultural capital. The great and current demand on the immigrant – indeed, the dominant expectations especially for those who have immigrated to the U.S. -- was to be educated in the dominant discourse while maintaining some agency to assent and resist it. While this was no easy feat, immigrants' "transnational" position may or may not enable them to further critique the U.S and their home countries, while at the same time, having to choose which values and identities to adopt, retain, reject or even hold in tension. According to Ong (1998), "We begin a dialogue when we recognize other forms of gender- and culture-based subjectivities, and accept that others often choose to conduct their lives separate from our particular vision of the future" (p. 90).

Specifics of the Study

Again: in general, my research was focused on examining how Muslim American immigrant female youths were interpreting their educational experiences as second language speakers of English within U.S contexts, where provisions for immigrant education varied considerably from one state/region/school to the next.

In this section, I detailed my specific research questions as well as my conceptualizations of my research participants and the methods by which I had gathered

data about their interpretations of their experiences as “immigrant Muslim young women” who were classified as second language speakers of English.

The participants for this research were Muslim female immigrants who:

- have migrated to the U.S. when they were very young;
- who have gone through the U.S. education system up to High School level;
- and who now may or may not be enrolled in college.

I had invited participation in this proposed study through my contacts and associates at AAANY. I particularly contacted youths who had “fit” my above-detailed participant criteria; these young women may or may not be or have been associated with AAANY. Starting with my associates as well as with former students, I have used a snowballing technique (Thompson, 2002) to invite participation to my study. I had framed my “interviews” as conversations within inquiry spaces where they might reflect with me – and at times with some other participants in a focus-group context -- on their English educational⁷ experiences in the U.S.

Research Questions

In this study, then, I had researched:

- (1) What discourses did Muslim female youths utilize in relation to how they described their status in U.S. contexts as “second language learners” of English?
 - (1a) How did their descriptions, if at all, exhibit aspects of resistance to what were most often positioned as dominant discourses in the U.S. in the learning of “English” as a second language?

⁷In Chapter IV, I will interrogate my educational experiences from learning English as a second language in postcolonial Malaysia to learning literature and how to teach it in my Doctoral English Education program at TC, Columbia University.

- (1b) How did their descriptions, if at all, exhibit aspects of assent to what were most often positioned as dominant discourses in the U. S. in learning of “English” as a second language?
- (2) How/did Muslim female youth study participants describe their “learning of English” within U.S. contexts in relation to how they perceive their cultural identities?
- (2a) How/did these participants describe their “learning of English” within U.S. contexts in relation to how they perceive their gendered identities?
- (2b) How/did these participants describe their “learning of English” within U.S. contexts in relation to how they perceive their socio-political identities?
- (3) How/did study participants construct their English Education experiences within a current U.S. climate of suspect and surveillance of all Muslims?

This study focused on my interpretations, which were framed by my own perspective as a Muslim woman, second language speaker and teacher, and an international graduate student, who utilized postcolonial, third-world-women feminism, and poststructural lenses. I positioned conceptualizations of “English Education” in a local U.S as well as international contexts, where, I believe, the binary of native/non native or first/second language speakers of English potentially could be disrupted.

Further, utilizing autobiographical forms of self-reflexive inquiry, I examined my own limited, partial and incomplete experiences as a Muslim woman, second language speaker of English and English teacher, as an international student who was educated in the UK for six years and who was pursuing her graduate study in the US. I did so in order to examine my relationship to English and English speaking communities as shaping part of my identities, possibly allowing me to make imaginative crossings, enabling access to new knowledge.

Thus, my research questions continue:

- (4) What happened when I examine my multiple identities as a Muslim woman, second language speaker, teacher and teacher trainer of English, and researcher in relation to this study's focus?
- (4a) How/did being embedded in Anglo-American dominant discourses of "teaching and learning English" affect my interpretations of my participants' responses?
- (4b) How/ did being embedded in Anglo-American dominant discourses of what counts as "education research" affected my interpretations of my participants' responses?

Questions within # 4 within this study obviously were framed, at the very least, by my interpretations thus far of my own learning and teaching experiences. For example, learning English for me had entailed accessing British and American English grammar i.e. structures, vocabulary and pronunciation. But, as Fanon argues, 'To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization' (Fanon, 1967, pp. 17-18, in Pennycook, 1998, p. 5). Thus, according to Pennycook (2002), "English is both the language that will apparently bestow civilization, knowledge and wealth on people and at the same time is the language in which they are racially defined" (p. 4).

It is with this assertion in mind that I had constructed this research. How did the Muslim American participants and I in this research construct and were being constructed in our relationships to English and the English speaking communities? Is it possible then, I wonder, to transform language that was once and perhaps still is seen as a tool of oppression and exploitation into a language of justice, liberation and as reflective of the cultures and flavor of local realities instead of perpetuating the colonial discourse or are we all doomed to experience this constant tension?

Furthermore, as I continued to work on examining my subjectivities, the more I realized how embedded I was in Anglo-American discourse, and that there were limited 'native' selves and knowledge for me to draw from as I continue to seek knowledge constructed in first world countries. I recognized the impossibility of ever fully critiquing a Euro-American discourse while being deeply embedded in it. At the same time, I believed that it was pertinent that we examined the construction of second language speakers of English from the perspectives of Muslim female youths because third world women often suffered from a double form of exclusion/oppression, firstly by the patriarchal community we came from and secondly by EuroAmerican theories (Jones, 2011). Instead, I envisioned a form of "transnational English Education" that was aware of its roles and effects in a global context, and that is, simultaneously, always becoming conscious of its relationship to second and foreign language speakers of English in developed, developing and third world countries.

Other issues related to my central inquiry that I more deeply researched within the larger dissertation context include:

- 'Othering' -- where difference was seen as neither permanent nor fixed but constantly fluctuating;
- local and international surveillance of Muslims, especially as reported in recent news stories;
- examining whose language, culture and knowledge were valued in current iterations of the "English" curriculum in the U.S.;
- disrupting the notion that learning English automatically entailed acceptance and belonging in the U.S. society;
- and that learning English could also potentially mean learning new ways of looking at and categorizing the world within historical, political and social contexts.

Clearly, I believed that it was pertinent that we examined the roles of English and conceptions of ‘advantages and disadvantages’ of learning English in local and international contexts at both personal and political levels, especially as the U.S extends its military, technological, economic, and political power globally in this 21st century.

Further, utilizing autobiographical forms of self-reflexive inquiry, I examined my own limited, partial and incomplete interpretations of experiences as a Muslim woman, second language speaker of English and English teacher, as an international student who was educated in the UK for six years and who currently is pursuing her graduate study in the US. I did so in order to examine my relationship to English and English speaking communities as shaping part of my identities, possibly allowing me to make imaginative crossings, enabling access to new knowledge, examining how I may be complicit in perpetuating colonial and Western discourse when teaching English and constructing my differences as the 'other.'

To reiterate then, the broadly conceived aim of this research was to examine spaces/conceptualizations/desires/perceptions that I shared and did not share with Muslim American female youths as we constructed our identities and experiences as second language speakers of English within local/international contexts, utilizing “autobiography as both a genre and mode of inquiry” (Miller, 2006, p. 33). Throughout, I must acknowledge too one of my deeply held hopes for this study, which I then also interrogated throughout this study: How may or may not Muslim American female immigrants’ transnational positions enable them to further examine the U.S as well as their home countries in relation to choosing which values and knowledges to adopt, retain, reject or even hold “in tension”?

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I began by discussing the conceptual frameworks I had utilized in this research and they were postcolonial, third world women feminism and poststructural theories. These theories had helped to inform, shape and disrupt my study on how Muslim American female immigrants were interpreting their English Education experiences, intersected with their multiple identities and subjectivities as Muslim, women, immigrants, second language speakers of English in the U.S., and these participants' interpretation will be further complicated in the retelling of their narratives based on their partial and limited memory, experiences and agency. I then discussed a postcolonial lens on immigrant education to highlight how provisions for immigrant education varied from one school, region and state; and the tensions for immigrants in maintaining their cultural heritage while accessing the language and culture of power and disrupting the binary of center and periphery, and how immigrants have the potential to reenact, acquiesce or resist the discursive practices of an education that values certain knowledges while excluding others. Finally, in this chapter I examined the reconceptualization of curriculum from a technical rational managerial conception of curriculum development to a poststructuralist conception, whereby it questioned what and whose knowledges were valued and it provided space to examine how teachers and students' situated historical, cultural and political subjectivities helped to shape and interpret their experiences of the curriculum.

Conceptual Frameworks

This research utilized postcolonial, third world women feminism, and poststructural theories (a) when examining how Muslim American immigrant female youths were interpreting their educational experiences as second language speakers of English within U.S contexts, where provisions for immigrant education varied considerably from one state/region/school to the next; and (b) when examining my own limited, partial and incomplete interpretations of experiences as a Muslim woman, second language speaker of English and English teacher, as an international student who was educated in the UK for six years and who currently was pursuing her graduate study in the U.S. Thus, I will go on to discuss postcolonial, third world women feminism and poststructural theories, in order to grapple with concepts of imperialism, colonialism, postcolonialism, difference, experience, memory and subjectivity, in reference to immigrant education and my own postcolonial education as a second language speaker of English.

Postcolonial Theory

In my readings, I traced the various definitions of imperialism, colonialism and postcolonialism and their relationships to one another. I found that there was no one definition of imperialism, because there was a great deal of variation in its manifestations. The ways that various peoples have experienced imperialism were not uniform throughout geographies nor were they necessarily confined within one particular period of time. "Imperialism" has been used to describe the economic, political, and cultural expansion of European countries such as Great Britain, France, Portugal, and Spain before World War II. Similarly, this term has been used to describe the economic, political and cultural influences and dominance of a few 'Western' developed countries in this age of globalization. The experiences of imperialism in terms of its imposition, intensity, duration, exertion, resistance and acquiescence varied considerably across as

well as within nations and/or communities. I see imperialism as the imperialist's grand idea of itself and colonization as the action, movement or policy in advancing that idea. At other times, I may be guilty of using these two terms interchangeably.

According to Said, imperialism is “the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory” (Said, 1993, p. 9). Similarly, Michael Doyle (1986) argues, “Empire is a relationship, formal and informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society. It can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by economic, social, or cultural dependence” (p. 45). Said and Boyle seem to include aspects of colonization into their definitions of imperialism. They are interconnected concepts and are quite difficult to tease out. Said later does make a distinction between the two, differentiating between imperialism and colonialism. In his view ‘direct colonialism’ ended the day the colonized countries gained their independence but imperialism still prevails. Following Said’s definition, “direct colonialism” ended in 1997 when Hong Kong was handed back to China, but other scholars would argue colonialism is still experienced by the Native American in the U.S. I am assuming here by ‘direct colonialism’ that Said is referring to the political and physical occupation of territories, which suggests he is alluding to a prevailing ‘indirect’ (i.e., social, cultural, intellectual) forms of colonization. However, I wonder how these ‘indirect’ forms differ from imperialism as “a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic and social process” (Said, 1993, p. 9).

Smith’s (2012) definition of imperialism is somewhat more nuanced than the ones provided by Said and Doyle. Smith subsumes colonialism as one aspect of imperialism. According to Smith, imperialism comprises four aspects and “colonialism is but one expression of imperialism” (p. 22). Imperialism refers to European expansion from the 15th century until the World War II and used in the following ways “1) imperialism as economic expansion; 2) imperialism as a ‘subjugation’ as others; 3) imperialism as an

idea or spirit; and 4) imperialism as a discursive field of knowledge” (p. 22). Colonialism as a form of economic expansion is “the system of control which secured the markets and capital investments. Colonialism facilitated this expansion by ensuring that there were European control, which necessarily means securing and subjugating the indigenous populations” (p. 22). Second, colonialism leads to acts of subjugation but the manner in which these acts are enacted may vary considerably from one colonized community to the next. Furthermore, colonialism is an ideology located within the Enlightenment notion of a ‘modern’ developed human being. Finally, colonialism as “a discursive field of knowledge” is advanced by postcolonial studies that attempt to make sense of and delineate forms of imperialism.

One of the underlying ideologies that helped to sustain colonialism is in the construction of the ‘Other,’ the image and stereotypes of the colonized perpetuated in essentialized and dehumanizing ways. According to Said (1993), an act of imperialism and/or colonialism is more than “a simple act of accumulation and acquisition”. It is based on “ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people require and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination; the vocabulary of classic nineteenth century imperial culture is plentiful with words and concepts like ‘inferior’ or ‘subject races,’ ‘subordinate people,’ ‘dependency,’ ‘expansion,’ and ‘authority’” (p. 9).

Postcolonial lenses are particularly valuable in examining unequal power relations that still exist in this globalized world (Macedo, 2000, p. ix). Postcolonial refers to “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002, p. 2). In claiming the value of postcolonialism, Ashcroft et al. assert, “First, we cannot understand globalization without understanding the structure of the sort of power relations which flourish in the twenty-first century as an economic, cultural and

political legacy of Western imperialism. Second, post-colonial theory, and particularly the example of postcolonial literatures, can provide very clear models for understanding how local communities achieve agency under such pressures” (p. 216). The power relation structures that Ashcrof et al. refer to are not only enacted within the global context, that is, between the developed and developing worlds, but are equally relevant to groups of immigrants in the countries they have settled in. Quayson (2000, in Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001) argues,

The “postcolonial” can be thought of as a site of dialogic encounter that pushes us to examine the constructions of center/periphery relations and conditions with specificity, wherever we can find them. One can no longer assume that “first” world agendas are simply reproduced in the “third,” but rather, one must pay special attention to the changeability of material and discursive oppression in and across multiple, specific contexts. (p. 7)

Postcolonialism also forces researchers to move away from discussing the experiences of the colonized and colonizer as binaries. It further complicates the notion that these experiences operate in an either/or situations and are somewhat fixed. As Hall (1996) aptly argues, postcolonialism “is obliging us to re-read the very binary form in which the colonial encounter has for so long been represented. It obliges us to re-read the binaries as forms of transculturation, of cultural translation, destined to trouble the here/there cultural binaries for ever” (p. 247 in Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001, pp. 6-7).

In my readings, I have seen the term (post)colonialism appropriated in a least four contexts; as part of imperialism; as part of describing immigrants’ experiences in the country of settlement; to describe feminist researchers’ construction of third world women; and to describe research carried out with indigenous communities. The similarities of its uses within these contexts are:

- describing the asymmetrical relationship between people of power and those in more subjugated position, the former whose culture is seen to be more valuable than the latter;
- involving some form of exploitation.

Some people like Said would argue that colonialism ended when the colonizer's far-reaching rule had been dismantled and the colonized countries had achieved independence. Others may argue while these countries achieved sovereignty and the right to rule, the effects and elements of colonialism still prevailed thereafter. For example, in Malaysia's case, it was only twenty-three years after independence that Malaysia gained ownership of the oil palm company 'Guthrie' owned by a British company, which had a stake in the majority of oil palm plantation. We did so after a raid in 1981 at the London Stock Exchange to buy the company's shares, which resulted in at least 200,000 acres of land returned to Malaysians.

The terms *imperialism* and *colonialism* are so closely interrelated that it may be difficult to differentiate but, from my perspective at least, colonialism is certainly part of imperialism. Colonialism as an act of occupying territories may have ended but its non-physical (i.e., cultural, social, psychological) manifestation still prevails. Therefore, I would argue that Said's conception of imperialism as "a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory" is no longer tenable as a definition at present, what with the non-physical manifestations of such still often prevailing even in light of the end of direct colonialism and the physical and technological mobility of people from other countries to Western countries.

Walter Mignolo (2014), following the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano, who had first coined this term, utilizes "coloniality" by way of distinguishing it from imperialism and colonialism. According to Mignolo,

Colonialism refers mainly to historical moments in the history of the modern/colonial world (Western formation and domination since 1500). Imperialism doesn't need colonialism. Colonialism is one of the visible faces of coloniality. There is coloniality without colonialism; for example, China or Japan or Russia. These formations were never colonized but did not escape coloniality. Today it is said that colonialism is over, an episode of the past, but coloniality is well and alive ... (short hand for 'colonial matrix of power'). (p. 197)

I see imperialism as an advancement of economic, political and cultural values by a few dominant and powerful countries. We see this with the advancement of a capitalist economy; where countries are hierarchically structured according to categories like “developed, developing and third world” - categories that I have difficulty avoiding in my own writing; where the West is still seen as the ‘center’ of knowledge and technological productions; where often developing countries’ economies serve to generate further wealth for the developed countries by providing resources and labor. I see this happening in Malaysia recently, with the construction of a rare earth plant in Kuantan (a town on the east coast of Peninsula Malaysia), by the Australian company Lynas corporations, where rare earth minerals will be processed, resulting in radioactive wastes being disposed off of Malaysian shores. (Chi, 2013). Or in the case of the collapse of a garment factory in Bangladesh, it has highlighted the precarious and often oppressive state Bangladeshi factory workers work in, to feed the demand by conglomerates like Walmart, H&M, the Gap, etc. to provide cheap clothing (Associated Press, 2013). In the cases I have mentioned above, the Malaysian and Bangladeshi governments were complicit in perpetuating this capitalist economy and if we continue along this path, we would exhaust our natural resources and generate non-biodegradable wastes.

It has become incumbent upon citizens and transnational corporations from the nations involved, therefore, to address these issues. In the case of the rare earth plant in Malaysia, some Malaysian activists have brought their petitions and protest to Lynas corporations in Sydney, Australia and they have received support from a few Australian NGOs. The struggle for justice and democracy must cut across nationalistic lines. The decolonial effort is no longer the reserve of the once colonized but transnational mobility and consciousness have brought it to the ‘center,’ complicating the binary of colonized and colonizer.

I found it exciting to see competing views, challenges to the dominant narratives and rewriting of histories, emanating from the U.S. Similarly, the postmodern turn has

further shattered any grand narrative and has created spaces for views contingent upon one's sociocultural and political points of views. The issues facing the world today like global warming, poverty, and racism increasingly require the coming together of people across national, political and cultural boundaries in a concerted effort to address interrelated and complex issues that do not recognize walls and nationalistic lines. I believe it is crucial for countries like Malaysia to create alternative knowledges and practices like Islamic financial and banking system or green sustainable development, and to define key concepts such as "development," "democracy," and "justice" for herself, instead of aping the West.

Third World Women Feminism(s)

In a discussion of feminists' constructions of "third world women," Mohanty (1988) highlights the construction of third world women by Western feminist researchers, which hierarchically position them as powerless victimized homogenous Othered, in relation to more developed empowered Western women. She uses the conceptual framework of colonization to exemplify these unequal hierarchical power relations, which she defines in this context as "predominantly discursive..., focusing on a certain mode of appropriation and codification of 'scholarship' and 'knowledge' about women in the third world by particular analytic categories employed in writings on the subject which take as their primary point of reference feminist interests as they have been articulated in the US and Western Europe" (p. 61). Mohanty does acknowledge Western feminist researchers as a heterogeneous group in its full complexities and manifestations but argues that one still could trace a particular pattern of hierarchical assumptions by many Western feminist researchers and the effects these assumptions have had on third world women.

Reading this article, I became uncomfortable with how she had positioned her argument. I wondered at this point if it was sufficient to merely acknowledge the

heterogeneity of feminists work in passing. She may have laid claim to the diversity and yet this was not represented in her writing at that particular historical juncture. I could understand as part of academic writing, the need to thoroughly and convincingly explicate a particular theory and yet was she not also perpetuating a particularly universal narrative by not presenting a more complex and contradictory version of Western feminisms?

Much of academic research and writing follow a similar pattern. Recently, in a class on critical pedagogy research, the instructor advised the students as budding researchers to choose participants, who were “articulate” to help make the research process more smooth and successful. Particularly in researches that laid claim to successful pedagogy, this instructor apparently was assuming that it became inherently more pertinent to choose participants who would confirm its success, thus perpetuating the “magic wand” approach to teaching and researching!

Similarly, in a previous research, I must now admit that, in choosing quotations from participants’ interview transcripts to demonstrate a point of view, my partner and I chose the ones that we felt were “articulate or eloquent.” In other words, we had chosen a person whose speech was similar to what we perceived we needed to construct as our “academic voice” and whose words sounded more like writing than speech, without its hesitations and pauses. This vignette points to a crucial issue in all representations of research, no matter from what theoretical orientations and assumptions: do many of us, in fact, make these decisions all the time in writing, especially when we are constrained by the number of words that any journal would consider for a ‘publishable’ scholarly article, or when we want to seek traditional forms of “validation” for our study?

Thus, I would like to further complicate Mohanty’s (1988) line of argument, so as not to absolve myself as a ‘third world woman’ (sic) of any potential biasness, based on my own subjectivities. I discovered this always-present possibility recently when I met up with a friend, who introduced me to a Muslim American girl who was wearing the

niqab.¹ Upon being introduced to her, I felt initially uncomfortable that I could only see her eyes and this initial reaction shocked me. The shock was immediately followed by a sense of shame. How could I as a Muslim feel uncomfortable with this attire so accepted in my Islamic faith? Eventually, I began to compose myself but the meeting had unnerved me and made me question Mohanty's assertion, that such biasness is imposed mainly by Western feminist researchers on third world women. Perhaps, my uncomfortable-ness was due to my more common interactions with Muslims, who wore the veil to cover their hair and chest, as well as to the fact that I have hardly ever encountered a Muslim woman wearing the *niqab*. Perhaps these "experiences" had shaped my unconscious views and affected my response that day. At the same time, I now must further consider that perhaps Mohanty's assertion was still very much relevant today, that is, that the "assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality ... and inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of Western scholarship on the 'third world' in the context of a world system dominated by the West" (p. 63) still predominate in a significant amount of feminist research. At the same time, I was acutely aware that these assumptions should never serve as a blind spot for third world women researchers' treatment of their counterpart.

Poststructuralism

No one of us can see the whole or sing the whole. Since I was a little child, I have known that all perspectives are contingent, that no one's picture is complete. (Greene, 1995, p. 82)

The book was still finely wrapped in thin plastic cover between Anyon's *Theory and Educational Research* and Finn's *Literacy with an Attitude* on the four-tiered wooden bookshelves. With my index finger, I gently pulled the top corner of the book and tilt it so my other fingers could grab its sides, lifting it out into my hands and leaving a gap on

¹A veil covering the hair and the face except the eyes

the usually packed organized bookcase. I am always uncomfortable with gaps, with the darkening hollow space now created between Anyon and Finn. It felt incomplete and called me to fill it in but I knew its existence was necessary at this moment so I held within me two opposing desires and emotions. The state of unknowing was equally discomfoting as the gap I had created. I looked at the white font of *Imaginative Horizons* juxtaposed against the blue cloudy sky and a figure of a man, an adventurer or explorer, standing perched on a boulder, facing the horizon ahead, a mountainous cloudy region. The cover was a painting, “Traveling next to a clouded sea” by Casper David Friedrich.

The man standing on the boulder was Friedrich himself, making his artistic presence known to his viewers, the observer observed, oscillating between being a subject and an object. Friedrich’s technique of painting himself into the landscape was apparently “a device intended to invite the viewer to look at the world through the lens of the artist's own personal perception.”² As my hand held up the book, I was looking at the same horizon that had transfixed this man, the one that he had seen, experienced, imagined and created. Paintbrush in hand, daubing oil upon canvas, moving back and forth between imagination and [re]creation. He must have sketched the outline first, the mountains and boulders before the figure of the man. The details, the fleshing out came later, layer upon layer upon layer of black, blue, white and green oils. The misty clouds made the peaks and boulders looked less solid than they were and accorded them more movement. The act of [re]creation forced one to attend to details we were bound to miss at first glance. For example, I had not noticed before the color of Finn, Anyon and Crapanzano’s book titles. In one research I had participated, I was asked to read colorful words of colors and after that to identify the colors the letters of each word was in. It took me longer to see the colors than the words. Perhaps not so surprisingly, I see the world in

²Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*. Retrieved from http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/his/CoreArt/art/rom_fri_wand.html

letters and am less attuned to its colors. Recreating this piece made me attend to other details my mind had deemed less important. Friedrich's world must be the opposite. He must see the various shades and hues of each landscape.

In creating the painting, I wondered what Friedrich would want me to see? Where was his unseen gaze directing my eyes? We cannot see for each other, but we can invite each other to gaze in our direction. By the tilt of his head, the broadness of his shoulder, and the point of his feet, Friedrich invited me to take in the expansive space and landscape. As I recreated above my experience "reading" the cover of the book, *Imaginative Horizons*, I also am underscoring key concepts in poststructuralism, that is, a researcher in constructing her research interest, is an embodied being, who is shaped by and reenacts particular political social cultural discursive systems (Miller, 2010). Experience, memory and subjectivities are concepts I am concerned with in my daily interactions and particularly when I do research. How do I make sense of what I observe and experience in my life and the classroom when my sight is limited, my memory is fragmented and my understanding is partial? It made me feel like experiences are more fluid than realist claims, like the mountains amidst the clouds. If such insights and perspectives were meant to be comforting, they weren't.

In qualitative research, the researcher is the "instrument" for gathering data. S/he decides what, why, how, where, when and with whom a particular research is carried out and how they are represented. These choices are not made in a vacuum but emanate from the researcher's attention, concerns, and interpretations of past and present experiences located in a particular context, climate and within dominant discourses. While my subjectivities may guide the way I shape this research, theory too, much like one's own historical, political, social and cultural assumptions and contexts, has the explanatory power to shape what a researcher attends to, but I find theory alone can be overpowering and overwhelming to the senses. It can take away the explorer's right to imagine and discover. It can take away the artist's right to inspire. To depend on theory alone can

confine our seeing and in doing so constrict our writing. So we must rise up to greet and meet theory with our whole being so we may humble it and ourselves as we co-create meanings of our experiences. Theory can be liberating only when it liberates its researcher as well as its readers. Theory is an imaginary bridge to possibility, an act of becoming but at the same time we may encounter other people's readings of us, which may contradict how we see ourselves or how we wish to be seen. In that encounter we may choose to reject, accept or negotiate on the multiple readings of us. And the very act of reading others we are defining who we are to them.

There is an obvious tension I feel in conceiving of this research between the conceptual frameworks I have chosen and my own subjectivities. I will discuss key concepts in poststructuralism such as memory, experience, agency and self-reflexive autobiography in more detail in the methodology section while simultaneously engaging in self-reflexive examinations of my felt tensions about such.

Why Did I Choose These Theoretical Frameworks?

How did these theoretical frameworks fit into each other? Firstly, I chose postcolonialism as a theoretical framework because coming from Malaysia, a postcolonial country, I felt postcolonialism shaped much of my perception of the 'world' I lived in. Postcolonialism as a theoretical framework was pertinent particularly when recognizing and examining the unequal power distributions between countries and amongst communities in each country. However, postcolonial theory does not assume a direct continuation of imperialism as practiced more than 100 years ago but it acknowledged and questioned the different forms it may have taken on at present. What I found valuable in postcolonial theory is that it had helped me to examine the politics of immigrant education in the U.S.; to question the role of English and English teaching in the U.S. and globally as 'natural and neutral' endeavor; and to examine what discursive system it had constructed and perpetuated.

I have found third world women feminism theoretical framework to be valuable because as a Muslim woman, I have oftentimes read and heard narratives that had positioned Muslim women, in particular to their wearing of the *hijab*, as oppressive and contradictory to the values of ‘equality’ and ‘freedom’ as espoused by ‘western’ feminists. Such beliefs have led to the banning of the *hijab* in France (Scott, 2007) and it being labelled as an archaic practice contradictory to our ‘modern’ lives. Muslim women have fought against such misrepresentations and chose to reinterpret the wearing of the *hijab* as in line with feminist values as they have found that it frees and empowers them to accomplish pursuits instead of being sexually objectified. It must be said that the issue of the *hijab* is debated not only in non-Islamic countries but also in predominantly Islamic countries and within the Muslim community in non-Islamic countries like in the U.S. There has never been a consensus as to the ruling on the wearing of the *hijab*. Based on my own experience, I have to acknowledge how I too have subconsciously internalized the values attached to the many forms of the *hijab* and became more comfortable with one form as opposed to another such as the *niqab*. Third world women feminism helped me to examine one of the identities of the participants in this research as Muslim women in one of the Western countries, whereby their religious identity may or may not be accepted or understood and how these participants have chosen to reinterpret and assent to the readings they have felt imposing on them. However, postcolonialism and third world women feminism are prone to grand generalization, which assumed and trapped postcolonial and third world individuals in experiences that failed to recognize and acknowledge how each person is subjected to, construct and is reconstructed within a particular discursive system one may be conscious and subconscious of. These theoretical frameworks as well as my own subjectivities as a researcher, have the potential to affect how I have constructed this research and my interpretations of the participants’ responses, thus ‘trapping’ them in a grand narrative.

Poststructuralism in particular was invaluable in troubling and disrupting the other two theoretical frameworks. While I have to acknowledge as a researcher I am ‘compelled’ to interpret these responses, I hope by combining postructuralism to postcolonialism and third world women feminism theoretical frameworks, I could possibly disrupt and complicate the Muslim American female immigrants’ interpretations of their English Education experiences. Firstly, following the crisis of representation, it placed me the researcher under scrutiny, by not absolving me of my ‘guilt’ in how I have chosen to construct this research and my ‘reading’ or interpretation of the interviews. Furthermore, key concepts in postructuralism such as ‘memory,’ ‘experiences,’ ‘agency,’ ‘difference,’ and ‘reflective subjectivities’ have helped me to interpret and construct the participants’ English education, and their identities as Muslims, women and immigrants as limiting, fluctuating, and subjected to discursive systems.

**Immigrant’s Journey – “Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”**

To honestly confront histories of inequity and imbalance, the false claim to innocence and the hiding behind patriotic myths must be questioned.
(Jones, 2011, p. 2)

Mei Ying,³ Namuun,⁴ and I walked off the ferry that took us from Manhattan to Liberty Island. In this December day in 2011, four days before Christmas, we wanted to celebrate the end of the semester by visiting one of the most iconic symbols in the U.S., The Statue of Liberty. Namuun was visiting, and Mei Ying wanted to take her sightseeing in NYC. She asked me to come along, so off we went, three international students from Singapore, Mongolia, and Malaysia, who were playing tourists for the day. We were bundled up in our winter clothes and coats in preparation of the winter cold, but that day

³Real name

⁴Real name

the sun was shining brightly and there were few scattered clouds in the sky. I had seen it countless times on television, in films and when I crossed over to Staten Island on the ferry, but on that day, I found the Statue of Liberty impressive and it was a sight to behold seeing it up close. As we walked around the circumference of the statue, the sunrays enveloped the front of the statue, and I traced its silhouette against the almost clear sky. On the Western side of the island, we came upon five small bronze statues of Édouard René Lefèbvre de Laboulaye, Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi, Alexandre Gustave, Joseph Pulitzer and Emma Lazarus, who I learned were key figures who had contributed to the Statue's construction and symbolic meaning. I first heard of Emma Lazarus's name and her beautiful poem, 'The New Colossus,' in the first course I enrolled in at Teachers College, Literature and Teaching. However, the significance of the poem as well as the Statue worked on me only as an English Education student and a tourist. At the end of my graduate program, I get to go home. It may not have been the same meaning the Arab American immigrants at AAANY may have attached to it as they painted it on the mural or perhaps they had not even considered its significance at all.

'The New Colossus' by Emma Lazarus

"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
 With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
 Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
 The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
 Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
 I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

The poem 'The New Colossus' by Emma Lazarus, which is etched on the Statue of Liberty, is a symbolic welcoming gesture for the immigrants' journey to the U.S., land of supposed and 'real' opportunity. Lady Liberty, this matriarchal figure, a "mighty woman" and "mother of exiles" warmly embraces the 'tired', 'poor' and 'huddled masses' to her shores. It is a poem of hopes and dreams for many who yearn for a better life. The immigrant stories themselves are as varied as their socioeconomic and historical

backgrounds. These immigrants' experience of living the dreams their parents had for them and they have for themselves is only one narrative amongst many in their lives. Other narratives may include being uprooted, negotiating their cultural and multiple identities, disillusionment, escaping persecution, re-imagination and revived hopes.

For example, Ong (1995), in her article on Chinese women's migration to the U.S., complicates the narrative of "Chinese women fleeing the unremittingly oppressive society into full emancipation" (p. 351) by showing how, while in the U.S. they struggled with marital abuse and a sense of isolation, while at the same time, critiquing their Chinese culture and resisting "Western constructions of one's Third World identity" (p. 355). McLaren (2000) reminds us that "immigration has a varied history, not all of it ending in the Panglossian fable known as the 'American Dream'" (p. 1 in Trueba et al., 2000).

While Lazarus's poem is heart warming and welcoming to immigrants, feeding into the grand narrative of the U.S. as a land of opportunity and built on the backs of immigrants, at a policy and legal level, immigration is one of the most contentious and conflicting issues in the U.S. today. The battle for immigration reform is still ongoing and has curtailed the 'Dreamers' to a path of citizenship and reinforced border security between the U.S and Mexico (Immigration Policy Center, 2013). Contrary to the poem, not all immigrants are welcomed, poor and homeless. I felt it was important for me to deconstruct this grand narrative of America as the land of opportunity for immigrants because for the longest time I had fallen for that myth, from listening and watching stories of immigrants who had prevailed over hardships and achieved the "American dream". My readings in narrative research classes had forced me to reexamine that assertion and complicate the stories of immigrants' journey.

I read Anzaldúa (1987), who writes, "The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country

– a border culture” (p. 25). Anzaldua’s vivid image and pain, which is so aptly described, is in such stark contrast to that warm welcoming gestures conveyed in Lazarus’s poem. As I watched the PBS documentary “The undocumented” (2013, April 9), I was completely horrified at the number of undocumented immigrants’ who made the unforgiving and sometimes deadly crossings across the U.S-Mexican border. Many had suffered from the relentless heat and harsh terrains to make that crossing only to be caught by the Border Security agents or lose their lives, their bodies baked and dehydrated under the scorching sun. This reminded me of one of my childhood experiences, after the end of the Vietnam War towards the end of the 70s and early 80s, when the Indochina region was still in turmoil, and reeling from the devastation, many Vietnamese and Cambodians journeyed on boats across the South China Sea to the beaches of Peninsula Malaysia. Once a Vietnamese boat became lodged in the sand a mile away from our beach. My family, neighbors and I saw at least a hundred people on the boat, many of whom started jumping off the boat to swim to shore. The fishermen and navy boats later rescued the others, mostly women and children. They began congregating in a field opposite our houses, seeking shade under the *Rhu*⁵ and coconut trees. We gave what we could of food, water and clothes. Later they were taken in army trucks away to a refugee shelter. Many if not all were later deported to their home countries. The immigrants’ journey is at times thwarted and aborted.

The flow of Muslim immigrants into the U.S has seen a history of acceptance, denial and scrutiny based on the fear of threats to national security. Beginning with the first wave of immigration between 1870 and 1890 where the majority came from the Middle East, South Asia and Albania, until “the 1924 Johnson-Reed Immigration Act, which prohibited all Asians from coming to the United States, including those from most of the Muslim and Arab countries that were also classified as Asian” (Fine & Sirin,

⁵Casuarina equisetifolia - A type of tree species often found on Malaysia’s coastline

2008). Similarly, the second wave of Muslim immigration was halted by the Patriot Act after 9/11 and recently The American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California reported that the Muslim immigration application came under great scrutiny after the Boston bombing tragedy, resulting in blacklisting and prolonging of the process (Taxin, 2013). Jennie Pasquarella, an ACLU staff attorney said, "It is essentially creating this secret criteria for obtaining naturalization and immigration benefits that has never been disclosed to the public and Congress hasn't approved" (Taxin, 2013). In response to the report, a spokesman for Citizenship and Immigration Services, Christopher Bentley said, "We are vigilant in executing these responsibilities, and will not sacrifice national security or public safety in the interest of expediting the review of benefit applications" (Taxin, 2013).

I discuss here the immigrants' journey through one of the most iconic symbols, i.e., the Statue of Liberty, that has consistently been used to represent the U.S. history and its treatment of immigrants, as a means to trouble in my own mind the grand narrative of the U.S as a land of immigrants, who are in search of the American dreams. Immigration is one of the most contentious political issues at this time and in examining immigration, I construct both the history of inclusion and exclusion of immigrants, particularly in relation to the U.S relationship with Muslim immigrants.

A Postcolonial Lens of Immigrant Education

The concept and enactments of "immigrant education" could be subsumed in the U.S. under "minority education", which has been conceived by some as a political act, originating historically in the Civil Rights movement in the United States. Throughout the years it has evolved in response to the concerns of its times. During the civil rights movement, the drive had been to achieve the rights to be educated, to participate in desegregated schooling, and to dispelling the myth of genetic inferiority in relation to

education perpetuated by similar beliefs that helped to sustain slavery. At the heart of minority education, proponents aim to fight for social justice, e.g., counter racism, achieve educational equity, and challenge the hegemony of middle class, white normative discourse and knowledge. The tensions surrounding minority education are still ongoing within the current climate of No Child Left Behind Act and Common Core standards, and the concern is still focused on the relatively wide achievement gap in literacy between dominant and minority students. On the one hand, a school is seen as a place to acculturate minority students into the mainstream discourse in order to improve their social, economic and political standing. On the other hand, it is also a place to affirm their culture and language. It has led to the debate on standardized curriculum as well as the debates surrounding pedagogical approaches that supposedly address students' diversities, such as multicultural education, culturally responsive and relevant teaching/pedagogy, bicultural/bilingual education, funds of knowledge, and hip hop pedagogy.

At the heart of these educational debates are conceptualizations and resulting treatments of difference. Bailey Jones (2011) asserts, "I see three current themes in formal and informal approaches to difference in education in the United States: difference is celebrated as an exotic diversion to the everyday, it is used to maintain the power of the dominant culture over those who are different, or it is treated as a possible threat to the safety and security of our 'American way of life'" (p. 19).

Macedo's (2000) use of colonialism to describe immigrants' experiences situated within the U.S., which is based on a Marxist ideology, is with reference to the asymmetrical power relations. He argues that these power relations are "between the dominant and the subordinated group" in the United States, particularly pertaining to the extraction of "surplus labor from workers, burdened by the baggage of white supremacy and self-interest in reproducing colonialism, and reaping the benefits of belonging to the capitalist class" (p. ix).

In relation to, but not necessarily sharing Macedo's Marxist perspective, research on immigrant education in the U.S. has focused mainly on reducing the literacy gap between dominant and minority students (Delpit, 2001; Hirsh, 1988; Ogbu, 1978), on immigrants' transculturation in local society, and on validating their cultural capital (Gonzalez et al., 1995; Sanchez, 2007). But, for example, English education for immigrant populations in the U.S. is not standardized, nor is it uniform in its theory and practice. Thus an immigrant may experience different approaches to the teaching of English as a second language, depending on the policy, approaches, and monetary resources from the state, the region or even specific school. Thus, in relation to my proposed dissertation research, the participants in this study may differently interpret their experiences and thus construct very differing accounts of their educational experience.

Studies on immigrants' experiences have mainly focused on their transnational experiences of mediating between their country of origin and settlement. There is a tendency to think that providing citizenship education or teaching English for immigrants would create an 'American' identity. Firstly, what constitutes an American identity needs to be unpacked. Second, pedagogical processes and intentions are much more complex than that.

And, as noted earlier, "transculturation" is negotiated within the nexus of cultural interactions and encounters. It happens when we read a book; speak with another person or watch television. It is exercised in our daily encounters. It cannot be taught. It is experienced and interpreted in vastly differing ways. It happens when we come across readings or situations that brings to the fore our cultural differences. Immigrants are in unique and differing positions in terms of negotiating all these interactions and exchanges in their daily lives. However, "immigrant education" has often failed to acknowledge or address these unique transcultural positions in which immigrants are often in within various constructions of "curriculum." Dimitriadis and McCarthy (2001) argue:

Against the tide of this current change, however, mainstream educational thinkers, particularly in the United States, have tended to draw a bright line of distinction between the established school curriculum and the teeming world of multiplicity that flourishes in the everyday lives of youth beyond the school. These educators still insist on a project of homogeneity, normalization, and the production of the socially functional citizen. (p. 2)

Similarly, there is an underlying assumption that the more immigrants assimilate within the local culture, the more academically successful they will become (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2000, p.18). Implicit in this view is that the cultural value of the host country outweighs the cultural value of the immigrant population (Macedo, 2000). Macedo (2000) goes on to argue,

On the one hand this ideological yardstick serves to overcelebrate the dominant group's values to a level of mystification (i.e. viewing English as education itself and measuring the success of bilingual programs only in terms of success in English acquisition), and, on the other hand, it devalues the worth of the cultures of nonwhite people who now populate most urban areas. (p. x)

Furthermore, it is often assumed that the role of assimilation falls heavily on the immigrants without taking into account the acceptance of the local community or the school structure in sustaining integration. For example, Olsen's (1997) two-and-a-half-year study of Madison High School was profoundly revealing on the nature of racial and class dynamics and deep divisions amongst its students as well as the particular State and school's policy in their treatment of immigrants. In particular, I was struck by the misperceptions by the school community on the issue of diversity. While the presence of a growing number of immigrants suggests that the school had become a site for diversity, Olsen's study reveals that diversity did not necessarily entailed integration. In an exercise of social mapping, the students identified physical areas within the school that show where students of different ethnic background congregated. There were also more groups of students of the same ethnicity than they were of mixed races. Negotiating a sense of belonging amongst the students proved to be a tricky one as they did not want to be seen as too 'Other' when mixing with students of different racial background for fear of taunts

from their friends of the same racial background. One student said that it was better to choose sides, because to be in the middle meant you would be ‘thrown stones’ from both sides. The physical separation of ELLs demonstrated their invisibility in the consciousness of the students and the administrators alike. Olsen concludes,

Marginalization, racialization, and pressures toward conformity that required immigrants students to give up their home language and cultural identity were the new Americanization project – one that offered only partial acceptance to newcomers and immigrants. But I also concluded that it was still an open question about which way our society would choose to go: toward increased imposition of a single monocultural model of what it means to be an American or toward a more multicultural and inclusive vision that might embrace the many linguistic and cultural groups immigrating to the country. Sadly, I don’t believe it is an open question any longer. The nation has turned markedly toward exclusion. (p. vi)

While the term “transculturation” acknowledges the agency immigrants may exercise, postcolonialism unveils the discursive elements of immigrant education in the U.S. linked to its center/periphery relationship. Thus, there is a need to further complicate this binary by examining how agency is achieved and how discursive practices are reproduced or challenged or resisted or ignored at various time and contexts. Agency is not an acquisition, that is, it cannot be achieved completely but rather is constantly enacted through negotiations. Quayson (2000) argues,

The ‘postcolonial’ can be thought of as a site of dialogic encounter that pushes us to examine center/periphery relations and conditions with specificity, wherever we can find them. One can no longer assume that “first” world agendas are simply reproduced in the “third,” but must pay special attention to the changeability of material and discursive oppression in and across multiple, specific contexts. (in Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001, p. 7)

Studies on immigrants’ education have focused on examining the discursive and social nature of literacy teaching and practices; the ideology of teachers and the transformation involved in teaching minority population; and highlighting immigrants’ cultural knowledge as wealth to be included in the classroom and curriculum. The ‘new literacy’ studies have drawn our attention to the discursive and social nature of literacy

teaching and practices. Street (1993) argues the limitation of viewing literacy as an autonomous and neutral practice because it fails to take account of the power relations in which literacy practices are imbedded. He asserts,

It is not simply sufficient, however, to extol simply the richness and variety of literacy practices made accessible through such ethnographic detail: we also need bold theoretical models that recognize the central role of power relations in literacy practices. I elaborate below on the ideological model of literacy that, I suggest, enables us to focus on the ways in which the apparent neutrality of literacy practices disguises their significance for the distribution of power in society and for authority relations: the acquisitions, use, meanings of different literacies have an ideological character that has not been sufficiently recognized until recently. (pp. 430-431)

In particular, the view of the relationship between orality and literacy as either a divide or a continuum is problematical and so Street (1993) proposes an alternative view, making “the distinction between autonomous and ideological models of literacy” (p. 431). In the autonomous model, literacy is seen as technical, discrete and “independent of social context.” Ong (1982) articulates it as such: “By isolating thought on a written surface, detached from any interlocutor, making utterance in this sense autonomous or indifferent to attack, writing presents utterance and thought as uninvolved in all else, somehow self contained, complete” (p. 432).

Probst (in Street, 1993) argues against the autonomous model, stating that it does not reveal literacy’s social nature and “its relationship to other institutions” (p. 433). The ideological model is based on the premise that “literacy practices as inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in society and to recognize the variety of cultural practices associated with reading and writing in different contexts” (Street, 1993, pp. 433-434). Street’s use of the term *ideology* includes both the cultural aspects of literacy as well as the power dynamics. It also serves as a “site of tension between authority and power on the one hand and resistance and creativity on the other” (p. 434). It does not deny the study of technical aspects of literacy but only when examined within the social cultural

contexts. Research based on the ideological model would thus open “up a potentially rich field of inquiry into the nature of culture and power, and the relationship of institutions and ideologies of communication in the contemporary world” (p. 437).

Curriculum as Autobiography

I sat at the back of the classroom observing one of my teacher trainees conducting a lesson with at least 30 primary school children. The fans on the ceiling were spinning at full speed to ease the heat and humidity of Malaysian weather and the windows were wide open to allow what little breeze there was to circulate. The classroom was abuzz with the voices of children from the other nearby classrooms, only to fall relatively silent when their teachers began their teaching. In my hand was a piece of paper, the lesson observation guidelines with which I would assess the lesson. I knew how uncomfortable it was for my student to be observed, having gone through it myself in the last year of my bachelor degree. I tried to ease her discomfort, though I wasn't sure how successful I was, by maintaining a straight face, reducing any facial expressions particularly of disapproval. In that 45-minute lesson, I did the impossible task of observing how engaged the children were with the activities, how much learning was taking place, how effective she was at managing the classroom, how creative she was at designing the teaching aids and whether the activities she had designed helped her to achieve her objectives. Later, we would sit down and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the lesson.

My own conception of curriculum had derived from a notion of technical-rational curriculum development

that conceives curriculum as bits of information and universally agreed upon knowledge that supposedly can be arranged in a linear order and transmitted to the learner. In such a model, curricular development, design, and, most importantly, curricular meaning are determined by relationships among Tyler's sequential steps of developing educational purposes or objectives, as well as educational experiences, and then deciding how these can be

organized and evaluated in terms of learners' attainment of the predetermined objectives. (Miller, 2010, p. 499)

The underlying assumptions that framed my “observation” here thus included: the teacher was capable of transmitting knowledge to the children through the activities she or he had designed; and she or he must possess the skill and personality of an entertainer and the whip of a show master. It was only in my class at TC that I learned another conception of curriculum development from a poststructuralist lens. In the 1970s, Pinar and Grumet (1976) began theorizing curriculum as autobiographical text as a means to make connections between “school knowledge, life history and intellectual development, in ways that might function transformatively” (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 515). Pinar was dissatisfied with the exclusion of individual, be it the teacher or the learner, in favor of content knowledge, curriculum design, materials and evaluation (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 519).

It had never occurred to me to consider “educators' and students' subjectivities - the unconscious and conscious emotions and thoughts of individuals, their senses of themselves and their varying ways of understanding their relations to the world - [that] are always in process, contradictory, produced historically, and reconstituted in discourse each time they think or speak” (Miller, 2010, p. 499). Indeed, I had experienced the tensions of operating from a technical rational conception of curriculum when I began teaching at AAANY.

The boys were running around the place. They were playing hide and seek with me hiding behind the door of the backroom. One of the school volunteers and I tried to get them to come into the main room so we could start the lesson. A few did but not everyone. I started by writing on the board the word ‘Spring’ and asked them what they could think of when they thought of Spring. I gave examples like flowers and the children started giving me their responses like sun. I let Yunus⁶, Adeeb⁷, Kamal⁸ and Obaid⁹

⁶A pseudonym

⁷A pseudonym

hand out the cardboard cards, magazines and cut outs, glues and scissors. They wanted to help handing them out. I told Youssef to call the other two boys Adeeb and Ali¹⁰ to come into the room from the backroom and he did. He was very helpful. Once they had all the things necessary the older boys decided to work in the back rooms. They wanted to move away from the main room. I let them although I did feel uncomfortable, feeling like I could not manage the class well. Obaid and Ali the younger ones stayed with me. (2012, December 3)

Classroom management was such an issue for me because I was never “trained” to teach young children. I had taught in a secondary school for five years before teaching at a teacher preparation college for six years. A few weeks into teaching I had a dream the night prior my weekly commute of being observed in the classroom by one of my professors and dying of complete shame and embarrassment for my imagined failure as a teacher. My perceived inability as a teacher to manage the classroom became a great source of discomfort for at least the first three months. In my mind it is one of the most crucial characteristics of a successful teacher. My conception of a successful classroom would be for all the students to remain seated in the same room, to be and to remain on task, and to be respectful of each other.

However, perhaps for the students, the site was seen as a less formal setting far removed from the regulations of school. The students’ actions --- such as moving to another space, refusing to work on the task I had planned, and deciding to work on separate task could be perceived as their ways of exercising agency and gaining more independence as opposed to resisting or challenging my authority. Gradually, I began to allow the students more roles in the classroom, such as helping me distribute the handouts or materials to their classmates or taking charge in conducting games like Hangman.

⁸A pseudonym

⁹A pseudonym

¹⁰A pseudonym

The students sometimes were very eager to take on the role of a ‘teacher’ as in the case of Azim,¹¹ who started teaching the other children Arabic scripts while I was helping a student with his homework, or of some of the older children who would help the younger ones with their homework. I realized that I needed to gradually relinquish my role as the sole authority in guiding the students’ learning experiences and allow them the independence they sought. The presence of many conflicting energies of the children and the high school volunteers as well as the varied activities was initially disconcerting for me but the children seemed to be more at ease with the situation. I realized this involved a negotiation between asserting and relinquishing some of my authority and control in the classroom and a reconceptualization of this version of third space. Britzman (2003), in observations of the teaching profession, asserts:

Our skeletal depiction suggests that more often than not, to know education is to be able to measure it as success or failure and so reduce educational experience to an authoritative order of compliance and noncompliance ... understanding the experience of having to be educated and then trying to learn how to educate others is far more complex, ambiguous, and paradoxical than supposed in the reigning binary split of success and failure and the rigid notions of authority and control that follow. Learning is never so cut and dried, even if the structure of schooling is organized to belie the belatedness of learning. Indeed for the learner and the teacher, what counts as success and failure is subject to wild vacillations and, so, to revision. Mistakes, misrepresentations, confusion, conflicts, and little gifts of error are all crucial to the stuff of understanding and constructing knowledge, as are small and large adjustments and insights we make from these events. (pp. 1- 2)

Following a poststructuralist conception of teaching and learning as that articulated by Britzman, for example, “curriculum” too thus is conceptualized “to be a political act, with incomplete, fractured, and deferred meanings constantly shifting and reconstructing versions of particular content knowledge” (Miller, 2010, p. 499).

¹¹A pseudonym

However, during my six months of pedagogical experiences at AAANY, I had found how even in this ‘third space’, predominant Enlightenment and technical-rational versions of teaching, curriculum and learning governed approaches to the teaching of English as a second language were enacted in the Kitaab class I was teaching, and how I was complicit in reenacting these.

Thus, my brief teaching experiences at AAANY have led me to a larger inquisition into Muslim American female immigrants’ English Education experiences and their interpretations of those experiences. The construction of this research inquiry is very much based on my own concerns, experiences and subjectivities, and thus why I am focused on certain issues such as Muslim surveillance, how Muslim American female immigrants are interpreting their English Education experiences as second language speakers, and how to disrupt the notion that learning English immediately entails acceptance in the U.S.

In this dissertation research, then, I examined, in self-reflexive ways, my interpretations of the autobiographical accounts of the participants’ experiences that they provide to me as second language speakers of English in contexts where provisions for immigrant education varies from one school to the next.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

In constructing this research, I drew on self-reflexive autobiography, decolonizing methodology, and the treatment of ‘difference’ as a means to explore the issues of immigrant English Education in the U.S. I will also discuss:

- criteria in choosing the participants;
- how I had planned to seek these female American Muslim immigrants for my study;
- and interpretations of who Muslim Americans “are” in the U.S. The methods of inquiry and analysis I have chosen for this study are autobiographical self-reflexivity and interviews.

Self-Reflexive Autobiography

I had utilized autobiography in this research for the purpose of examining my own and my participants’ interpretations of our English Education experiences, intersected by our multiple identities as Muslim, women, English language learners and speakers, and further complicated by our limiting experiences, memories and conceptions and enactments of what we each regard as agency. Philippe Lejeune defines autobiography as “the retrospective narrative in prose that someone makes of his own existence when he puts the principal accent upon his life, especially upon the story of his own personality” (in Smith & Watson, 2001, p. 1). In writing an autobiography, “the writer becomes, ...

both the observing subject and the object of investigation, remembrance, and contemplation” (p. 1). Like the cover of the painting “Traveling next to a clouded sea” by Casper David Friedrich I have written about in Chapter II, the painter/writer observes, interprets, reflects on, and recreates her or his experiences, shaped by her or his limited memory.

One of the main components when writing an autobiography is our understanding and interpretation of what we regard as our ‘experiences.’ Following Smith and Watson’s definition (2001), experience is “an interpretation of the past and of our place in a culturally and historically specific present” (p. 24). Experience is a socially constructed series of events, based on the external material ‘reality’ we encounter, enacted by our internal (sub)consciousness on the external events (Scott, 1992). However, how we interpret and make meanings of those events are dependent on social, cultural, political and religious discursive scripts we have been exposed to and have internalized. Scott argues, “It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience” (in Smith & Watson, 2001, p. 25). I learn ideas about being a woman, Muslim, Malaysian, English language learner, speaker and teacher, and graduate student. I learn about what to include and exclude from academic discourse. For example, I have excluded completely any talk on my sexuality because I do not see its ‘relevance’ in academic discourse. However, the lack of explicit discussion of my construction as a heterosexual does not mean the complete absence of this identity marker. Or perhaps to put it more accurately, I am ‘assuming’ a heteronormative discourse of my discussion of my experiences as a second language learner, speaker and teacher.

Another crucial component of autobiography is memory. According to Smith and Watson (2001), “narrated memory is an interpretation of a past that can never be fully recovered” (p. 16). Our memories are selective, contextual, historical and deeply political. What we choose to remember and how we choose to remember events, become like a stitched quilt, “that is, we inevitably organize or form fragments of memory into

complex constructions that become the stories of our lives” (Schacter, in Smith & Watson, 2001, p. 16).

Writing autobiography is also dependent on our conscious and subconscious views of ourselves, and our demarcation between private and public self/selves, which is sanctioned by the cultural and social rules we have embodied. These are the stories and the ‘sanctioned’ discourse(s) that we allow ourselves and that have been allowed in order to talk about ourselves in relation to a particular topic and context. Friedrich and I could be observing and recreating the same scenery but how we see it and how we see ourselves will vary. When writing an autobiography:

the life narrator confronts not one life, but two. One is the self that others see-the social, historical person, with achievements, personal appearance, social relationships. These are "real" attributes of a person living in the world. But there is also the self experienced only by that person, the self felt from the inside that the writer can never get "outside of." (Smith & Watson, 2001, p. 5)

In autobiography, a concept like ‘truth’ is further disrupted. While we can expect adherence to factual information, much of autobiography narration is constructed based on the person’s fluctuating interpretations and subjectivities. In addition, the narrator could also provide contextual information s/he did not experience personally but it is based on common knowledge or information gleaned from family members. For example, when I had written about the time of my birth, some of the information was gathered from my mother’s retelling and some from my common knowledge about the town I was born in and its daily practices. Thus, Smith and Watson (2001) suggest:

We approach self-referential writing as an intersubjective process that occurs within the writer/reader pact, rather than as a true-or-false story, [so] the emphasis of reading shifts from assessing and verifying knowledge to observing processes of communicative exchange and understanding. (p. 13)

In this research, how and what I choose to tell about my life as a second language speaker and teacher of English is shaped by what I interpret as having experienced, what I remember from my experiences, what I perceive to be ‘relevant’ to the topic; and my

interpretations of those experiences could change across time. Smith and Watson (2001) further extend the definition of autobiography as thus:

Our working definition of autobiographical or life narrative, rather than specifying its rules as a genre or form, understands it as a historically situated practice of self-representation. In such texts, narrators selectively engage their lived experience through personal storytelling. Located in specific times and places, they are at the same time in dialogue with the personal processes and archives of memory. (p. 14)

What is Reflexivity?

In this research I have utilized self-reflexivity as a means to explore how my own subjectivities have affected how I had constructed this research inquiry, how my participants and I had constructed ‘difference,’ and how I chose to analyze and represent the participants’ interviews. In Chapter I, I attempted to expose how my “entry” into AAANY and what I was attending to -- such as the sign outside AAANY, the colorful mural on the wall, the blue paper glued behind the door that delineated steps to take when approached by FBI agents, and my perception of the curriculum constructed for the Kitaab club -- are all shaped by what I had perceived to be valuable and important within the context of this “third space,” intersected with my identities and roles as a Muslim Malaysian woman, a second language speaker and teacher of English, and a graduate student at Teachers College. My self-reflexive practice and process were at times uncomfortable but at the same time, they represented what I attended to and what I did not. But what exactly is reflexivity? How have I utilized it thus far? And how will I continue to utilize it?

Pillow (2003), in her article, argues that qualitative researchers have used reflexivity as a methodological tool in order to address issues of representation, establish authority and legitimization (p. 176). Following Chiseri-Strater’s definition, reflexivity is recognition of “an other and [involves] some self-conscious awareness of the process of

self-scrutiny” (1996, in Pillow, 2003, p. 177). Reflexivity helps to contribute to research process by attending to issues of power and privilege, questioning how research could be more ‘ethical’, and unveiling how knowledge is constructed, produced and distributed. Pillow discussed four uses to reflexivity (i.e. reflexivity as recognition as self, reflexivity as recognition of the other, reflexivity as truth, and reflexivity as transcendence (all of which are based on assumptions of an Enlightenment, fully “knowable” self) and then suggested a fifth, which she coined as “reflexivities of discomfort” (p. 187). She argues for this form of reflexivity founded in the postmodern, whereby the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ are seen as multiple, unknowable and shifting embodied beings.

‘Reflexivity as recognition of self’ invokes the researcher to examine, scrutinize and represent his or her own subjectivities to make for ‘better,’ less ethnocentric, and ethical research. Pillow’s objection to the use of reflexivity as recognition of self in most qualitative research is that it assumes that the ‘self’ is a knowing subject, fully capable of revealing her/himself to the readers. Furthermore, when researching her or his community, the researcher would often align her/himself as closely as possible with her or his research group in order to yield ‘better’ data. Underlying ‘insider’ status is an assumption that the more familiar and aligned the researcher and participants are to each other, the better access to and quality of information gained. It thus limits the role of the researcher as a person whose main priority and success is to extract information from the participants that other researchers may not.

‘Reflexivity as recognition of the other’ underscores the importance for the researcher to represent the Other “accurately,” to enable the participants to define themselves (Trinh, 1991, p. 67) and to provide space for more egalitarian researcher-participants relationship when doing research. Critics of the stance (hooks, 1990) argue “the ability to reflexively discuss the problems of representation as a privileged space from which to work” (Pillow, 2003, p. 185). Pillow goes on to argue, “Reflexivity then always occurs out of an unequal power relationship and, in fact, the act of reflexivity may

perpetuate a colonial relationship while at the same time attempting to mask this power over the subject” (p. 185). I take up further this issue in relation to the difficult (im)possibility of ever fully representing ‘difference’ in the next section.

The third form of ‘reflexivity as truth’ seeks to validate, legitimize and authorize research “to that status of scientific research” (Trinh, 1991, p. 46). Pillow argues that the use of reflexivity to seek ‘truth’ often masks how the truth sought by the researchers often operates within “the dominant power structures of a given society” (McNay, 1992, p. 25, in Pillow, 2003, p. 186). Finally, in ‘reflexivity as transcendence’, the researcher believes that s/he “can transcend her own subjectivity and own cultural context in a way that releases her/him from the weight of (mis)representations (Pillow, 2003, p. 185).

Pillow, instead, argues for “reflexivities of discomfort,” a practice that pushes the researcher to continuously be critical of her/his subjectivity. It means going beyond seeking truth and transcendence. For example, acknowledgement and recognition of my biasness alone does not entail my ability to overcome it. Pillow (2003) asserts:

Thus a reflexivity that pushes toward an unfamiliar, towards the uncomfortable, cannot be a simple story of subjects, subjectivity, and transcendence or self indulgent tellings. A tracing of the problematics of reflexivity calls for a positioning of reflexivity not as clarity, honesty, or humility, but as practices of confounding disruptions – at times even a failure of our language and practices. (p. 192)

As a researcher I found it challenging to transition from a post positivist to a poststructuralist research, oftentimes noticing my construction of binaries and grand generalizations, and my adherence to a knowing self, who is able to articulate every intention, desires, knowledge, and perception. During my six-month teaching at AAANY, when writing my ethnographic notes and attending to my subjectivities, sometimes I felt vulnerable in representing my insecurities and feeling of inadequacy in the classroom, especially when they would be read by others. It took me weeks before I felt I could share my complete field notes with my research group. I wondered if I was guilty of being too narcissistic in detailing my insecurities or feeling of inadequacy in the

classroom at the expense of my students' experience as critique by Kemmis (1995) and Patai (1994) who argue "the proliferation of reflexivity talk as at best self-indulgent, narcissistic, and tiresome and at worst, undermining the conditions necessary for emancipatory research" (in Pillow, 2003, p. 176). How do I capture the complexity and discomfort of experiences and conflicting fears, desires, hopes and expectations as discussed in Pillow (2003) when the urge to make sense in a coherent, sanitized and contained manner was so profound? It was particularly challenging when I felt my responses were less than 'noble' or 'judicious'. I could just as easily shape my narrative following a positivist inquiry of detached voices, discarding details and the constantly fluctuating tensions. It was and still is a transitional messy process for me of moving from a post-positivistic research approach to narrative inquiry that attends to reflexivity as a means of excavating – but never fully, never fully consciously -- my subjectivity. I felt a great deal of uncertainty and discomfort, at times falling back on what I felt comfortable with and at other times attempting to push myself beyond the discomfort while being uncertain if I was making the right move. "Is this right?" I kept asking. And why the great concern with being 'right' or should I see it more as making choices? I was comforted by Richardson (1994) when she says, "There is no such thing as getting it right" (p. 930). Each article we had read in narrative class forced me to attend to different aspects of doing research. Was I capable of this kind of work? Again I was associating it with 'ability'. It is like reading Arabic scripts again after years of reading the alphabets. It is a slow tedious process of attuning the eyes to the unfamiliar. Or is it more like learning another language altogether? It was a becoming and it was uncomfortable and unsettling. I did find it helpful to question my assumptions about doing research but at the same time I was and still am not sure how far I will go in my narrative inquiry journey. Althusser (1989) argues, "There is no such thing as an innocent reading, we must ask what reading we are guilty of."

I also utilized self-reflexivity to examine, as much as was even possible, how my own subjectivities shaped and influenced what I had attended to and what I did not, and in doing so I learned more about my fluctuating identities. Do we really know who we are until we have written it? And even then, if we are always shifting and changing, who we are becoming at any one moment? As I continue to write I began to see how writing following Richardson's (1994) conception is "a way of finding out about yourself and your topic. Although we usually think about writing as a mode of "telling" about the social world, ... Writing is also a way of "knowing" – a method of discovery and analysis (p. 923). She goes on to argue,

Writing as a method of inquiry, then, provides research practice through which we can investigate how we construct the world, our selves, and others, and how standard objectifying practices of social science unnecessarily limit us and social science. Writing as a method does not take writing for granted, but offers multiple ways to learn to do it, and to nurture the writer. (p. 924)

In this research, I found it particularly helpful to view writing as "a way of knowing" because it helped me to examine my own construction of this research as I fluctuated and transitioned from a post-positivist to a poststructuralist epistemology. Much of research like teachers' stories have been written as if we come to knowledge seamlessly and fully formed. In Miller's (2005) article, 'Autobiography and the Necessary Incompleteness of Teachers' Stories,' she examines and disrupts her experiences of transitioning from a notion of technical rational conception of curriculum to curriculum as autobiography from her reading of Maxine Greene's 'the shapes of childhood recalled'. Miller recalls and reconstructs how Maxine's work helped her towards reconceptualizing curriculum, through Maxine's own examination of how literature has had an influence in various part of her life, whilst also disrupting a unified self, who is always conscious of her own desires, motivations and intentions.

Decolonizing Methodology

I remember what I will posit here as “an experience” of going jungle trekking in Malaysia with a group of instructors and students from a Teacher Training College I was attached to at the time. At the beginning of the journey, we were told to adhere to certain rules by the guide. In the Malay culture we believe that the jungle is inhabited by spirits, who may welcome or resent our presence. If we were welcomed then our journey will be easy and smooth but if our presence was resented, then the spirits would play tricks on us, causing us to lose our ways and never find our way out. In order to appease the spirits, we were asked to take great care where we tread and what we did in the jungle. We were not to break off any branches, pull off leaves and throw rubbish. Before we entered the jungle, we did a little prayer and sought permission from the spirits to enter safely. The experience taught me that when I tread on foreign ground, I needed to walk carefully, learning the rules and customs of the land so as not to cause offense to its residents. I include the anecdote above as an analogy to doing ethical research, particularly in relation to how researchers could manipulate or cause harm to the participants for their own gains.

In her book, *Decolonizing Methodology*, Smith (2012) examines the relationship between research and European imperialism from the perspectives of ‘the most researched’ group of people. The indigenous communities’ history with research has been fraught with tensions and various forms of oppression. Drawing from critical and feminist approaches, Smith positions indigenous communities at the forefront of her discussion as a group that has been marginalized, excluded or, if they are included, usually considered as an afterthought or placed within the periphery of critiques on research. She argues that the aims of her book are to deconstruct some of the key concepts of research and situate them within an imperialistic discourse; provide counterstories to the Western researchers’ narrative of successful research practices on

indigenous communities; as well as serve as a site of struggles for these communities to resist forms of imperialism. Indigenous communities indeed have witnessed and been subjected to research processes in which the discursive nature of research have led to Western researchers through data collection, interpretation, and classification to create an image of the 'Other'. The image of the Other has been perpetuated and sanctioned by these educational institutions "which makes statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching about it, settling it, ruling over it" (Said, 1978). Indigenous communities have experienced the exploitation of Western researchers who in the processes of research have laid claim to their knowledge, represented their image and way of life to other Westerners and eventually reflected it back to them. Another concern, as pointed out by Smith, is how the colonial discourse within Western educational institutions is also being enacted within local settings, which continue to perpetuate imperial ideology. Thus we see local researchers similarly treating indigenous communities in the same manner that Western researchers are guilty of. Smith, however, is not advocating an eradication of research but a form of research that is more ethical, sensitive and respectful. Thus, researchers would need to consider these questions, "Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?" (Smith, 2012, p. 10).

As part of the decolonization process, researchers would need to examine "the underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research practices" (Smith, 2012, p. 21). Smith begins by dismantling the heroic position many key imperial figures have held in history such as Columbus and Cook, by rewriting these characters not as the heroes and mythical figures written in Western historical records but as people who had brought destruction, exploitation and diseases to their communities (Smith, 2012). In the indigenous eyes they are exploiters to the mainstream's version as adventurers and destroyers, as opposed to the mainstream's view as conquerors. Indigenous researchers

take contention with the term ‘postcolonial’ because it seemed to suggest that colonialism has ended and disguised the ways in which indigenous knowledge and theory continue to be excluded.

History as a concept is equally important for indigenous communities because it has led to the exclusion, oppression, subjugation of indigenous experiences and knowledge within colonialism. Poststructural critics have questioned the concept of history as universal, totalizing, chronological, developmental, self-actualization, coherent, innocent, a form of binary and patriarchal. Western researchers’ academic discourse too can be complicit in oppressing indigenous peoples when they exclude, misrepresent, lie and privilege certain narratives. Thus writing or researching “back” to Western research and creating theory is part of the political fight for social justice.

Within this discussion of indigenous cultures and various forms of research, I still struggle with the need to essentialize identities. While Smith does acknowledge the different indigenous communities and how their experiences are specific within the social historical political context of imperialism, she still privileges it as a category as a means to 'research back' to the Western researchers. Are there contexts in which essentialized categories are necessary to advance a political undertaking or can we do away with these categories altogether? In my view, essentialized identity operates where there is a systemic oppression of one group of people over another and then it becomes necessary to deconstruct such oppression. Smith also problematizes a particular assumption by certain researchers, who see their research as an emancipatory endeavor when working with indigenous peoples. It may certainly be naïve to think that our research alone could provide the solution to a problem or help free oppressed groups of people, but I would certainly wish for my research to be of some help to the community I am researching or at least be less harmful to them. As part of my purpose for doing research, I don’t think I can avoid doing away with the aim of advancing my career because the educational institutions I am embedded require me to do so. It is still part of the power structures

within universities that the more research a scholar conducts, the more prominent s/he becomes, provided of course that these researches are ethical and of quality. Attaining professorship, within many academic institutions, still depends on the number of research articles we have published.

Thus, at times I am uncomfortable with efforts to deconstruct certain Western conceptions or in writing counterstories because, in doing so, I feel I am acknowledging the power imperialists have had on me and how they have positioned me in a subjugated position. It seems to me that when I am constantly pushing back against the Western conception of key terms or research, or exposing ways in which “they” devalue and exclude indigenous knowledge, I remain stuck in this complex subjugated relationship with the imperialists. If all my efforts are focused on dispelling myths and writing counternarratives, then will I ever be in the position to be creators of my own theory and knowledges? How do I as a researcher who is educated within the Western framework become able to dismantle aspects of Western knowledge and ideology or am I able to do so at all? Unearthing my subjectivity alone would not necessarily make for research that dismantles colonial ideology. How am I contributing to these changes?

Difference

Qualitative researchers have been urged as part of their research process to examine the relationship between researchers and their participants as researchers (co)construct the Self and the Other (Fine, 1994). Postcolonial theories have been instrumental in drawing attention to research as a colonizing act and viewing any attempt at representing as a potential act of Othering. It is crucial that as qualitative researchers we examine the asymmetrical power relations with our participants, how our multiple selves affect our constructions of Others and are constructed by Others, thus affecting and effecting our interactions within particular socio-cultural historical contexts.

According to Michelle Fine (1994), “By working the hyphen, I mean to suggest that researchers probe how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations” (p. 72). Fine argues against research that claims objectivity and neutrality, whereby the researchers' voice is distant, his or her privilege protected, contradictions banished from the text, and his or her investments implicitly stated. Renato Ronaldo (1989) contends in such “objective” research that the “eye of ethnography [often connects with] the I of imperialism” (in Fine, 1994, p. 140). Fine implores researchers instead

to unravel, critically, the blurred boundaries in our relation, and in our texts; to understand the political work of our narratives; to decipher how the traditions of social science serve to inscribe; and to imagine how our practice can be transformed to resist, self-consciously, acts of othering.... Our work will never “arrive” but must always struggle “between.” (p. 140)

During my teaching experience at AAANY, I made an effort to represent my subjectivities that I was at least conscious of, which included my ideologies about teaching and curriculum, my biography as an ESL speaker and teacher, and my identities as Muslim Malaysian woman, which are all implicated in this narrative inquiry. To say that the children and I shared the same religion would mean that we believe in the main tenets of Islam; but, at the same time, there are variations in our practices and worldviews based on the socio-cultural and political context each person comes from. For example, there are variations in the concept of female modesty. Hajar’s¹ mother wears the burqa, a black covering from head to toe. Hajar wears a veil and loose fitting clothes covering all the way to her wrists and ankles, some women do not wear pants while others do not adhere to the Islamic concepts of modesty at all.

I did not find it useful in this context to refer to the binary of insider and outsider because it does not reflect the complexities nor the fluctuations of moving in or out. What does it mean to be an insider or outsider anyway? Can these ever co-exist

¹A pseudonym

simultaneously? How do they affect my interactions? What about power relations? Does one always have to be in agreement with the other about feeling a sense of belonging to real and imagined communities? Is there a way of going beyond that without creating another binary? The insider and outsider concepts suggest either an acceptance or rejection of my identities as belonging to or excluded from the group for the purpose of gaining trust and information. While there are certain instances where a person could be excluded, such as the examples I give below when my students and friends speak in Arabic, there are many more instances where the construction of my multiple identities had very little affect and effect on my sense of belonging. In addition, it does not address how I could be positioning myself as a researcher cum teacher.

Khan (2010) seeks to problematize the concepts of insider and outsider by suggesting that they be viewed as part of a continuum: "Most researchers have explored how a community's structure, internal dynamics and differences problematize the definitions of insider and outsider ethnography and proposed that ethnographers occupy a continuum of space between the insider and the outsider" (Aguilar 1981; Corbin & Buckle 2009; Ganiel & Mitchell 2006; Narayan 1993; Sherif 2001 in Khan, 2010, pp. 103–120). Kusow (2003) further argues,

The insider/outsider distinction lacks acknowledgment that insiders and outsiders, like all social roles and statuses, are frequently situational, depending on the prevailing social, political, and cultural values of a given social context. In other words, ... we cannot permanently locate individuals according to a single social status. Rather, they occupy a set of social statuses such that one individual can occupy an insider status in one moment and an outsider in another. (p. 592)

Following a critique of insider/outsider status as creating a binary, Miller and Ellsworth (1996) conceive of a "working difference" "to refer to the possibility of engaging with and responding to the fluidity and malleability of identities and difference, of refusing fixed and static categories of sameness and permanent otherness" (in Miller, 2005, p. 181). Factors such as generational gaps, nationality, gender, and educational

background affect how we relate to each other. We are shaped by our multiple identities and the meanings we attach to each identity, which may be similar and different from the people we interact with. However, according to Miller and Ellsworth, “by 'multiple and fluid' identities, we refer to the insistence by some postmodern theorist that identity and difference are social constructions whose meanings shift and slide across times and places” (Butler, 1993; Flax, 1993; Marshall, 1992; Trinh, 1989, in Miller, 2005, p. 181), and these constructions are devoid of “a prior difference, with meanings already in place, that is either put to use or replaced by some other oppositional or alternative difference, just as known and static” (p. 181).

In this research I further complicate the notion of the ‘Other’ by disrupting the binary of the West and “the rest of the world,” or specifically the U.S. locals and immigrants, and refer to instances in which we assign different meanings to our multiple gendered, social and political identities. I see difference as operating on many levels from the personal to the political, and from the local to the international. Thus, it may not be useful for me to consider that, because I share the same religion as the children I teach and the Muslim students with whom I interact, I immediately gain access to their meaning systems, which may or may not be similar to mine. It is more useful for me to be aware of instances of how my multiple selves are constructed in specific contexts and equally important how I construct my own as well as their multiple identities.

“Are you from China?”

Ahmed², Mandisa's³ brother, approached me at the end of class. He boasted about him coming in later to class and yet being able to complete the task in a brief period of time. He asked me if I was Chinese. He must be the third person who has asked me that. I told him no I'm not. I'm from Malaysia. I am Malay. He listens patiently while I explain but I could see

²A pseudonym

³A pseudonym

from his body language he was ready to leave. I ended my utterance. He nodded, smiled and said his goodbye. (2012, February 2)

The above excerpt shows how a few of my students were reading me. Ahmed and a few others had asked me if I was Chinese probably judging from my look. He most likely did not know what it meant to be a Malay anymore than I know what it meant to be Egyptian or Arab. When I told my Chinese Singaporean friend about this incident, she asked how it was possible for the children to see me as Chinese, “Is it because you’re fair?” I am not certain which aspect(s) of my features was interpreted as Chinese by my students, but for my Chinese Singaporean friend, it was not any of my facial features but rather the fairness of my skin which she perceived as being ‘Chinese.’

“Oh my gosh”

I can’t remember why but at one point as I was working with Mandisa⁴, I said ‘Oh my gosh’. Mandisa told me as a Muslim we shouldn’t say ‘Oh my gosh’. I asked her what I should say instead. She leaned in and whispered in my ear, “A Muslim should never say ‘Oh my gosh.’” I said ok. (2012, March 19)

Islam as a way of life regulates the conduct and behavior of those who profess it. Being a Muslim entails following particular conducts such as saying Koranic phrases when performing certain acts. For example, before eating or drinking, we say “Bismillahirrahmanirahim” (In the name of God, most Gracious, most Compassionate) and after we are done we say “Alhamdulillah” (Praise to God). In the following excerpt, Mandisa saw me as a Muslim and pointed out how my expression ‘Oh my gosh’ was unbecoming of a Muslim.

“How can you wear the hijab if you don’t speak Arabic?”

Jamilah⁵ asked, “Do you speak Arabic?” I said, “No, I don’t.” She asked, “How can you wear the hijab if you don’t speak Arabic?” I told her, “I can speak certain Arabic phrases such as Bismillahirrahmanirahim and

⁴A pseudonym

⁵A pseudonym

Alhamdulillah. I can read the Koran but I do not understand what I am reading.” (2012, May 7)

Jamilah’s comment affected me more than Mandisa’s because it questioned my religious affinity. As Muslims we follow the five basic tenets of Islam; professing in one God, performing the daily prayers, giving alms, fasting and performing the Hajj. I have never accorded Arabic the same status as the *hijab*, as Jamilah did. Arabic is not native to Malaysia and it is usually associated with religious ceremony and sermons, reading the Koran, or for religious positions such as being an ‘Imam’ (Muslim leader and head of congregational prayer). It is not a language of conversation. For most Malaysians, it is our ability to read the Koran rather than speak Arabic that becomes a salient indicator of our affinity to the religion and, since Arabic is not spoken in Malaysia, most Malaysians do not understand it and depend on translations of the Koran or interpretation of it by religious figures.

The *hijab* is a point of contention in Malaysia because the arguments surrounding the issue range from it being a choice to compulsion. Nevertheless, legally in Malaysia, the *hijab* is not legally imposed on the Muslim female community unlike certain Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia. In my own family, my sisters and I were never forced to wear it and we each decided as and when we felt we would embrace it, if we wanted to embrace it at all. I started wearing the veil when I was 22 years old, my eldest sister at the age of 40 and my second sister at the age of 38. Of course the discursive narrative of being a ‘good’ Muslim woman still operates here. Furthermore, there is no necessary condition such as speaking Arabic attached to wearing the veil. This instance highlights the issue of ‘authenticity,’ in my case who is considered an authentic ‘Muslim.’ As the Koran was revealed in Arabic to the Arab community and later Islam was formed, the Arab community could be perceived as the ‘authentic’ Muslim. Thus, in this way of thinking, a Muslim is one who professes the basic tenets of Islam, speaks Arabic and is an Arab. However, the construction of a ‘Muslim’ has been problematized by Muslims

from varied social cultural political contexts who may or may not adhere to the teachings of Islam, such as in the case of gay Muslims like Irshad Manji.

“You have a good life”

Azim⁶ and a few other boys were curious about the iPod Nano I was wearing on my wrist. I explained to them the various functions it has such as listening to music, podcast, audiobook and radio, recording audio and it also functions as a watch. Azim asked me how much it was. I told him. He said, “You have a good life.” I said, “Alhamdulillah.” (2012, January 24)

Privilege could be recognized by the school that you attend, the clothes and shoes you wear or the gadgets you use. Azim recognized my privileged position by the iPod I was wearing on my wrist. I found it somewhat embarrassing as I was writing my fieldnotes and even now in this paper to mention its price. My response to him ‘Alhamdulillah or Praise to God’ is in recognition that whatever blessings (i.e., monetary, health, education, friends, family etc.) and even misfortune I have received come from God Almighty. It is similar with the phrase ‘He giveth and he taketh away,’ that is to acknowledge the impermanence of life in general. The phrase ‘Alhamdulillah’ also serves to remove any feelings of entitlement on my part and envy on the part of the recipient.

The above anecdotes illustrate how my multiple identities were constructed at different times and in different contexts during my teaching at this Arab American community as well as in my interactions with other Muslim students at Teachers College. There were many instances when our shared religious practice became prominent, such as when the students and I started reading the Arabic alphabets and when we began reading aloud together the surah ‘*Al Fatihah*’ which is the first chapter in the Koran. Does it make me less of a Muslim if I do not speak Arabic? Much like some Malays’ perception that I am less of a Malay because I am more comfortable speaking in English. In 2013, at a dinner gathering at the Malaysian Consulate General, one of the Malaysian

⁶A pseudonym

United Nations representatives was astonished to hear that I could no longer speak the local dialect of a state I was born in and had lived in for twenty years. I explained to him I still retained my home dialect, which was different from where I was born because my family originated from another state. Perhaps implied in his astonishment was a person who had forgotten her roots, whose language had been displaced by another language. And what if the language is a second language and a former [and even current] language of colonialism? The anecdotes above demonstrate only a small part of my interactions with the ESL and a few Columbia students. It is a demonstration of how our multiple identities are constructed in various setting and places and the meanings we attach to them. And this issue of “difference,” in all its complexities, will be one that I will and must explore throughout this proposed research study.

Participants

The participants I engaged in this research were Muslim female immigrants who:

- have migrated to the U.S. when they were very young;
- who have gone through the U.S. education system up to High School level;
- and who now may or may not be enrolled in college.

I had first invited participation in this proposed study through my contacts and associates at AAANY. I particularly contacted the seven youths in this study, who had “fit” my above-detailed participant criteria; these young women may or may not be or have been associated with AAANY. Starting with my associates as well as with former students, I used a snowballing technique (Thompson, 2002) to further invite participation to my study. Each participant may suggest other friends they know and invite them to my study. For example, Hannah had been part of and frequented AAANY in her teenage years and it was through her that I managed to get in touch with other participants in the study. I had met Sabah through a classmate and a fellow doctoral student at TC, who had taught

her in high school. Sabah later introduced me to Farah who later suggested other students at her college for me to contact. I framed my proposed “interviews” as conversations within inquiry spaces where they might reflect with me – and perhaps with some other participants in a focus-group context, if possible -- on their English educational experiences in the U.S. I have successfully recruited nine participants for this research study.

The Muslim American immigrant community in the U.S. is a heterogeneous group and they are diverse in their ethnicity, nationality, and linguistic makeup. (Fine & Sirin, 2008; Nimer, 2002; Rong & Priessle, 2008). According to Rong and Priessle (2008), during the second wave of immigration, more than 17 million immigrants entered the U.S. between 1990 and 2005. Immigrants and children of immigrants make up 20% (70 million) of the U.S. population (p. ix). Out of this number, immigrants from the Middle East, which included countries like Egypt, the Palestinian territories, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Iraq, Iran, constitute a small percentage. In 2000, there was an estimate of 400,000 immigrant children between the ages of 5 and 18 who are of Middle Eastern origin. The majority of the Middle Eastern immigrants are Iranian-American (17%), and this is followed by Lebanese (16%), Egyptian (7%), Israeli (7%), and Syrian-American (6%) (Rong & Priessle, 2008, p. 267). However, these percentages do not reveal how many of them are Muslims since not all from the Middle East are Muslims, not all Arabs are Muslims and not all Muslims are Arabs. While they may come predominantly from the Middle East, there are also Muslim immigrants from other countries such as from South Asia, Africa, and South East Asia (Fine & Sirin, 2008). This, however, is not reflective of the world Muslim population because at present there are more Muslims in other parts of the world than in the Arab countries.

Interviews

I had planned a series of one to two hour(s) focused interviews, spaced across two to three months' duration, which took approximately a total of nine to fifteen hours of recording. Following a postmodern perspective on interviewing, as advocated by Scheurich (1997), varying time and context of interviewing most certainly will affect the responses from the participants. Furthermore, the meanings attached to their responses and my own interpretations of them are not necessarily aligned. Scheurich argues:

My postmodernist perspective suggests that the researcher has multiple intentions and desires, some of which are consciously known and some of which are not. The same is true of the interviewee. The language out of which the questions are constructed is not bounded or stable; it is persistently slippery, unstable, and ambiguous from person to person, from situation to situation, from time to time. (p. 62)

Each of the participants, including myself, came to the interview with very different social, cultural, political and religious cultural scripts and experiences. Our interactions were further troubled by a relationship between language and meaning, that is “contextually grounded, unstable, ambiguous, and subject to endless reinterpretation” (Mishler, 1991, p. 260, in Scheurich, 1997, p. 62). Scheurich (1997), in explicating Mischler’s argument, puts it as thus:

What a question or answer means to the researcher can easily mean something different to the interviewee. What a question or answer means to the researcher may change over time or situations. What a question or answer means to the interviewee similarly may change. Meaning and understanding shift, in large and small ways, across people, across time, and across situations. What occurs in a specific interview is contingent on the specifics of individuals, place, and time. (Mishler, 1986, in Scheurich, 1997, p. 62)

Each person, when talking about her English Education experiences, had her own unique collective stories and her own interpretations of these experiences, by which she would attach her own meanings to them. She would have a selective series of events, which figure more prominently in her consciousness. We may be in the same class, in the

same school, and exposed to the same curriculum but how we tell stories about our educational experiences may vary considerably. Simultaneously, I too, as a researcher, need to be conscious of how I have shaped this research: the issues I attended to will be based on my own consciousness and interpretations and thus my participants' 'stories' may not necessarily fit in flawlessly or at all into this mold I have created.

This brings us to the issue of power, that is, the researcher's dominance and control over the research's direction as well as the participants' potential agency in resisting how the interview discussion is constructed. As a researcher, I have constructed the research questions, chosen the theoretical frameworks, and have chosen how to interpret and represent the data, all of which were based on my social, cultural and political subjectivities. Thus, adopting a self-reflexively informed methodology, I too constantly interrogated my own assumptions, expectations, interpretations and representations throughout this study.

For example, postcolonial theory figures quite prominently for me in this research, seeing that I come from a once colonized country and the process of decolonization is still ongoing and a source of tension and conflict in Malaysia. I chose to include poststructural and feminist lenses in an attempt to dismantle the binaries and grand generalizations I have encountered in postcolonial critical discourses that I feel have come to shape how I have narrated my identities as second language speaker and teacher of English. Scheurich's critique of the dominant and resistant binary, when discussing issues of power in interviews, is that it has led to the exclusion of other forms of interaction between the interviewer and the participants. Scheurich (1997), thus, conceptualized a 'third space' he called 'chaos,' which refers to "everything that occurs that is neither dominance nor resistance; everything that escapes or exceeds this binary is chaos (because it is not encapsulated by the binary) and an openness or freedom for the interviewer and interviewee" (p. 72). He argues:

Our social life, including research, is riddled with dominance and inequity to the detriment of everyone. In addition, the understanding that the less powerful are not passive participants in the drama of dominance is a profound insight that is a necessary part of any move toward equity. But to enclose social life within the dominance-resistance binary is but another prison house of language, meaning, and communication. (p. 72)

My concern as an interviewer is whether I will be successful in representing the interview as an amalgam of conscious and subconscious fluctuating intentions, desires, and meanings, without being locked into the dominant/resistant binary in relation to issues of power. Scheurich (2014) suggests that a researcher should firstly examine her positionality and secondly, to “foreground the open, indeterminacy of the interview interaction itself” (p. 74). Thus, in this research, I made an attempt to represent the interviews in ways that showed how my own subjectivities had impinged on the construction of this research, and to construct the “findings” of this research in a way that remained open to indeterminate meanings of interactions.

In the next chapter, I will interrogate my own incomplete, partial and ongoing postcolonial English Education from a small town on the East coast of Peninsula Malaysia to doing an Undergraduate degree in TESOL⁷ in Bognor Regis, U.K. and a Postgraduate Doctoral degree in English Education at Teachers College, Columbia University of New York. I will examine my partial construction as a second language speaker of English and teacher, intersected with my other identities as Muslim, woman, Malay, and Malaysian, while simultaneously interrogating my relationship to the native speakers of English in the U.K and the U.S.

⁷TESOL is Teaching English to speakers of other languages.

Chapter IV

MY POSTCOLONIAL ENGLISH EDUCATION

In this chapter, I have interrogated my own postcolonial English Education, from a small town off the coast of Peninsula Malaysia to doing an undergraduate degree in TESOL¹ in Bognor Regis, U.K. and a Postgraduate Doctoral Degree in English Education at Teachers College, Columbia University of New York. I examined my construction as second language speaker and teacher of English, intersected with my other identities as Muslim, woman, Malay, and Malaysian, while simultaneously interrogating my relationship to the native speakers of English in the U.K and the U.S. I self-reflexively (in ways informed by Pillow's notions of "reflexivities of discomfort" that call attention to humans' inabilities to be always fully conscious or to have full insights into "self" or "other") will attempt to disrupt my autobiographical writings and research. I chose to construct the following section by utilizing Richardson's (2005) Creative Analytic Practices, whereby I collate texts of incomplete fragmented writings from various genres, such as my responses to texts I have read for various classes at TC and reflective writings. I particularly chose texts I felt would represent some of my subjectivities and multiple selves, in relation to being Muslim, woman, Malay, Malaysian, and second language speaker and teacher of English. Following Richardson's (2005) argument that the self is always present in the text, it helped me to explore how and why I had come to see and shape this research in the way that I did. In addition, I

¹TESOL is Teaching English to speakers of other languages.

attempted to interweave my narrative with my ‘personal-public’² voice and my ‘academic’ voice. I still feel the ongoing struggle and tension between presenting my ‘competent’ academic self and my personal self. It may also speak to the role English has played in my academic, career and personal lives because my ‘private-home’ voice is in my mother tongue, *Kedah-Penang*³ dialects, which have been limited to my interactions with my family members. In this section, I fluctuated between my roles as student, speaker, teacher and teacher trainer of English as a second language by examining my interpretations of experiences learning the language as I simultaneously consider the possible future policies of English Education in Malaysia.

My Postcolonial English Education in Post-Independent Malaysia

We lived at the cross-roads of cultures. We still do today, but when I was a boy, one could see and sense the peculiar quality and atmosphere of it more clearly.... But still the cross-roads does have a certain dangerous potency; dangerous because a man might perish there wrestling with multiple-headed spirits, but also he might be lucky and return to his people with the boon of prophetic vision. (Achebe, 1975, p. 67)

Mama said I was so eager to come into this world that I didn’t wait for the doctor to get to the labor room. It was the nurse’s hands that welcomed me instead. It could either be due to my eagerness or that my two elder sisters had loosened the grip of my mother’s uterus to allow for my easy trip out. There was no drama in the world when I was born, 16 years after Malaysia gained her independence from the British, in a small town off the coast of Peninsula Malaysia, where fishing and agriculture were the main preoccupations. It was two months before the monsoon season on the east coast started,

²Personal-public voice refers to a personal narrative for public consumption. It is a ‘comfortable’ voice that I use whilst being aware of the ‘reader.’

³*Kedah-Penang* dialects are a combination of Malay language dialects from two neighboring northern states of Peninsula Malaysia, where my father and mother were from, respectively. They have more similarities than differences in sound and vocabulary.

and would drench the coastline for the next two months with floodwater, raging waves and winds. It was the weekend and people had one hour of sleep left before the *azan* or the call to prayer can be heard from the mosques. But at the time when the umbilical cord that connected me to mama was cut and the salty air of the east coast filled my lungs, all was well.

The place of my birth, *Kuala Terengganu*,⁴ was a small idyllic town, where people moved and talked slowly and gently like the lapping waves on its shores except during the monsoon season, when they raged and wreaked havoc on the silky white sandy beach, pounding upon it, creating undulating sand dunes, which the wind later carried grain by grain leveling the field literally and metaphorically. My childhood memories of this languid town included following mama to the wet market on weekends; taking walks on the beach at night; being lulled to sleep by the sound of the gentle waves; catching tadpoles and dragonflies; and wading in the flood water during the monsoon season.

Learning English for me meant reading English nursery rhymes, Aesop's Fables, Fairy Tales, Enid Blyton's 'The Famous Five.' Aside from English being spoken in the English classroom, it was not a language of communication for the wider community. The local dialect prevailed over the sounds of lapping waves and falling rains. I heard the English tongue from my next-door neighbors who were expatriates working with the oil company. I heard it in the films and TV programs from the U.K and the U.S. Learning English for me meant learning other people's history and culture, where nothing of myself is reflected in what I read. I learned about the value of standard British English as spoken by Professor Higgins, the status it accorded Eliza Doolittle at the expense of her sense of belonging, the language of power and injustice of the colonial and slave masters.

⁴Kuala Terengganu is the capital city of the state of Terengganu, situated on the east coast of Peninsula Malaysia.

I heard sounds of my mother tongue in the market and on the playground. But I also heard another tongue, distant, a foreign tongue, linking the place to its historical past, on the television, in the classroom, but mainly for me in books. My father, who was educated in this foreign tongue that brought him to foreign lands like New Zealand and Hawaii, knew for himself and for his children the opportunities and possibilities it brought. As opportunity to speak in English was fairly limited, learning English for me had been mainly in a culture of silence. And so in my native land with voices in my native tongue, I was immersed in the world of books written in a foreign tongue. When I pried open a book, I heard voices different than my own. I heard the voice of the author, the voices of the characters and eventually I heard my own voice in a tongue that became less and less foreign. These voices brought me to lands and worlds that existed in an alternate reality, which slowly took shapes, flesh by flesh from images in movies or photographs and from my own educational journey. Most importantly, these voices helped me to believe there is room for me in these worlds, where I could possibly belong.

As Malaysia was still in the process of distancing herself from the grip of her colonial past, the Malay language had been resurrected to its position as the language of governance, media, and medium of instruction in schools (Pennycook, 1994). English was re-positioned as a second language both in terms of its status and function. It was no longer the language of the elite few but was taught as a subject starting from kindergarten to secondary school.

I went to St. Teresa's kindergarten at six years old following my two elder sisters. I was taught by St Teresa's nuns and teachers, who were mainly Christian Chinese and Indians in *Terengganu*. I can't remember what I had learnt there but I especially enjoyed the breaks. We would be given sweet biscuits, which I would always keep in the small

pocket of my beige and maroon outfit, some to be eaten there and some to be brought home, and the teacher would also give us *milo*⁵ drinks.



Figure 1. St. Teresa Kindergarten (Second from left)

My father bought us English books and encouraged us to read. He knew how important the language was, having been educated in an English medium school during the colonial period, doing his bachelor degree in New Zealand and masters degree in Hawaii.

The teaching of English since Malaysia's independence had focused on its acquisition as a second language, with literature holding a peripheral role because teaching literature meant drawing on either British or American literature. The postcolonial mentality at the time was focused on limiting colonial influences, building a national identity and community amongst disparate multicultural communities as a result of the British importing indentured laborers from China and India to work at the tin mines and oil palm plantations respectively (Pennycook, 1994). The colonial strategy of divide and rule amongst the three main ethnic groups, the Malays, Chinese and Indians, in Malaya for fear of local uprising against the colonial power problematizes a smooth

⁵Chocolate drink.

transition. Thus, after independence English functioned as a tool for acquiring knowledge for Malaysia's development as well as access to power. The priority was to use the language as a weapon in order to play the colonial masters at their game, gaining back what once belonged to us and elevating our formerly subjugated positions. For as long as I can remember, the government has always emphasized on education and had spent a good proportion of its annual budget on educating its people. Somehow they knew the development of the country was dependent on three key factors and they are investing in human capital, political stability and building infrastructures.

English literature reemerged in the curriculum in 1990 when it was taught in the lower and upper secondary schools. Only recently in 2003 did the Ministry of Education introduced a Contemporary Children's Literature program in elementary schools, which included children's literature from various commonwealth countries. Obviously, I believe that teaching English is a political and cultural phenomenon, and, as such, I welcome this move to include contemporary children's literature into the schools; however, "English" in the Malaysian classroom still is often taught as discrete neutral skills or what Brian Street (1993) refers to as the autonomous model.

Its importance is also acknowledged by politicians who see the language as a necessary tool for achieving Malaysia's goals of becoming an industrialized nation by the year 2020. In addition, in order for Malaysians to participate in an increasingly competitive globalized world economy, we were urged to "master" the language. As stated by Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamed, the former Malaysian Prime Minister, English is important in achieving Vision 2020, which delineates "how we should go about to attain our objectives of developing Malaysia into an industrialized country" (Malaysia: The Way Forward in Jamaliah Mohd Ali, 2000, p. 22). Malaysians, he said, should be proficient enough to deliver speeches, conduct negotiations, give presentations, and participate in business dealings using the language. This is important, he argues, if Malaysia is to expand its trading globally. However, English in Malaysia serves mainly

an instrumental purpose. This is probably because the spirit of its people finds its expression mainly in their mother tongues such as Malay, Chinese and Indian dialects.

On the other hand, we are beginning to see a growing number of Malaysian writers writing in English such as K.S. Maniam 'In a far country,' 'Tan Twan Eng's 'The Gift of Rain,' Bernice Chaully 'Growing up with ghosts,' and Tash Aw "The harmony silk factory." In an article in *the Guardian*, discussing the multinational nominees for the Man Booker prize 2013, O'Toole (2013) reflects on the role of the English language in representing and including novelists from various nationalities, "This year's list, though, makes a definitive statement that such writers are no longer the exotic outsiders that add colour (literally as well as figuratively) to the British norm. They are the new normal." He goes on to argue,

What the would-be linguistic dictators called the "anarchy" of the English language has been redefined by writers from the greater anglophone world as its great generosity. Its glory is that it lets everyone in without making them all the same. English was multicultural long before it contained that word. Because it is itself an unruly bastard tongue, it is capacious enough for everyone to find within it their own unique cadences. The England that once had pretensions to govern this glorious tongue is gone. The tongue itself is taking infinite new shapes in billions of mouths. As we lowered the Union flag and waved off the last governors, we who were once ruled from London had to take our hats off and say: "So long and thanks for all the words. (*The Guardian*, 2013, September 14)

As more and more Malaysians acquire the language and appropriate it to express their cultural identities and experiences, it perhaps takes on more intrinsic value. If in the U.S the utilitarian value of English education comes under great scrutiny, in Malaysia the teaching of English needs to accommodate a growing number of speakers who are carving spaces for themselves within World Englishes (Crystal, 2003). Nevertheless, issues of inequality of access along the lines of race, and urban and rural divide still persist and warrant an address.

In the U.S. where humanistic versions of curriculum form the core of its educational spirit, the growing impingement of technology and the global Market is seen

as a concern prompting several authors to write books explicating their detrimental influences on education and instead advocating for the value of the arts including literature (Nussbaum, 2010; Scholes, 1998; Taubman, 2010). Scholes (1998), in his book *The Rise and Fall of English*, expresses this binary when he says, “I wish only to point out that there is a serious gap between literary and artistic values, on the one hand, and the commercial and competitive values that are active in our society, on the other” (p. 20).

Martha Nussbaum (2010), in her book *Not For Profit*, addresses her concern over the growing movement in education for the purpose of gaining economic profits. She argues,

Thirsty for national profit, nations, and their systems of education, are heedlessly discarding skills that are needed to keep democracies alive. If this trend continues, nations all over the world will soon be producing generations of useful machines, rather than complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person’s sufferings and achievements. The future of the world’s democracies hangs in the balance. (p. 2)

What these authors seem to suggest is technology and the arts are irreconcilable. Second, focusing on the instrumental value at the expense of its transcendental value will eventually produce soulless individuals without “the ability to think critically; the ability to transcend local loyalties and to approach world problems as a “citizen of the world”; and, finally, the ability to imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person” (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 7).

Devoid of its literary tradition for 33 years, English in Malaysia was and still is taught as a tool to gain knowledge especially from the West. Following the New Literacy study we can argue that its treatment in the classroom is predominantly based on the autonomous model of literacy, whereby teachers focused on the strategies and technical aspects of its acquisition (Street, 2001). Its learning and teaching have been fashioned for the sole purpose of developing human capitals that are able to compete in the global

economic market. The growing number of Malaysian English speakers has often been the result of their education, occupation and urbanization. English remains a language of social and economic mobility. English in Malaysia with its continuous development and growth needs, I believe, to further express the Malaysian spirit. It is timely that the language of oppression also be appropriated as a language of liberation. It could be another language of inquiry for the various ethnic groups and for Malaysia to examine the internal and external inequalities, racism, and discrimination that continue to exist in the world today.

For me learning English is about elevating Malaysia's development from a country that lived in poverty and has seen empires flow in and out of our region, leaving us mainly worse off politically, socially and economically, to one of the fastest growing economy in East Asia. We built on what little institutions the British had left us like its democratic parliament, legal system, and educational institutions. We learnt English to access the discourses and knowledges created in 'native' English communities. But this is no longer sufficient. Accessing and engaging in discourses particularly constructed in 'native speaking' countries must include a critique, analysis and deconstruction of 'difference,' 'development,' 'privilege,' 'imperialism,' and 'democracy.'

The main issue I grapple with as a speaker and teacher of English is whether and to what extent, am I complicit in perpetuating the colonial/ imperialistic discourse as I continue to teach, consume and produce texts in English. Does Audre Lorde's (2012) refrain, "The master's tool will never dismantle the master's house" (p. 110), include the continued use of the Master's tongue? How do I disrupt the colonial/imperialistic discourse while utilizing the English language in my personal and academic lives? Or can I?

The Sound of Music

Even before I learned to read the English words, I learned to hear the *Sound of Music*. In my childhood, Julie Andrews personified to me the standard by which I measured my own and other people's speeches in English. I listened to the crisp enunciated sounds of the English consonants and vowels as she sang 'Do Re Mi.'

Doe, a deer, a female deer
Ray, a drop of golden sun
Me, a name I call myself
Far, a long long way to run
Sew, a needle pulling thread
La, a note to follow So
Tea, a drink with jam and bread
That will bring us back to Do, oh oh oh

My sisters and I watched the movie so many times that we ruined the videocassette. My father had borrowed the movie from his long time friend, so he had to replace it and buy us a new one. I remember him being pleased that we had taken to the movie as passionately as we did. The three of us would often spend the afternoon on weekends, either squatting on the floor or lying on our backs, facing the TV in our shared bedroom, watching a nun with seven children cavorting around Austria's towns and hills, and memorizing the lyrics to each song.

If *The Sound of Music* shaped my view of the 'proper' way to speak, i.e., Standard British English, then *My Fair Lady* exemplified for me that there existed a variation of English dialects, of which some are considered subservient and less prestigious than the one spoken by Professor Higgins! It sharply distinguished for me the social status and the speech associated with each status. Somehow until today I still perk up and straighten my back like the Von Trapp children lining up to meet their governess for the first time, when I hear an English accent. What is it about Received Pronunciation that makes a person be on alert? I saw how Eliza's speech could transform her from a common flower girl to a princess! Of course now I know how naïve I was in thinking that. Fairy tales do

not exist. Correcting one's speech, i.e., pronunciation alone cannot transform an ugly duckling into a swan anymore than it can facilitate the transition from one social status to the next and expect complete acceptance. One character in the movie, who more or less stayed true to himself even after becoming rich, was Eliza's father. His speech perplexed me. More than Eliza, I had a hard time understanding him when he began to sing:

The Lord above gave man an arm of iron
 So he could do his job and never shirk.
 The Lord gave man an arm of iron-but
 With a little bit of luck, With a little bit of luck,
 Someone else'll do the blinkin' work!
 With a little bit...with a little bit...
 With a little bit of luck you'll never work!

The Lord above made liquor for temptation,
 To see if man could turn away from sin.
 The Lord above made liquor for temptation-but
 With a little bit of luck, With a little bit of luck,
 When temptation comes you'll give right in!
 With a little bit...with a little bit...
 With a little bit of luck you'll give right in.

Later in my life, when I was studying in the U.K., I heard many more English dialects, many of which were foreign and incomprehensible to me. Apart from the pronunciation, there were slangs, idioms and phrases I had never heard nor read in my English books. Understanding their sense of humor from watching comedy shows like *'Only fools and horses,' 'Blackadder,' 'Yes, Prime Minister,'* and *'Keeping up appearances'* was harder still. Jokes I knew in Malay when translated into English just fell flat to the English ears. I cannot remember when I began to understand the English's sense of humor. As I continue to learn English formally in the classroom and studied the English grammar, syntax and pronunciation, my immersion in an English town and culture helped me to unconsciously acquire the English language. However, my classmates and I were most of the time isolated from other English students. We attended separate classes because the program was specifically designed for nonnative speakers

like us. The college had signed an agreement with the Malaysian Ministry of Education to design a program that would help us to become English teachers in Malaysia. The only time we studied with other English students was in our geography classes.

I decided to become an English teacher because I didn't do so well in my science subjects as I did in English during my Form five national examination. I 'knew' I was fairly good in English when one day I sang the song 'Sweet dreams' by the Eurythmics and my father was pleased to hear my pronunciation.

Sweet dreams are made of this
Who am I to disagree
I travel the world and the seven seas
Everybody's looking for something

Some of them want to use you
Some of them want to get used by you
Some of them want to abuse you
Some of them want to be abused

Sweet dreams are made of this
Who am I to disagree
I travel the world and the seven seas
Everybody's looking for something

English for me when I was growing up, unlike many Malaysians now, was more clearly demarcated between native and nonnative speakers. We knew from the sound of our speech, the errors in our grammar and the incomprehensibility of the English humor that we did not belong. Bridging the gap required a great deal of effort on our part. I have always felt it was more incumbent on me to learn to understand the British and their many dialects of English, than for them to understand my 'foreign' ways and me.

Racial Memoir

A&HE 5518 Teaching Diversity in Social Cultural Context
Azlina Abdul Aziz

The distinctiveness and boundaries of race became most prominent in my life when I was 16, that sweet, sweet age when the heart was ready to flex its muscles, contracting and pumping blood, coursing through my veins and warming known and newly discovered bodily parts. We had hardly spoken to each other, Soon Peng⁶ and I. In this languid Eastern seaside town of a predominantly Malay Muslim community, the Chinese community consists of a small number. Islam as the dominant religion meant there was also both a covert and overt boundary on relationships between boys and girls. We may have studied in the same class but our interaction was always kept to a minimum. Speaking to boys was mainly perfunctory often related to school and schoolwork. We did not ask about the personal and we certainly did not flirt. It is funny how the heart refuses to be constrained by any human made rules. It follows its own. It finds elusive ways to express itself. Mine came in a dream. I can no longer recall the details of the dream, only the feeling I felt for Soon Peng. Call it a crush or an infatuation in an effort to belittle adolescents' experience but I have since come to know that the gravity of the matter is the sustained way in which we wittingly and unwittingly have denied this flesh and blood in favor of some societal normative cultural norms. I knew what it meant to forbid my heart from loving; to scold it, pull it back, contract it, dismiss it and above all conceal it. I never told my family nor my friends. I learnt to be shameful of my desire. In my mind I thought, "It is inconceivable and impossible for me to even love another person of a different ethnic background. How was this even possible?" Soon Peng probably did not pay much notice to my existence. Did he also see the boundary created between us as I did? I learnt to disregard my wanting and to question it. Instead of honoring the feeling, I

⁶Real name.

rationalized my heart into accepting the unacceptable. Where had I learnt this? My heart must have recognized this boy as flesh and blood, no different than itself but the abstract man made concept of race denied him and myself of the full expression of our humanity. In retrospect, I wonder now how many times in my life I have consistently and continuously disregarded and belittled my desires and what kind of life would I have had if I had chosen to trust and believe in it instead.

An Education in Autumn: A Tale of the Field in the Manner of Van Maanen

A&HE 6151 Narrative Research in English Education

Azlina Abdul Aziz

It was abysmal to see the state of Grace Dodge Hall on this Monday morning, September 26th 2011. It had been three weeks since the first class began for this fall semester but you would find it difficult to believe that we were already in full session. You had to tilt up your head to see the sun, feeling the tail-end of the summer heat. And on this island city a million coffees had been served but you would not know it when you enter this historical hall where the likes of John Dewey had sat sipping coffee or tea alone or in conversation with fellow philosophers musing and ruminating over educational philosophy. Did he know then that he would leave such influential enduring legacy to our educational community?

I walked in with my bag pack on my left shoulder and scanned the room, walking slowly eyeing the best place for me to sit. After paying for my breakfast of eggs and toast at the register, I chose a seat. I chose the table seated for four people close to the register in the middle of the hall where most part of the hall can be seen. The Professor had told us to do an observation at one place but at two different times or two places but at the same time of the day on two different days. I had two chapters of Bakhtin and an article by Denzin and Lincoln to read for my classes this week so I was not planning to come

here again on another day. I had planned to be here a while. Whatever data I was going to collect had to be done within the three and a half hours I was here. I had a good view of most of the hall but soon began to realize my own limitation. I had a blind spot. I have come to believe that we were never meant to see everything. If we were then we would be God.

Three people were in the hall; a Caucasian woman, a Black woman and a Black male; each one sat at a different table and in different parts of the dining hall. Did they mean to be as far apart from each other? Were they choosing their favorite places? What comfort did it bring them? Was it a comfort of silence or privacy? I wondered what great things have they done or will they do? Are they the next John Dewey or Maxine Greene?

Three years ago it had never even entered my mind that I would be here in the U.S. in New York, in Columbia University, in Teachers College. Only a generation before me, my mother had attended school only until she was sixteen years old, became a typist and later got married in her early twenties. Here I am pursuing my doctoral studies at an age well beyond what Malay society considered to be a marriageable age. We have come a long way. I feel fortunate and blessed that the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education had found me valuable enough to invest in my education. They found me to be a worthy investment that they hope will later yield many fruitful returns. I know the huge responsibility I carry. I know how many people could have been educated in Malaysia from the living allowances, school tuition fees, insurance, book allowance, and plane tickets they had paid for me. It was not my bag pack alone with my laptop I was carrying into the hall. It was a meeting of my mother's past, hundreds of Malaysian children's hopes and Dewey's ghost, of missed opportunities and potential greatness.

I wondered whom this Black man had brought with him into this hall? Were Martin Luther King, Jr., Langston Hughes, W.E.B Dubois, his mother, father and/or ancestors with him too? Langston Hughes's poem "I dream a world" and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech "I have a dream," of poem and prose began to co-mingle in my mind:

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

A world I dream where black or white,
Whatever race you be,
Will share the bounties of the earth
And every man is free.

Whose eyes are reading the letters, words, sentences; whose hand is highlighting, underlining and writing; and whose mind is thinking, categorizing and synthesizing? Bring them all into this hall! Bring in our/their souls, dreams, hopes, and even dreams deferred. It is too sparse here!

My journey as a second language speaker and teacher of English has brought me to the colonial centers, the United Kingdom and the United States in the pursuit of knowledge on the teaching and learning of English Education. I had spent two years studying A-level and four years of undergraduate degree in Teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) in a small town on the south coast of England, ‘Bognor Regis.’ My lecturer had explained to me and my fourteen other Malaysian classmates that the seaside town’s name had been derived from Anglo Saxon, meaning ‘Royal Toilet.’ I love to tell people the most interesting thing about me is that I spent six years of my life in a ‘Royal toilet,’ much to their confusion! As an international commonwealth student, it was a dream to study in the U.K. The first year being in Bognor Regis was quite a culture shock. My classmates and I were each placed with a host family to help us become more acclimatized to the culture and place. My host mother Rene was a drama and speech teacher and had hosted other Malaysian students before me. She knew of our dietary requirements and would make *halal*⁷ roast chicken for Sunday dinner. While enjoying my Sunday dinner, Rene would at times correct my pronunciation. She said Malaysians had the tendency to drop the consonants at the end of each word and she insisted I

⁷‘Halal’ refers to meat prepared according to Islamic law.

pronounced them all. She would make me practice over our roast chicken, Brussels sprouts and roasted parsnips and potatoes.

Reconceiving the Academic Voice

A&HE 6151 Narrative Research in English Education
Azlina Abdul Aziz

As I thought about what to write for this response paper I recall an early experience just as I was beginning to engage in research and the world of academia. As I recall the incident, other similar experiences came to mind and I also began to notice it in my current reading. The call to attention of one phenomenon almost always leads us to notice other similar phenomenon. However, I would be wary of making generalizations as this recounting is but a minute experiential and observational inquiry.

I remember having a discussion with a colleague awhile back about how to write an academic article in particular in relations to the conventions. She said she was told by her instructor never to use the personal pronoun 'I.' Instead she told me you can address yourself as the researcher, one or to avoid it altogether by writing in more passive form. We never did query the reason for it and simply brushed it off as an academic discourse we were eager to be part of and be taken seriously. Reading research articles at that time seem to confirm it. Even as I Google now on the internet on the usage of personal pronouns in academic writing, there are manuals or instructions online that guides students never to use it. For example, two websites outlined the following:

i) http://elearning.homestead.com/ACADEMIC_WRITING_GUIDE.htm

Do not use first person point of view: *I, me, we, our, us*, etc.

NEVER use second person point of view: *you, your*, etc.

Do not use phrases such as *I think that, I believe that, I feel that, in my opinion*, etc.

ii) <http://www.monash.edu.au/lis/lionline/writing/arts/sociology/2.3.1.xml>

The convention in much academic writing is to write with minimal reference to yourself as an author. The reason for this lies in a tradition of needing to present your work "objectively," as the work of a dispassionate and disinterested (that is, **unbiased**) researcher. So, one of the features of academic writing is a general absence of the first person pronoun "I." This can be difficult, as lecturers often say, "tell me what you think." Well, they do want to know what you think, but presented as a **rational, objective** argument. For this reason, we also avoid using emotive language; instead we let the "facts" - or our reasoned argument - make the point for us.

The second website was more explicit in its call for researchers to write 'objectively,' 'dispassionate(ly),' 'disinterested (ly),' underscoring a positivist stance. I wrote my entire dissertation following this convention, writing in a distant voice of a so-called authority but feeling less so. It was a façade. It was a voice of an authority whose bodily presence is not represented in the text but whose idea proposition or argument is at the fore, a divorced body and mind. Scientific disciplines rather than the humanities seem to suffer more from this dis-ease or do they?

One of the first thing I noticed when reading Chase's (2005) article "Narrative Inquiry" is how she situated herself within the inquiry: "During the early 1990s, I struggled to interpret and represent as narrative my interviews with women superintendents" (p. 651). She describes how her research led her to review various narrative inquiry traditions only to feel a sense of lack in its treatment of her own interview transcript. She goes on to define the term narrative inquiry and outlined the rest of the article and posed questions that arise for her as she struggled to grapple with this field and seek other inquirers to take up the challenge of addressing them in future. She demonstrated to me how her inquiry is situated within her own concern and dissatisfaction.

Recently I read a book, *Why Literature*, by Vischer Brunsin (2011) and in the preface entitled 'Situating the questioner,' she wanted

to establish its significance from my own frame of reference by recounting the occasions in my life which brought me to the inquiry. Donna Haraway provides a justification of sorts for this autobiographical indulgence when she characterizes the typical approaches to the discovery and reporting of knowledge in Western academia as “ways of being nowhere while claiming to see comprehensively”, what she calls “the god-trick.” The alternative to god-trick, Haraway asserts, are partial, locatable, situated knowledges, not a view from nowhere but from somewhere. Rather than leaving those particulars unmentioned, I want to disclose them in order to make explicit the need which motivates this study and the context from which it arises. (p. xi)

I thought it was interesting that she should call it an autobiographical indulgence. A quick dictionary⁸ check reveals the word indulgence to mean:

- *allow oneself to enjoy the pleasure of*
- *become involved in (an activity, typically one that is undesirable or disapproved of)*
- *informal allow oneself to enjoy a particular pleasure, esp. that of alcohol*
- *[trans.] satisfy or yield freely to (a desire or interest)*
- *[trans.] allow (someone) to enjoy a desired pleasure*

There is a negative connotation to the word implying a self-gratifying self-centered undertaking of pleasure, which may seek disapproval of some established authority and have no place within the academy. It is interesting that situating the questioner needed further justification, marking it out of the norm, appeasing the readers, which most likely would be practitioners alike. Even a book on literature situated within the humanities cannot seem to escape from this dis-ease.

⁸From: <http://www.seadict.com/en/en/indulge>

“But I’m not literary, the way Jane or John is!”

A&HE 5150 Research in practice
Azlina Abdul Aziz

Five years ago I had sat in the office of the dean of my faculty to discuss my future at the Faculty of Education, National University of Malaysia. She wanted me to further my studies in Teaching of Literature to fill a current gap at the faculty. I was somewhat reluctant considering I did not have an educational background in literature and never majored in English studies but feeling the need to be indispensable, I took it up as a challenge. The teaching of literature in Malaysian education has played a minor role in the past but at present there is a move towards incorporating more literary texts in the classroom. I chose to come to the U.S. because of its long history in teaching the language arts. I was both hopeful and somewhat daunted by the task.

I scanned a page of Rosenblatt’s *Literature as Exploration* and my eyes were drawn to these words “But I’m not literary, the way Jane or John is!” In the column of the book, I scribbled, “I said that!!!” I had articulated these words before but seeing it type written in an academic book by a renowned professor of English Education had caused me great excitement and brought me comfort. “The author understands me,” I said. I felt validated in my experience and it was important for me to both understand and be understood.

Reading literature has mainly been a solitary experience for me. I read books and allowed myself to be carried away into foreign lands and worlds; met characters I loved, those I hated, others I felt ambivalent and many I did not care or remember; I felt enraged, humored, sad and thrilled. But at the end of each reading I closed the book and placed it on the bookshelf. This time the experience was different. I had to write a commentary on a literary text I was reading. “What should I write about? What should I say? What would be worth saying?” I wondered. I agonized over it. “I’m no literary critic”, I said. The other students I felt had learned to read literature before so they knew

what to look out for when they read. They had wonderful things to say about it but it was alien to my ears. More alien still was my own commentary articulated against the others. I stared at the computer but nothing came to me. I started vacuuming my room as if the very act would clear the emotional and mental clutter I was experiencing. It was a mental block and I was searching for the release button. When the instructor sent a ‘message of comfort’ to everyone in class inviting everyone to write the commentary in the spirit of experimentation and not to try to fulfill anyone’s expectations, it freed me. I began to write “Dear God,.....”

“Can we pick on you?”

“Can we pick on you?” Jane⁹ asked.

“Ok,” I nodded gently if not a little hesitantly.

She was eager to have me share my writing with the class. We were asked to write a commentary to the text we were reading, *Paradise Lost* by Milton. The instructor had previously told the students not to try to fulfill anyone’s expectation and had invited us to write it in the spirit of experimentation. In class he asked the students to share writings that were out of the norm of the common practice and Jane felt my ‘Letter to God’ would be a good example of that.

Jane raised her hand. She said, “I wonder if Nina could share her writing with us.”

I nodded and started reading my letter.

Dear God,

I have been reading a book in which by the author’s intent he hopes to explain your ways to us. I do at times wonder if he is one of Your chosen ones that You have elected above others (Bk 3: 183) although at times I fear if it is part of Satan’s plan of vengeance when he set up his throne against Yours determined to bring evil and pervert even what is good (Bk 1: 159-165). But the author seems wise enough to invoke the spirit to instruct him and illuminate his being as he attempts to write this great prose

⁹A pseudonym

(Bk 1: 17-26). And perhaps it would be wise too for me to do the same but with what certainty do I have that spirit will come to my aid. What may be gained by reading this book for someone in a fallen state? Or perhaps precisely because of the state I am in that I have much to gain from? And yet with little knowledge and much doubt, I continue to read depending mainly on my Reason and Will for I did choose to read it and if I so will I could 'unchoose' it. God, I feel inclined to defend our human frailty and fallibility only in so far that by way of the author's description of Satan, I feel what chance could Adam and Eve possibly have against this 'Almighty' entity that is doggedly determine to cause their fall, which neither redemption nor victory drives it but the sole aim of revenge against its creator whom it feels had unfairly placed man above the angels. How fair is it that my grandparents be the target of its attack when failing to take up its cause against You, it had led to its fallen state? Adam and Eve did prove their obedience to You and would most probably continue to do so had it not been for Satan's temptation. And I have no doubt he would have been relentless, scheming, plotting and conspiring until he achieves his goal. Was Adam and Eve's fall not inevitable? You knew his plan and saw him flying towards heaven's gate. Even when You knew your beloved were in harms way You did not intervene. I do recognize this is my protest to You and how futile it is much like a child who screams to the world "It's so not fair!" You chide Adam and Eve and call them ingrates (Bk 3: 97) and with great certitude claims they are free to stand or to fall (Bk 3: 99). Could it be that by the same breath You admonish them You also exalt them knowing as You do of their ability since You are their creator and that the reason You did not come to Adam and Eve's aid is because You know they have it within themselves to withstand Satan's power and might. How bizarre is that idea! Two innocent fragile souls made from clay could defeat this powerful being! I have many more questions God but I think for the moment I'll leave it for my next letter.

Nina

When I was done, a few people made their comments, which were generally positive. All but one. At this point of the story I find it interesting that I cannot remember the details of the comments so I cannot report them here. Had my memory been totally wiped out perhaps by one disturbing event? Had that particular critique gained such prominence in my memory that everything else pales by comparison. Memory is selective. In my case my memory had attended to this specific person who had said these specific words.

“I think Nina’s writingcomes from an impulse that is self-serving.....does not serve the community.....hellish.....” my critic said. He was more articulate than that but my memory only attended to the words IMPULSE, SELF-SERVING, DOES NOT SERVE THE COMMUNITY and HELLISH! It did not end there. He proceeded to glorify another student’s writing he felt was heavenly and bade her to write more.

I think I would be one of the first people to agree that my writing could have been improved and that it was by no means the best writing in the group, but I certainly did not think it deserved to be condemned to hell! I have as a teacher read my students’ writing that pains me and made me wonder if it bears some close experience to hell but I have taken great care and effort to give constructive feedback instead of condemning it beyond redemption.

I could not believe what I had heard. Had I imagined it? I scanned the room. I looked at each person’s expression. Most faces were stoic. Were they just as disturbed by the comment as I was but had chosen to reserve their emotions and thoughts? Perhaps the greater the waves of emotion rides, the more one needs to hold it in. I turned to Jane and Alyssa,¹⁰ who were sitting next to me, and I could see they were equally aghast. I had not imagined it after all.

I was speechless and hurt.

To write or not to write

I wondered what elements in my ‘Letter to God’ had created such disturbance in my critic. What was it that he found so offensive? What assumptions and ideas of a commentary did my letter challenge in him? It also made me question my own assumptions and ideas. Was this a classic case of a cultural clash? Did he expect a more

¹⁰A pseudonym

intellectual literary commentary as opposed to a personal emotional one? When I received some positive comments, he seemed to feel the need to correct people's perception, should they mistakenly think my writing was superior. Did he think himself the bastion of the interpretive community, that he holds the key to my entry? It was not my intention when I read the letter aloud to have it used as a yardstick by which the quality of everybody else's writing be measured by. It was only to demonstrate a different format, which I was more comfortable with. Nevertheless in that one moment he had alienated my letter.

In my initial writing for this chapter, as I wrote the above narrative 'Can we pick on you?' I remember simply copying and pasting the letter into the appropriate section of the narrative and as I reread it for cohesion, my eyes skipped the entire section of the letter, consciously refusing to engage with it. In my second revision, I drew on a more conventional format of research writing I was familiar with and had excluded the narrative entirely. I had retreated into the more distant stance of a researcher and having purged the experience, I wanted to be rid of it. Furthermore, I was uncertain how to position my narrative and whether it had any value. Its exclusion made it seem as if it had somehow magically manifested itself devoid of context.

But the distance in terms of time and space and further reading has allowed me to appreciate the value and richness of the narrative in representing the "complexities and ways of acknowledging the influence of experience and culture on human learning and knowledge construction" (Schaafsma, Vinz, Brock, Dickson, & Sousanis, 2011, p. 2). It represents the tension that is not often seen in writing a commentary. According to Schaafsma et al., "stories make it possible to explore territories filled with tensions, conflicts and competing forces." The narrative made me realized there is more to writing a commentary than the transaction between the reader and the text. A reader is situated in social and cultural contexts, which may affect her/his engagement with a text. In my

situation, the event brought to my consciousness the sense of belonging to a literary community I was (a) part of or from.

For example, in one of the class activities for the course discussed above, the students were asked in groups to improvise a scene from *Paradise Lost* where Adam chooses to eat the forbidden fruit. We were to recreate the scene so that Adam makes a decision, which is more consistent with his just and elevated state. After the performances, one of the students mentioned that she felt she needed to respect the author's work and not improvise too much of the scene. I wondered then where did she learn this? Is this one of the rules of dramatization that I was not aware of? Transacting with the text as a reader is a personal experience but I was beginning to be aware that readers also operate with/in various conceptions of "community" that may have similar or different assumptions, similar or different sets of rules and values.

A Continuum of Efferent and Aesthetic Readings

A&HE 4085 The Teaching of Reading
Response to Rosenblatt: Chapter 3 & 4

Imagine being in a classroom in Malaysia, the teacher would most probably come into the class, expecting the students to have read the novel, poem or play assigned for the day, and then would proceed to discuss the plot, characters, themes, setting and literary devices with the students. The success of the discussion would be measured at the end of the year when the students sit for their exam responding to similar questions with ready-made answers. As part of revision, they may refer to cliff notes or workbooks that summarize the literature materials for them. This scenario is very typical in most classrooms in Malaysia where the text take prominence over the reader or the author. The students' role is thus limited to an archeologist who would unearth and make connections the pieces he or she has discovered. Such approach to literature is called The New

Criticism approach, which argues whatever is needed to understand or interpret the story, is contained within the text. The readers are called forth to “carefully examine, or “closely read,” all the evidence provided by the language of the text itself: its images, symbols, metaphors, rhyme, meter, point of view, setting, characterization, plot and so forth, which, because they form or shape the literary work” (Tyson, 2006, p. 137).

Rosenblatt’s theory, on the other hand, proposes that the reader’s experience with the text should be given more prominence as the “text is merely an object of paper and ink until some reader responds to the marks on the page as verbal symbols” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 23). She delineates two kinds of reading the efferent and aesthetic, which are not discrete items but rather placed on a continuum. What is interesting here is that she does not attribute the efferent and aesthetic characteristics solely to the text but rather to the transaction between the reader and the text. It is the reader’s transaction with a text that determines to what extent a reading is more aesthetic or efferent. She further argues seeking formal structures within a text to categorize it into efferent or aesthetic would be limiting. A reading may be said to be efferent when “the primary concern of the reader is with what he will carry away from the reading” and it is aesthetic when “the reader’s attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text” (pp. 24-25). Thus, two readers reading the same novel may have a different experience with the same text depending on his or her purpose, state of mind and psychological state.

For the purpose of classroom discussion much like the one set up in Malaysia, I would imagine most students would read a novel with the purpose of passing the exam though I am sure there are a few who would read it and experience an aesthetic reading. So what would the implication be for Malaysian classroom? The question is how does a teacher set up his or her lesson so as to encourage a more aesthetic reading where “the reader had to pay attention to the broader gamut of what ... particular words in this particular order were calling forth within him: attention to the sound and rhythm of the

words in the inner ear, attention to the imprints of past encounters with these words and their referents in differing life and literary contexts, attention to the overtones of feeling, the chiming of sound, sense, idea, and association” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 26). In a classroom of 40–45 restless students with two fans spinning at full blast instead of having air-condition, in a 35-40°C humid weather, competing to the sounds of 955 other students in other classrooms which have their doors and windows opened too (as to close them would be even more cruel in the heat), creating an aesthetic experience of reading would be next to impossible I would imagine. But then there are readers who get totally engrossed with a book sitting amidst frenzied surrounding. Does this mean then the responsibility lies with the students more so than the teacher in creating a particular experience of a text? Or can teachers somehow contribute to their experiences of reading the text? Is the aesthetic reading the more ideal reading in which a reader should strive towards particularly when reading literature? If so what implications would this have on assessment? These are some questions I have for the moment in relation to the roles of the teacher and student of reading in which I hope I will be able to answer later.

An Aesthetic Reading [is] Essential to the Beginning of a Process of Organic Growth

A&HE 5514: Literature and Literary Study
Azlina Abdul Aziz

Undoubtedly in many English classes today the student functions on two separate and distinct planes. On one plane, he learns the ideas about literature that his teacher or the literary critic presents to him as traditional and accepted by educated people. On the other plane, he reads the literature and reacts to it personally, perhaps never expressing that reaction or even paying attention to it. Only occasionally will there be a correlation of these two planes of activity. Teachers frequently approach a book or a poem as though it were a neatly bundle of literary values to be pointed out to the students. (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 56)

As I am reading Rosenblatt, Purves, Probst, et al., I cannot help reflect on my own experience as a reader when reading *Paradise Lost* (please indulge me). I wonder if my

own reading process is similar to the ones she describes in her book and if not I wonder how it might be different. Rosenblatt (1995) states, “An aesthetic reading ... [is] essential to the beginning of a process of organic growth, in which the capacity for thinking rationally about emotional responses can be expanded. Such reading can nourish both aesthetic and social sensitivities and can foster the development of critical and self-critical judgment” (p. xviii). In other words, she is arguing for an amalgamation of students’ personal responses as well as a careful attention to the details of the text in a reciprocal process leading (Rosenblatt posits) to a more critical understanding of the text. I love her concept of an organic growth to reading implying that creation of meaning is a continual and layered process as we transact with the text and the “community” of readers. During the initial reading, Rosenblatt argues that students should be given the freedom “to approach the text without artificial restrictions and to respond in his own terms” (p. 73).

My own initial response to *Paradise Lost* came by way of a letter to God. As I reread my first letter, I could see how it may lead me to further explore and attend to Milton’s depiction of Satan and his motivation, Adam and Eve’s fallibility and their ‘ability’ to withstand Satan’s temptation, and God’s intervention or lack thereof in protecting Adam and Eve from Satan. But as I reflect on my reading process as a student, I wonder how it would be different if I were to position myself as an English teacher. As English teachers, do we hold ourselves to different standards when reading literature? Do we have different expectations for ourselves and our students or can the approach to reading literature as delineated by Rosenblatt be one that both students and teachers aspire to? As we become more experienced readers, do we immediately “know” what to attend to, thus skipping the emotional response, much like a person who is reading the text for the second time? Are teachers doing their students a disservice when our own readings do not reflect our own students’ for fear of being seen as ignorant and have our competence come into question? In other words, do we immediately expect to

know all the answers or could our demonstration of the process in our reading help model to our students how actual reading looks like? Looking back at the incident in class, perhaps he could have seen that my letter to God was my initial emotional response to the text and could be further expanded had it been encouraged.

Writing Personal Responses

A&HE 4085 Teaching of Reading
Blau Chapters 5–6

When they are asked to talk about a text in class, however, they act like witnesses to a crime who are afraid of being personally involved or have been warned by a judge to stick to the facts and not draw inferences or reach any conclusions of their own. They generally suspect that they are supposed to do more than provide a mere plot summary, but they seem not to know what else there is to say in an academic context that isn't either plot summary or else the predictable pseudoacademic observations encouraged by study guides and, unfortunately, by some typical school assignments. (Blau, 2003, p. 102)

As I sit here facing my computer, I think, “What on earth am I supposed to say? What can I say? What would be worth saying?” The first question connotes an external body of authority, who expects a particular response out of many possible responses. The second imply my having the ability to say something and the third is a value judgment that some kind of response is more worthy to be read than others. I have sat far too long in front of this computer; an amount of time that I am beginning to think is not worth the miserable one or two pages I write. The process is long, for me at least, which involves reading and making connections to something personal be it to my practice as a teacher or my experience as a reader. Then I sit down to compose some semblance of a coherent structure out of my disorganized and disjointed thoughts. Self-defeating thoughts like ‘I’m just horrible at this’ or ‘I’m so slow’ interlace the half formed ideas in my head but I plod on against a looming deadline that resembles more the sinister Professor Snape than

our luminous Professor Browne.¹¹ Writing a response paper much like responding to a literary text can be daunting when a figure either real or imagined looms in the distance nodding or shaking its head as one would expect to find in any academic pursuit. Usually the figure is very friendly but let us be realistic because that figure, i.e., the judge in Blau's description, gives us the grades and so we write under its shadow whether we like to or not. For me at least writing a response paper yields numerous possibilities that can be overwhelming initially unlike let's say a research article that has a particular structure. The personal connection each person makes to the text takes on different meanings and so there are many more interesting directions each response can take.

I think of the many second language speakers like myself who have been told to refer to the text in their responses much like the witnesses sticking to the facts combined with an added burden of expressing themselves well in the second language are often silenced by a practice that do not value their less grammatical personal voices. So they respond in a language that is impersonal and a content that is easier to grasp. Often I listened to my classmates and from their responses know those who have been trained in the language arts and I am made aware of my own limited exposure to literature. With different types of discourse and text, the reader is expected to respond differently. I recall a conversation with a colleague who told me about a literary criticism of a novel she was engaged in. During the discussion, one student with a more reader response approach as opposed to new criticism was not taken seriously when she started relating it to her personal experience. The incident demonstrates how different educational settings and discourses place different values to responses and so we continue to write and learn to rewrite according to the demands placed upon us be it either a more restrictive or liberating responses.

¹¹Real name

Response to *Ignorance* by Milan Kundera

A&HE 5199: Fiction and Literary Imagination
Azlina Abdul Aziz

Staging in literature makes conceivable the extraordinary plasticity of human beings, who, precisely because they do not seem to have a determinable nature, can expand into an almost unlimited range of culture bound patternings. The impossibility of being present to ourselves becomes our possibility to play ourselves out to a fullness that knows no bounds, because no matter how vast the range, none of the possibilities will “make us tick.” (Iser, 1993, p. 297)

In Malaysia, during the *Eid-ul-Fitri*¹² celebration, vast numbers of Muslims make the annual pilgrimage to their hometowns, usually with some risks that come with travelling on roads, to celebrate a day of festivity and forgiveness with family members and relatives after an grueling thirty-day fast. The coming together involves ritualistic congregational prayer at a local mosque; the seeking of forgiveness for wrongdoings committed in the past, which supposedly clears the slate of accountability and for one day one’s conscience is at ease before another marks the sins for the year to come; and the great feasting of compressed rice with peanut sauce, glutinous rice cooked in bamboo with chicken or beef *rendang*¹³ or curry and assorted cookies. It is a day of ritual, indulgence and merrymaking. It is a day to fill in the gap created by a year of absence and so people talk about their progress in their career and how big the children are. It is also a day of awkward conversations, false starts, incomplete utterances, phatic communication and ritualistic comments. It is a day to notice how different people have become as life leads them in different directions and so the rituals become the glue to our decentered selves.

¹²*Eid-ul-Fitri* is a day of celebration after thirty days of fasting in the Islamic month of *Ramadhan*. It falls on the first day of the month of *Syawal*.

¹³*Rendang* is a popular dish in Malaysia, made with chicken, lamb or beef and combined with a mixture of coconut milk and various spices.

In *Ignorance*, Irena's great Odysseus' return to her homeland after a twenty-year absence is peppered with such awkward moments. It began a few years before she returned to Prague when her mother's visit to Paris had reduced her to "that feeling of inferiority, of weakness, of dependency" (Kundera, 2000, p. 21). Her matriarchal overpowering self had "flattened her daughter and...that she took a secret pleasure in her own physical superiority" (Kundera, 2000, p.21). How cruel she was to deny her daughter of her moment of glory and pride over her triumph in creating a good life for herself and I wonder if secretly she resented her daughter for abandoning her country or worse her own mother for the glamorous city of Paris, a city she declared she felt more sense of belonging than Prague. Was she playing out the anathema even if only psychologically towards those who were perceived to be treacherous to the country? Perhaps it is her mother's attempt to reenact their past relationship even after they were separated. It is fascinating how one can get stuck in a role-play enacted countless times and neither space nor time can change it because of the other person's insistence that you project the image they have of you and of themselves.

Her mother's denial of her life should have been an indication of things to come and her return did not turn out as magical as it was for Odysseus. Her reunion with her friends did not turn out as she expected. She offered them fine wine, which they felt was alien to their ritualistic gathering and perhaps implicit in her offering was the sense of her superiority in taste over her friends' common choice of beer. When her friends chose to drink beer over her offer of fine wine, she saw it as a rejection of her. During the gathering she failed to turn the conversation to topics she was interested in. She concluded at the end of the reunion:

I could go back and live with them, but they'd be a condition: I'd have to lay my whole life with you, with all of you, with the French, solemnly on the altar of the homeland and set fire to it. Twenty years of my life spent abroad would go up in smoke, in a sacrificial ceremony. And the women would sing and dance with me around the fire, with beer mugs raised high in

their hands. That's the price I'd have to pay to be pardoned. To be accepted. To become one of them again. (Kundera, 2000, p. 45)

In *Ignorance*, we see the concept of human plasticity as suggested by Iser. We adopt different ways of being in this world as we move from one place to another. It certainly makes me wonder what I would be taking from my stay here in the U.S. and if it would alienate me even if a little to my beloved home country upon my return. Are these changes so subtle and unconscious that only my return could enlighten aspects of my multiple selves? And what would be the glue to hold them together? Is it the ritualistic congregational prayer, the compressed rice with peanut sauce and the glutinous rice cooked in bamboo with chicken or beef *rendang*? It will be interesting to see.

Re-placing English Education in Malaysia in the 21st Century

How may we refashion English Education in Malaysia in this globalized 21st century? In Malaysia's case, in an effort towards building a nationalistic Malaysian identity, Malay language served the primary role of expressing the Malaysian spirit. However, there is a growing number of English speakers in countries where it is taught as a second or foreign language, who have gained ownership of the language and embraced it as part of their identities. However, the vast majority view English mainly for its utilitarian value and its teaching in the classroom focuses on the technical aspects of acquisition in line with the autonomous model of literacy. Guillory (1993) terms it a technobureaucratic society, which is concerned with producing "a new class of technical managerial specialists possessed of purely technical/managerial knowledge" (in Graff, 2008, p. 261). Maintaining the balance between English's humanist and capitalist values would be crucial to avoid the negative effects warned by various scholars like Nussbaum and Guillory.

The processes involved in transforming and appropriating the language to take on local characteristics are crucial in the beginning stages of decolonization. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2007) put it,

Postcolonial culture is inevitably a hybridized phenomenon involving a dialectical relationship between the 'grafted' European cultural systems and an indigenous ontology, with its impulse to create or recreate an independent local identity. Such construction or reconstruction only occurs as a dynamic interaction between European hegemonic systems and 'peripheral' subversions of them. It is not possible to return to or to rediscover an absolute pre-colonial cultural purity, nor is it possible to create national or regional formations entirely independent of their historical implication in the European colonial enterprise. (pp. 220-221)

This suggests the inevitable connection and tensions between varieties of English to native English. The other side to this equation is while there is appropriation involved, the standard in which we hold as ideal is still the native varieties as when we refer to Oxford and Merriam Webster dictionaries or "Collins Cobuild English Grammar" on ideas of Standard English. There is still a dependence on countries like the U.S and the U.K as resources to help improve the English language in Malaysia by drawing on their expertise in various forms. In other words, we are still consumers of all things English. The important question to ask is what is the next move away from this dependence? Scholes (1998), in conceptualizing an English education, provides a response to this question. He argues for a movement away from teaching a canon of texts to employing a canon of methods in order to study the three elements of textuality; "how to situate a text (history), how to compose one (production), and how to read one (consumption)" (p. 147). In teaching a canon of texts, it would limit one's learning experience to the issue of coverage or representation, i.e., English, American, multicultural literature. Scholes (1998) argues that "material 'covered' in classrooms and not incorporated into the communicative lives of students simply fades away" (p. 149). A more powerful means of learning would not be what text one has read but rather one's ability to deconstruct a text and identify its strengths and limitations. It is a set of skills one acquires that will be

applicable to other texts one reads. Scholes extends this even further when he argues for students to be not only consumers but also producers of texts, “The best preparation we can give our students will be the highest level of competence as readers and writers, producers and consumers of the various texts they will encounter” (p. 154). He sums it up when he says, “one needs to be able to read, interpret, and criticize texts in a wide range of modes, genres, and media. What our students need to function in such a world, then, is an education for a society still struggling to balance its promises of freedom and equality, still hoping to achieve greater measures of social justice, still trying not to homogenize its people but to allow for social mobility and to make the lower levels of its economic structure tolerable and humane” (p. 84).

Scholes's conception of English Education is particularly resonant with people who have experienced and is still experiencing various forms of injustice and oppression particularly through the discursive use of the English language. It moves away from valuing literary texts as cultural capital as part of the nationalistic movement or identification of ‘cultured’ citizens. Post-colonial countries need to also turn its gaze upon itself because when its gaze is turned outward toward the oppressor, it fails to acknowledge its own oppression by enacting the very colonial discourse it opposes. For example, in 2010 the recent racist incidents acted out by two school principals in Malaysia have caused uproar amongst all levels of Malaysian multicultural society. In the first incident the school principal was reported to have said during a school assembly that “Chinese students were not needed here and should return to China while the prayer strings tied around the necks and wrists of Indian students made them look like dogs” (Wu, 2014 October 12) after a few Chinese and Indian students had arrived late to school. In the second incident the school principal reprimanded a group of Chinese students and told them to go back to China when they were having breakfast during the Muslim fasting month which they obviously had the right to do since they were not Muslims!

These incidents are grim reminders of the insidious lingering presence of racism in Malaysia. Inherent in these acts is the underlying belief of the Malay superiority sealed by the Malaysian Constitution, which delineates the Malays and indigenous people as the original people and protects their rights and privileges. In the first incident, it is a constant reminder of the Chinese and Indians' arrival to Malaya as immigrants, that they are second-class citizens. More insidious than that is the derogative remark made to the Indian students debasing the Indian culture. In the second incident, it is an attempt to impose Malay Muslim practice onto the Chinese students. The officials' and public's reaction over these incidents was a good indication of the government's zero tolerant policy on racism. The Minister in the Prime Minister's Department said "I agree with the public on this... it is frightening to see our educators behaving like that. Severe action must be taken – we cannot, in any way, tolerate this" (Wu, 2014 October 12). Both principals were discharged of their principal position and reassigned to a desk job at a district education department. While these racist incidents were reported I am certain there are many more both blatant and subtle aspects of racism that go unreported and unchecked. Efforts on appropriation of the English language need to also include its appropriation as a language of liberation.

Reflection on my Postcolonial English Education Experiences

In this section, I have attempted to interrogate (though limited by my memory, agency and consciousness) my own postcolonial English Education experiences; from my childhood experiences of learning English in Kuala Terengganu to studying my undergraduate in TESOL in Bognor Regis and eventually as a doctoral student of English Education in New York City; whereby I had learnt English as a second language in a town on the East coast of Peninsula Malaysia where English was hardly spoken in the community, to it becoming a dominant language in my life, in a sense that I think, speak,

read and even dream in English; and intersected by my multiple identities as female, Malaysian, Muslim, student and teacher. Constructing this section, I had chosen to collate texts of incomplete fragmented writings from various genres following Richardson's (2005) Creative Analytic Practices, such as my responses to texts I have read for various classes at TC and reflective writings, that would represent my subjectivities and multiple selves, in relation to being Muslim, woman, Malay, Malaysian, and second language speaker and teacher of English.

In addition, I utilized Richardson's (2005) conception of "writing as a method of inquiry" and "a way of knowing" about myself and my topic at hand. Writing my postcolonial English Education was a process of discovery about myself, my understanding of my readings as well as my limited 'worldview.' Very often we tend to write to tell people about a particular issue but often we fail to acknowledge that it is in the act of writing that we discover our beliefs and how we construct and interpret the world we live it. In other words, we attempt although at times it may be limited and limiting, to articulate what would otherwise be a conscious, at times almost unconscious, and others remained unconscious thoughts still. Only in writing do I make visible how I have constructed my experiences and multiple identities, that at times have not risen above (as much as I desire it to) the binaries or grand narrative I seek to overcome. I was not always as 'enlightened' as I wish I was. In reflecting on my English Education experiences, I am drawing attention to aspects of learning and teaching the language that is informed by its discursive systems. There may be aspects of it I may not have noticed which other readers may be able to.

In constructing my experiences of learning the English language, learning English felt more like learning a foreign language and culture as I had lived in a community that hardly spoke the language, and my exposure to the language was limited to learning it in the classroom, watching TV and films, but mainly in reading books. In my mind, English 'belonged' to the English people, who had authority over its usage such as in its

grammatical rules, pronunciation and vocabulary. Explicitly and implicitly, we were told to emulate British English (i.e., Queen's English) particularly since we were part of the Commonwealth countries. Pronunciation to me was the most 'visible' form of the language, whereby the further your speech 'deviated' from Received Pronunciation (think Prof Higgins), the less educated and economically well off you were (think Eliza Doolittle). Thus, to speak English well brought with it a certain 'status' and power as it was spoken by the elite and educated in Malaysia and it also accorded opportunities to further one's education abroad. Only later when I was studying in the UK, did I become more aware of the many different dialects and varieties of English but even then I had noticed the continuing tensions of speakers seeking validation for what they perceived as 'their' versions of the language. In one of my classes at TC, a classmate spoke about her struggle with her Brooklyn accent because she felt it was perceived as uneducated and at times she struggled to be taken seriously. During the TV program 'The late show with Stephen Colbert,' in which John Oliver was the guest, Stephen Colbert and he argued about the pronunciation of the word 'process':

Colbert: Well no.....The primary PROcess OR PRAHcess as we say it on this side of the pond....

Oliver: Well, PROcess.....We invented words, we'll tell you how it's suppose to sound.

The above exchange might be a humorous banter between former colleagues, who now have their own TV programs in competing networks, but they do speak to a sense of entitlement by a British speaker of English to determine the 'correct' pronunciation of the word as Oliver laid claim the language had originated from the U.K. In other words, since the language originated from the U.K., the British had ownership of the language and could therefore sanction how words are pronounced. Of course, these comedians knew they were 'playing out' the absurdity of the notion but even then, I could see how Colbert was silenced by Oliver's assertion and quietly even somewhat reluctantly acquiescing to

the fact. The first chapter in my learning the language was to ‘sound’ like the English, that at times had caused a dissonance in my mind and in the mind of others. I remember when I was doing my Masters in Malaysia at a local university, a lecturer said when she heard me speak, she imagined me wearing a blouse, skirt and not wearing a veil (I was in my *baju kurung*¹⁴). Another colleague, at the university I am currently teaching, told me he found it difficult to reconcile how I could look Malay and yet sound British. These two anecdotes spoke to how we have associated the English accent with being ‘Western’ in dressing and look. In other words, acquiring the language and sounding like the English would entail adopting their way of life and values. Indeed, for a few of my classmates, that was the case when we were in the UK doing our undergraduate (Not that there was anything wrong with it!). However, personally I felt it was important for me to retain the fundamental values of Islam and being a Muslim, while being open to other cultures and learning and even adopting some of their values. I did not see it necessary for me to sound ‘English’ and be English. My construction of my early English Education speaks to the subtle ways in which the discursive system of English Education could have an effect on one’s perception in how he or she views him/herself and other’s speech and how we are not always conscious of our reenacting the very power structures we oppose. It speaks to our limited agency and disrupt the view of the researcher as an authority figure, who is always more enlightened and have risen beyond his or her neurosis.

Apart from acquiring the grammatical structures, phonology and morphology of English, another aspect of my English Education is the acquisition of knowledge as constructed in English speaking countries. I saw dissemination of English and its teaching as the prerogative of the English speaking communities, who speak it as their

¹⁴*Baju Kurung* is a traditional and national dress for Malaysian women, which originated from the Malay community.

mother tongue. In other words, not only were we suppose to emulate the structure and form of the language from British English but we also learnt how it should be taught from native speakers of English. It almost always felt I had to aspire to speak and teach English like the native speakers and I was a recipient of these knowledges. If as espoused by Ashcroft that postcolonial transformation involved an appropriation of the language, in my case I felt it was more incumbent upon me as an English teacher to be a ‘guardian’ of the language rather than one of many of its creators. When I had arrived in Teachers College, to begin my doctoral program in English Education, having completed my undergraduate and Masters in TESOL and applied linguistics respectively, learning about how to read and teach literature was new to me. Where previously, I had learnt about teaching English to second language speakers based on a technical rational conception of the curriculum, I was learning about teaching literature grounded in a more ‘humanistic’ curriculum that attended to the arts and the students’ autobiography. In my classes at TC, I had learnt how to talk about a text, how to deconstruct a text, and how a text is written. In addition, as a researcher I had come from a post positivistic to learning about a poststructuralist epistemology, whereby the conception of a researcher as objective, authoritative, and fully conscious of him/herself were disrupted by a self whose memory, agency and experiences are limited. The process of transitioning from old knowledges to acquiring new knowledges was not always seamless to me and the challenge to my ‘Letter to God’ brought home a feeling of inadequacy as a student and a feeling of not being fully accepted by what I perceive as the native speakers of English.

In this section, I have conveyed past experiences as how I think I saw them at the time and yet these interpretations do not necessarily have a direct continuous line to my present perception. It also speaks to a continuous and ongoing movement of the ‘self’ that is not fixed and constantly in perpetual motion, which is not always easily constructed in text. We researchers, like painters and writers, attempt to paint or pen down a scene, while that scene changes in movement and light, affected too by our own internal

consciousness. There is a perpetual tension here I frustratingly am not always able to convey. I also struggle with a feeling of vulnerability in exposing myself particularly in an academic setting that highly values the researcher as an authority, who is always self aware and conscious and not subjected to struggles to grasp concepts or even worse not knowing! And at other times in my writings, I sound like the very authoritative figure I have conceived in my imagination. Added to this layer is the feeling of an outsider on the periphery of a center, where knowledges are created, a fictive boundary that requires for me crossings of seas and imagination. To sum up, this section is a construction of a self at an intersection of old and new knowledges; straddling between two geographic locations; and negotiating my multiples selves and feelings of belonging that are in motion.

Chapter V

KUIH LAPIS

Kuih Lapis

In the Malay culture, there is a layered spiced cake, made with cardamom, cloves and cinnamon, called in its literal meaning *Kuih lapis*, which is a delicacy served during festivals. Making the cake involves pouring a very thin layer of batter into a pan and baking it in the oven before removing it and adding another thin layer of batter in a different color. The process is repeated thirty or forty times depending on the thickness of the cake. It goes without saying that making the cake is a painstaking labor but biting into the cake one cannot deny its richness. Like the *kuih lapis*, we are located within and are products of layered social, cultural, religious and political discursive systems within specific historical periods.

My own interrogation of my subjectivities, based on texts of various genres in the previous chapter on ‘My own postcolonial English education,’ is thus my attempt to make conscious my own multiple subjectivities and how these can easily shape how I have constructed this research, what my research questions are, how I had chosen my participants, what questions I chose to ask, and to what extent my interpretative theoretical frameworks and subjectivities have imposed upon and framed my interpretations and representations of my participants’ points of view.

I began each chapter of my “musings” with an excerpt from the play ‘Pygmalion’ because having interrogated my autobiography of my postcolonial English Education, I

found that some of the themes in Pygmalion figure quite prominently in my consciousness in relation to learning the English language as a means to access a language of power and opportunity, and how transformational or non-transformational learning English could be for me and my participants. The play also touched on feeling a sense of belonging and non-belonging and making decisions on which space(s) we choose to occupy at different time and places in our lives. When representing the data, I had attempted to construct it around a few themes I had found to be prominent (based on my research questions, my theoretical frameworks and my subjectivities); ‘Interpretation of the Immigrants’ English Education Experiences,’ ‘Accessing cultural discourses,’ ‘The Browning effect – Hierarchical Constructions of Accents,’ ‘The *Hijabis* and non *Hijabis*,’ and ‘Being American, Islamophobia and Surveillance.’ Within each theme, I have constructed sub-themes based on the participants’ own phrases. These phrases were chosen because I felt they represented the main point each participant was trying to address. Sometimes as I reread the excerpts, I would choose a different phrase that I had found to be more suitable. For example, I had changed the subtitle “*Yes, it’s English language but it looks like along with the language it’s another world*” to “*English doesn’t necessarily represent America, English is just a language*” (also changed the title of this thesis) because after rereading it, I felt that was a more accurate message that particular participant was trying to convey.

Chase (2005), in her chapter on ‘Narrative Inquiry,’ discussed differences between the researcher’s authoritative voice and supportive voice, an imaginary continuum along which researchers could choose to position themselves when interpreting and writing up the findings. When using the researcher’s authoritative voice, I am reading the data using lenses (i.e., conceptual frameworks and my subjectivities) that the participants may or may not have when they were narrating their stories. The criticism against this move is that I am “privilege(ing) the analyst’s listening ear” (Denzin, 1997, p. 249, in Chase, 2005, p. 664) more than the participants’ voices. However, Chase (2005) argues such

move would make “visible and audible taken-for-granted practices, processes and structural and cultural features of our everyday social worlds” (p. 664). In other words, in the participants’ retelling of their experiences, they may not have the time or the interpretive frameworks that I did to examine their stories, while as a researcher I had more luxury to read and reread them, whilst applying my theoretical frameworks and subjectivities onto their narrative.

While that is certainly the case in this study, I also wanted to move away from traditional qualitative researches, where the researcher would extract short snippets of the participants’ narrative as an afterthought to his or her well-articulated arguments. Thus, at the end of that imaginary continuum is the ‘researcher’s supportive voice’, that privileges the participants’ voices above the researcher’s (p. 665). In researches that utilize such a move, we would hear stretches of the participants’ dialogue such as in oral histories. The criticisms against such move is that it “romanticize(s) the narrator’s voice” (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997, in Chase, 2005, p. 665) and also it assumes the narrators are speaking the ‘truth’ or are even consciously aware of the subjectivities, power dynamics, and fears that very often are infused in our interactions. Chase, however, argues that the researcher can be involved in “creating a self-reflective and respectful distance between researchers’ and narrators’ voices” (p. 665). In this research, I chose to straddle between the two ends of the continuum.

In parts on my musings, I would acknowledge if my interpretation of what the participants had said was conjecture on my part especially when the meaning is unclear or when the participants contradicted themselves or change their minds about an issue. I did try to honor the participants’ responses by composing stretches of their speeches, with some editing such as deleting comments I did not find relevant to the themes, removing redundant comments, reorganizing some of the comments for cohesion, and removing my own dialogue. I felt I needed to balance between my role as a researcher when ‘imposing’ my own subjectivities and interpretative theoretical frameworks, determining how the

data is represented, while also giving space for my very articulate participants to speak. I didn't want my voice to completely overwhelm what the participants had to say, as most times I felt they said it better than I could. I also did not want to extract short snippets of their dialogues as only supporting details to my analysis and interpretation as I did in previous traditional qualitative researches I have carried out in the past. My interpretation of the data is by no means exhaustive. I recognize my own limitations in how I had chosen to interpret, analyze and represent the data. In constructing stretches of speeches, I am also leaving some room for other readers to 'notice' and take away other readings from them instead of leaving my readers with no choice to possible alternative interpretations had I only constructed and extracted snippets of their speeches to explicate my 'theories.'

There were parts of the narrative where I have included dialogues, as in the section '*The Browning effect – Hierarchical Constructions of Accents*' because it was the interactions between the participants that helped to shape the argument they were presenting. In other sections, I chose long prose by each participant, sometimes that would involve me compiling all their dialogues into one long narrative. The whole narrative would then be disrupted by the interlacing of different participants' prose. In the process of presenting the data, I have had to reluctantly remove some of the participants' narrative in order to create a more succinct argument for that section.

When representing the data, I did not always choose findings that represented the majority at the expense of minority views. Nor did I choose findings that only confirmed my own experiences or interpretations. For example, even though only three participants talked about meanings they had attached to various English accents, I chose to include it because firstly, I had never heard of a 'brown' accent that they had described, which I had found fascinating, perplexing and I was curious of its origin. Secondly, their constructions of accents were in some ways similar to mine but they also partly differed. I had constructed them based on geographical locations but they had constructed them

based on whole regions/parts of the world. In another instance, when talking about Muslim surveillance in the U.S., the participants did not find that it figured as much in their consciousness as it did in mine. However, I still felt it was important to explore it looking at the current climate of fear and Islamophobia in the U.S. and elsewhere around the world. The challenge is in differentiating founded and unfounded fear, which would ultimately determine the most constructive way of addressing the threat of violence from extremists. Even in Malaysia, a Muslim majority country, we have the threat of terrorism. An artist was recently jailed for twelve years on charges related to providing support for and receiving training on terrorism activities (Gunaratnam, June 14, 2016). Our neighbor, Indonesia, the most populous Muslim majority country in the world had seen their share of the brutality and violence of terrorism. However, I found that in Malaysia and Indonesia, while we condemn such acts of terrorism, generally there was not a feeling such atrocities were acts committed by outsiders, people who did not belong to the country. In the U.S., it has sometimes led to a discussion of whether Islam is compatible in the West or, worse still, that “Islam hates us” rhetoric by a Presidential candidate (guess who).

Apart from the interviews, I had invited the participants to share their writings on a wikispace page I had created and on that page I had shared some of my own narratives I had written about learning English (personal communication, August 20, 2014). But since participants were occupied with college assignments, they did not have time to do so. The only writings shared was by Sabah, who emailed me her essay on ‘*The idea of Pakistan and its executors*’ (personal communication, June 27, 2014) and Hannah, who had shared a PowerPoint presentation she had done in class on ‘*Immigrants’ education in the U.S.*’ (personal communication, August 22, 2014). I was hoping to weave all participants’ narrative writings with their interview data to create a richer representation of the musings but unfortunately, that was not to be. I also attempted to get feedback from the participants on my writing in progress (personal communication, February 14,

2015) in an effort to seek further collaboration but I did not get any response. As much as I would like to have more collaboration from the participants, I have to recognize the constraints involved and what an imposition any participation in my research must have been to their lives.

In this study, thus, I have attempted to explicate multiple and contradictory interpretations that do not necessarily privilege the majority's views above the minority's or my own researcher's voice. There were times though when my authoritative voice superseded that of the participants, when I felt it was supported by my theoretical frameworks, and readings, whilst at other times, after having done some reflexive work, I could see how my subjectivities may have differed from the participants and their voices deserved to be privileged over mine. In the chapter following my discussion of my musings, I have summarized and made connections amongst my conjectures and highly considered assumptions about what I am positioning here as "my findings" in and of this research study, the research questions, and my chosen theoretical frameworks. As well, I discuss possible implications of my research and offer my tentative and always-in-process "conclusion of my study."

Let's Get to Know Each Other!

This research involved seven participants: Farah, Leyla, Sabah, Hannah, Safeena, Maisara and Safa. I met up with the participants either at Teachers College's Gottesman's library or at the Muslim Student Association's Center at City College of New York at W. 135th Street. I gave them a choice to either meet up with me for an individual/in pairs/a group interview(s). Leyla and Safa had chosen to have one-time individual interviews, which lasted between 2–3 hours each. I interviewed Safeena and Maisara together twice, and each interview was around two hours. Hannah came to the interview once together with Farah and Sabah and that lasted for nearly four hours. I also had a

final individual interview separately with Farah and Sabah, which were around two hours each. (See the table below for those who are more visually inclined).

Table 2. Number and Duration of Interviews

No	Name	No. of Interviews	Interview	Hours
1	Farah	3X	1. group (with Sabah and Hannah) 2. pair (with Sabah) 3. individual	3 hours 36 minutes 2 hours 4 minutes 2 hours 16 minutes
2	Sabah	3X	1. group (with Farah and Hannah) 2. pair (with Farah) 3. individual	3 hours 36 minutes 2 hours 4 minutes 1 hour 53 minutes
3	Hannah	1X	1. group (with Farah and Sabah)	3 hours 36 minutes
4	Leyla	1X	1. individual	2 hour 49 minutes
5	Maisara	2X	1. pair (with Safeena) 2. pair (with Safeena)	1 hour 57 minutes 2 hours 11 minutes
6	Safeena	2X	1. pair (with Maisara) 2. pair (with Maisara)	1 hour 57 minutes 2 hours 11 minutes
7	Safa	1X	1. individual	2 hour 42 minutes

During our first meeting, I had asked each person to introduce herself, where she was originally from, when she had come to the U.S., why she and her family chose to come to the U.S., what the process of coming to the U.S was like, and how they had adjusted to living in the U.S.¹ While the interview for each person may have been done in groups or individually, I have constructed the following interactions as a group introduction.

¹Azlina: ... so can I find out like your experiences of coming here like firstly where you're from and then at what age you migrated or moved to the U.S. and what was that decision like for you and your relationship with your mother tongue as well as with English.

Farah²

I start? Yeah, ok. My name is Farah. I'm Nigerian.³ I was born in Nigeria and I stayed there until I was four and a half years old. And then I was living with my grandparents. And my mom and my dad they lived in Kuwait. So post Kuwait, the Gulf War, they came to take me and I went to Kuwait and I lived there till I was about ten. And then we won the lottery to come to the United States and I remember it being like, I used to be such diligent worker, I mean student at school but when I heard that news, that was it (laugh). No more studying, no more doing homework. I'm out of here. Anyway, so I was so happy because over there, being like I remember the first day of school, when I was very young, I walked into the school and it was an Indian school. So you have in the Arab world, you have different kind of schools, you have American, Indian, and Arabic schools, different nationalities, like you have schools for different nationalities so the students can feel like comfortable and the curriculum is based on that country's curriculum, not Kuwait. So the Indian curriculum was based on what in India they would teach. The teachers were purely Indians. Everything was as if you were in India. The medium of instruction the language taught there would be British English. So I know the American schools they would teach American English, yeah. Coz even in India like the English they teach there it would be British English. So depending on the school you went to that's what you know your curriculum will be based on that country's curriculum. Yeah so I was in this school because it was the cheapest of all of them. This is a private

²Farah was a 23-year-old Nigerian American Muslim, who came to the U.S. at 10 years old. She has been in the U.S for 13 years. Her mother worked as a Licensed practical nurse, while her father was a mechanical engineer. She has a younger brother, who was 20 years old. She did live in Pennsylvania for 9 months but had been living in NYC ever since. In college, she was involved in Peer health exchange, City Serv, Free Arts, City Peers and Habitat for NYC as part of her extra-curricular activities. She planned to become a family and child counselor, in order to help her Muslim community.

³I had chosen to include this here because I felt it spoke to her sense of belonging in the U.S., an issue that will emerge later on in our discussions on identity. Saying '*I'm Nigerian*' and '*I was born in Nigeria*', implied very different meanings so I did not view these phrases as redundant.

school and you have to pay, so I remember when we first, my dad and I first walked in, we were the only Black people in the entire school, I would never forget this image, so we walked in and then it was like between transitioning between one class and the other, so there were a lot of kids and as soon as we walked in they just started parted like a separation (inaudible).

That was the beginning of my nightmare. As years went by we went through a lot of racism and a lot of you know, all these kinds of issues like that. So when we learnt that we were going to the United States I was so happy because finally I am going to be in an environment in which I can be (with) people of my race, cause I've never experienced, except for like I was in Nigeria, which is like a long time for me by then. I didn't know, my brother especially since he was born in Kuwait, I never knew what it felt like to be amongst my race so I was so excited and I just thought, my brother was like he misbehaved to the top and when they say I'm going to tell your principal, yeah I'm going to America so it doesn't matter (laugh). So yeah so we came here I think 2000? It was a year post 9/11 so when was that? Yeah, January 5th 2002 (we) came here and (laugh) it was nothing like I expected. It was a culture shock so different from where I came from, and the educational system was tougher in terms of, I experienced racism there (Kuwait) and it was difficult to make friends and to establish a connection, but here it was just, I thought it was bad but here it was really bad for me and I think it's because when you were in Kuwait, the schools teach you how to be disciplined like part of the education is not just to learn how to read and write, it's learning like how to obey your parents and all these moral things are part of your education but when you come here it's completely different you know. It focused only on you know how to read and write? And over here it's very confining the schools I mean. I remember my middle school, it could've been because the area I was living in, it was a school in need of improvement so these kinds of school there's like bars on the windows, bars on the stairs and you're sitting in one class every single day. And the only person who moves is the teacher and the only time we

ever get to move is whenever you have lunch or you have computer class. So for me someone like you know, in Kuwait, once lunch is over kids just stream into the hallways, you run you do whatever you want you know, adventure time and you play. Here you don't have any of that so you have that aspect of just confinement. That was so depressing and I had a very thick Indian accent so (laugh) so it stood out so people would pick on me because of that and also because I just didn't fit in like their ideology I just was not mine, I couldn't do what they did but I just like a lot of kids their idea of fun was to break the rules as much as possible. I'm used to following the rules so like kids would pick on me because they thought I thought I was better than them because I would, I was doing my work, I would go to class, I wouldn't speak in class and I was very very shy. I was extremely shy so that made it worse and so for a long time I experienced alienation.

Leyla⁴

I moved here when I was nine years old, almost ten because we came here in December 2003 and my birthday is in March. I moved from Bangladesh and I was living in Atlantic City, New Jersey for two months, and then we moved to New York. I moved here, well, I didn't really have a say because my parents kind of you know, I was nine years old and I can't really say, "No, I don't want to go." My Dad was already living here for almost fifteen to twenty years at that time, I believe. I was nine so he came here maybe another fifteen years almost. Then he got married and then ten years later we moved here. The reason I didn't initially, like my Mom didn't move here after she got married is because of my grandmother. She was still living in Bangladesh and my Mom

⁴Leyla was a 20-year-old, Bangladeshi American, who came to the U.S in December of 2003 at the age of 9. She has been in the U.S for the last 11 years. Her father was a businessman while her mother was a house wife. Her father came to the U.S in 1990, while her mother came with her and her siblings to the U.S in December 2003. She has two siblings. She spoke English in college and Bangla at home. She was involved in the 'Women In Islam' group at College and she planned to become a doctor in the future.

was kind of taking care of her. We were just all like a joint family I guess you can say, with my two uncles and my grandmother. So for five years after he had already settled here he lived in Bangladesh after he had become a citizen. During that time my grandmother she got sick and then she passed away and then he moved back here. Then a year later after all the paperwork, we moved here.

I moved here in December 2011 and the next time I went to Bangladesh was 2003 December and then the next time I went to Bangladesh was August of 2011, so that was the only time I went to visit. My entire extended family is over there, mother's side, my father's. The only people that are abroad is my father's sister and her family, they live in Canada. I haven't been there but they come to visit us. They are much older and my father he's currently out of the country for some stuff, we can't and we don't really travel without my father. When I went back it was very different like in the sense that the cities have developed more but everything else was the same for me. The feeling was the same, I'm back in my country, this is where I used to play. Most of the people that I grew up with they were still living in the same houses, the same place. When I went back I was just like all the memory was coming back to me so it was all the same pretty much for me, nothing had changed really. There were more family members because my uncle's gotten married they had kids, I was meeting new people that I had never met before. When I first moved here I didn't know any English at all. The only three words I knew were yes, no and thank you. It was kind of scary.

Sabah⁵

I came to the U.S. from Pakistan in the year 2000s. I was about five years old going into six years old. So I started from first grade like my first class was like my first grade. So basically at that time I had no English, basically I learnt basic English ABC 123, that's about it. My native language is Urdu and Punjabi. They were spoken languages and a little bit of reading and writing.

Hannah⁶

I came here when I was nine, I attended six grade and onwards, so junior school, high school, undergrad and now graduate school, all here in good old NY state. I was in ESL classes in six grade, maybe a semester, which is roughly four to five months, maybe it was a year, I can't remember that far back.

⁵Sabah was a 19-year-old Pakistani American, who came to the U.S at the age of 5 in the year 2000. She has been in the U.S. for 14 years. Her mother is a homemaker and she came to the U.S in 2000. Her father is a limousine driver and he came to the U.S much earlier in 1981 and settled down in Brooklyn, where the family lives now. She has 2 brothers and 2 sisters. She spoke Punjabi and Urdu at home with her family members, and English in college and with her friends. She was also learning Arabic at college and Sunday classes for religious purposes. She was a member of the Faizan-e-Madina, a religious Muslim organization at college. She was also taking religious classes at the *masjid*. After graduation she planned to go to Law School and then return to Pakistan to live.

⁶Hannah was studying for her Master's degree in the Teaching of Mathematics at Teachers College. She was originally from Egypt.

Safeena⁷

This is going to be interesting. I actually never talked about this because I feel like—this is how I think about myself I'm more of this person that get adapted to environment real fast. We came here in 2007. By the way I came here with the DV Visa, do you know what that is? That is like you have to apply for it and it has to go through a lottery. I mean when you apply everything comes here and they do a lottery and they pick the people and then they will give you all the information you just fill them out and then they accept you then they bring you to America with all your family.

Maisara⁸

Diversity? It's Diversity Visa. If you want background information on the Diversity Visa, the idea is America is a land of immigrants, so the Diversity Visa the purpose is to bring in people from different parts of the world. What they do is every year, they actually stopped it for Bangladesh now, every year for specific countries, let's say you're going to bring a thousand people from Japan, 500 people from India, maybe 2,000 people from Vietnam they have this thing, they have a specific quota for each country. Once it's fulfilled they don't give that Visa option. Right now, Bangladeshis

⁷ Safeena was an 18 year old Bangladeshi American, who came to the U.S. in May 25th 2007. She has lived in the the U.S. for 7 years. Both parents were from Bangladesh. Her mom was a housewife and her Dad worked at a pharmaceutical company. She has one sister and one Brother. She lived in California for 8 months before settling in NY for the last six years. She spoke both Bengali and English. She was involved in Cityserv and Peer Health Exchange Program, and MSA at City College. She also volunteered at Queens Hospital Center. She planned to go to Medical School and become a doctor.

⁸ Maisara was a 20 year old Bangladeshi American, who was born and raised in Qatar. Her parents were also from Bangladesh. She came to the U.S. in the summer of 2005 at the age of 13. Her dad worked as a Security Officer while her mom was a Home Health Aid. She has 1 brother. The family lived in Queens, NY. At home she spoke Bengali and at college/work, she spoke English. She was involved in MSA, Society of Women Engineers, Association of Computer Mechanics, City Serv, Work at the technology Center, National Society of Leadership and Success at City College. She planned to work independently from home in the future.

don't get that visa options but when Bangladeshis were less in this country we used to have that option to apply for that. I think recently it was last year or two years before they stopped because Bangladeshis they filled the quota. I know India filled the quota a long while back and there are other countries like Vietnam they are still bringing in people from there, allowing people to apply and go into U.S. The requirement for this is just basic education and that's pretty much it. It's not based on family, just to increase the diversity in this country.

Safeena

Here's the thing, I think it was in UNICEF or something like that so they had this meeting where America was like-- because at that time America have really less population whereas in Asia, in that whole part of the area it was overpopulated so they decided that since we have less population here why not bring in the people from there. That time they will get for example from Bangladesh we will have a thousand people coming in every year for twenty years. So then they were like okay so how are we going to do this we're going to give an application. So that's how that applications are given and I think the year already passed and right now they're not doing it anymore. I think last year was the last. Actually, it's like as they said that the process goes through application, they will get you background checked if you have any criminal record or not, if you're cleared with that then you're okay, you're good. Also, they will get your educational background, how educated you are because they want to bring someone here who'd be able to get a job and start a new life. Also when you apply for it they want people who have experienced, job experience and also education. It's like both way benefit, it's like any symbiotic relationship.

The people who are coming in here they have this "American Dream," when you come here you're going to be rich, which is not, you know in reality. First of all before I

go there, I'm really fortunate enough to be born in a family that has literally everything. I was never like thinking about oh we're poor we have to get money or whatever. So when my Dad applied here he had this idea like oh when we come then we're going to be living better but at the same time when we were in Bangladesh we are living better because he was an officer in a good company and we had our own house and everything. It wasn't anything like when we go there we're going to be like super rich, it wasn't something like that but then it was like it came from my Dad's side. My Mom she wasn't really prepared enough to come to this country and me I was sort of like I never had this imagination that I would actually be living here for my entire life. I wanted to come here just to visit the country because I have this thing like going on a world tour, she knows about it hopefully I would have this chance. I'm like one of these people who like to visit places. I had this excitement that I'm going to come here. This was happening when we applied for it and we're going through the process. I remember the very last day when I last went to school, my friends we stayed after school and when I was about to say goodbye they literally hugged me and started crying. That moment was like really —one of those moments that I would not forget. After that day I had this vacation and all my friends they invited to their house like I used to have invitation every single day right before coming.

I remember the day when my Dad came in from the passport office saying that we got the visa and we are about to leave the country in three months. As soon as he got inside, came home when he said it I don't know what happened to me, I started crying. One of my Uncles, unfortunately he's dead now, he was in Qatar and he called that night and I could not talk to him because that sadness that I'm leaving Bangladesh, I could not talk. It was funny because he lives in Qatar and I don't see him very often but when I was thinking about when my Uncle comes to visit Bangladesh I'm not going to be here. That sadness and I think the last time I saw him it was the day when he went to Bangladesh to say goodbye and after that I didn't see him. At that time I was literally crying and I could not talk to him and my Mom takes the phone away from me and then she was talking to

my Uncle saying that she can't talk anymore, she's crying and my Uncle was like yes, I knew that. That was the moment and I was excited but then I think I was sad more than excited. (I came over when) I was in seventh grade so --- Yes, we came here 2007. Twelve? Yes, so it's twelve (years old).

Maisara

My experience is very different from hers (Safeena). I am Bangladeshi but I was born in Qatar, which is a Middle Eastern country, that's like Dubai if you've ever known the glamour of Dubai, it's very similar, it's very posh and everything is like awesome. In terms of technology they are pretty much forward, it's kind of like how people look at Tokyo sometimes, Tokyo is like mad advanced. I'm not saying that Dubai is as advanced but close enough. Dubai has that tower, Burj Khalifa. They also have an underwater hotel. Yes, all that stuff and Qatar is very similar to that, I grew up in that area, it was pretty like high five I guess you would say. In terms of language I was born into a Bengali family, I started learning Bangla when I was young, talked to my parents in Bengali but the thing is my parents admitted me into an English speaking school with an Indian accent because the school was Indian. We spoke and learned everything in English. Here's one awesome thing about India, India is a huge country. India itself has 28 states, it has more than 28 languages. In an Indian school, for them to speak English is pretty normal because in a Bangladeshi school everybody talks Bangla, Bengali, right? So people can converse with each other. In an Indian school their languages are all different. When the medium of the school is English you have to speak English. I had friends who spoke Bengali but your teachers would always speak in English, you're writing and reading in English, you're watching English videos. I ended up learning English from kindergarten so at home I did speak Bengali but the thing is it was kindergarten, everybody is learning English at the same time, at the same stage so I didn't

feel left behind or anything and I was really young, that's when you learn a new language when you're young. I watched cartoons, which were in English, and that will come in the accent part.

Safa⁹

Okay. I was about eight when I came. I think I went to kindergarten in Bangladesh, I could be wrong, maybe kindergarten and Pre-K together and that was just to talk about the experience, you walk with the slate and a chalk and you walk by yourself to school, you're not accompanied. My Mom used to say I used to ask for candies (because the school was so far) so then once I used to get the money then I would go on my own. I think I would get lost but still get there. Here, we don't test these things to let our children go to school, here even if it's two blocks away we walk with them. I do remember a bit of that, I don't remember the education to be honest, I do remember just what I was carrying, what I used to wear, what the assembly line and when you do the National Anthem under the hot sun in the yard. It's like all these things, the things you do not, the education you get which I see it here too, I used to observe. I grew up in an island in Bangladesh. I'm not from a city. It's quite small, some parts of it is actually drowning because of the shift in the land. They say some parts are actually rising back up, I don't know. You can Google it, Sandwip. The other day I saw, "*The Life of Pi*" it didn't do a great job in bringing me back but it gave me a context to say I think I saw this when I was home, I used to see lots of lizards back home. There were fat snakes and I was creeped out at that time because I was young and I used to see them in the pond. I used to know how to swim, we had our own swimming pool so anytime I read something about children under the water, it brings me back to the moment when I swam by myself. The

⁹Safa was from Bangladesh and came to the U.S. when she was eight years old.

greenery, the land, the women when they are doing labor as what labor we call here is so different from the labor that women do there. The wives of Okonkwo,¹⁰ the tasks that they had to do, the children, the strict traditional values is sort of like where I was from but then I adapted sort of this is where my home is right now and I've never been back.

All of the seven participants cited the reason for coming to the U.S. was to seek a more politically and economically stable country, that would enable them and their families to have “*job security and educational opportunities*” (Farah), and thus, in their perception “*the U.S would give us a better life and future*” (Leyla). The journey to the U.S. was not necessarily a smooth one as the whole process could take up years, and clearly, it may involve initial separation of families, and some feelings of sadness, elation, and disillusionment. All of the participants were in college doing their undergraduate degree at City College of New York (CCNY), with the exception of Safa and Hannah, who were pursuing their postgraduate at CCNY and Teachers College respectively. They were between 18–27 years old. All of them except for Leyla, wore various styles of the *hijab*. Sabah was the only person wearing the *niqab*, which covered her face except her eyes.

¹⁰The protagonist in *Things Fall Apart*

Chapter VI

INTERPRETATION OF THE IMMIGRANTS'

ENGLISH EDUCATION EXPERIENCES

“THE NOTE TAKER [whipping out his book] Heavens! what a sound! [He writes; then holds out the book and reads, reproducing her vowels exactly] Ah—ah—ah—ow—ow—ow—oo!

THE FLOWER GIRL [tickled by the performance, and laughing in spite of herself] Garn!

THE NOTE TAKER. You see this creature with her kerbstone English: the English that will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days. Well, sir, in three months I could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party. I could even get her a place as lady's maid or shop assistant, which requires better English. That's the sort of thing I do for commercial millionaires. And on the profits of it I do genuine scientific work in phonetics, and a little as a poet on Miltonic lines.”

-- Excerpt From: George Bernard Shaw. “Pygmalion.” iBooks.

In *Pygmalion*, Professor Higgins boasted that he had the expertise to turn Eliza from a flower girl to a duchess by teaching her to speak a more standard form of English, and in turn change her position in life to a better one. Implicit in his statement is the belief that one form of the English language possesses more power, status and opportunity than other forms, and is key to gaining success in one's life. Similarly, for the Muslim immigrants in this research, the ESL class was provided to support their English learning so as to improve their access to other subjects and ultimately with the aim of succeeding academically.

In our first session together, I asked the participants about their versions of their initial ESL education¹. These ESL classes were based on a pull out system, where they were taken out of the mainstream classes a few hours each week and the teachers provided supplementary support to their mainstream education. According to Hannah,

The pull out system is essentially (where) a few selected students were taken out of the classroom and given extra resource room as a period to learn English, so essentially a lot of first generation immigrants around the same age like sixth or seventh graders and ... we would sit together and there would be one instructor so it wasn't like there were 20-30 students in the class, the class was very individual

How long you spent in ESL classes would depend on your progress. According to Sabah, “It depends (how long you’ll be in ESL class) because they give an annual exam and if your score is (a) passing grade of that exam, which is pretty easy, ... they will stop giving ESL classes.”

They also spoke of how small the size of the classes were; how much teachers’ attention they had received; how calming and kind the teachers were; and how having immigrant students who were in the ‘*same boat*’ helped them to feel more at ease in their learning experiences. I got the sense that learning English generally was not as foreign to them as it was to me, perhaps because having established their home here in the U.S. and having been immersed in an English speaking community, the necessity and provision to speak English dominated their experiences. The closest and most similar experience I can recall was when I studied in the U.K. for six years. However, a few of the participants remembered some initial feelings of difference and alienation. I could imagine how frightening and daunting it must have been, having first arrived in a new place and meeting new people. Safeena described her feeling of alienation when she couldn’t understand what her teacher was saying in class and recalled her wearing a “*weird*

¹Azlina: I want to find out more about what you experienced personally, your journey, of your English Education. When I say English Education I am referring to the ESL classes if you had any and the teaching of literature. What do you remember about the way they taught ESL at that time?

cultural dress” and how she spoke with a “heavy brown accent”. She remembered how she “was sitting (at) a table where I had three other students other than me, I remember I did not have any conversation going on with them, not even hi. They were just like talking to each other”. As the participants felt some feelings of vulnerability, difference and alienation, they did find some comfort and safety being in the ESL classes. The ‘safety’ of the ESL class was so important to Sabah that she deliberately failed her ESL exam so she could remain in the class. She said, “I was really nervous to go into a different school so I was like maybe ESL class will help, so I deliberately failed the exam”. Like Sabah, Safeena too sought the safety of ESL class because she felt she did not quite belong in the mainstream class.

The role ESL teachers play could and should not be underestimated since they had helped co-construct the ESL classroom. Sabah talked about the role of her teachers, whom she had described as being “calm and kind”, in helping her feel at ease in the classroom. Leyla said,

When I was going to school in New Jersey, my teacher, she was a white, blonde woman and she knew Bengali so that was really shocking for me but it was amazing too. She had actually lived in Bangladesh for a while and she knew how to speak Bengali but she was Caucasian.... But yes, she helped me. She tried to speak in English and translate that in Bengali so I would understand what she was saying. [Safa] had a very old (sic) teacher but she was very understanding and I guess she knew her duty that she had to be patient with us.

Apart from getting the emotional and academic support from the teachers, a few of the participants also expressed how their family members and immigrant classmates helped them to acquire the English language. In Safeena’s case, her sister “was my partner who I used to speak English all the time” and in Sabah’s class, while there were no other students with Pakistani background, whom she felt she could connect to, the presence of minority students from various backgrounds was somewhat helpful she felt. Listening to Sabah discuss her ESL experience, it seems that support, attention, feelings

of safety and comfort were pertinent during her learning and growing experience as an ESL speaker. For Leyla when she was,

In (the) third grade ... I initially started out like three friends who were Bengali and was translating for me [and] just going to school and talking to everyone and just listening to the different accents in which other people were talking whenever they were speaking English, that's what helped me.

I also asked the participants when they felt they had 'transitioned' into English being a dominant language. For Leyla it was when she "started speaking to (her father) in English that is when I was getting comfortable with the language, sort of like that became dominant for me" and for Maisara it was because she "wrote in English that was the first language I have learned to read and write and I was thinking in English, watching English cartoons and pretty much English all that way and that's how for me it became the dominant language." Safa became comfortable speaking "the language, I think I was not ready until sixth grade, until Junior High to fluently speak." Even though English is used more widely in their daily lives, only Safeena felt "Bengali is still my first language and English is still my second."

The participants discussed a class curriculum that they both liked and disliked that focused on grammar, extensive and intensive reading, reading aloud, keeping a reading portfolio and spelling tests (which Hannah never fully mastered). Farah felt that her learning grammar in Kuwait had given her an edge over her other ESL classmates and reading a lot of books helped her and her classmates as long as the students were committed to it. However, some students lagged behind in terms of reading proficiency. She had set herself a high standard of achievement and felt it had helped her to achieve considerably in academia. This at times had set her apart from her other classmates. She particularly enjoyed her time in Pennsylvania especially when it suited her affinity for more challenging and expansive curriculum. The school in Pennsylvania had more resources and infrastructure to provide for a conducive environment for learning.

What is missing in their narrative, in their retelling, in their remembering (at least from my perspective)? Of course from a poststructuralist perspective, much is missing as recalling past experiences is always limited and partial and tend to highlight events the mind had deemed 'worthy or significant' enough to retain in one's long term memory. However, I wondered why I didn't hear about a more culturally relevant curriculum that valued and incorporated the students' cultural knowledge and background? Could I safely assume it was missing from the curriculum or was it simply not significant enough to remember? What I had found to be overwhelming instead was the participants' feeling of alienation during their initial early education; a recognition that aspects of themselves that were different and the need to change some of them so as to gradually assimilate into the local community (although later on in their lives some of them may choose to reinforce aspects of their 'difference'); and a strong desire for comfort and safety either from the ESL classes, their teachers and fellow ESL classmates. The ESL classes for these participants were aimed at improving their English and focused on grammatical accuracy and developing the four skills i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking. In other words, immigrant ESL education for these participants had focused mainly on reducing the literacy gap between dominant and minority students (Delpit, 2001; Hirsh, 1988; Ogbu, 1978) and the curriculum that they had experienced were based on a technical rational conception, not that dissimilar from Malaysia's approach to teaching ESL. Such curriculum views literacy as an autonomous and neutral practice which fails to take account the power relations in which literacy practices are imbedded (Street, 1993).

The role of their mother tongue was rather limited, although if they were fortunate enough to have teachers or fellow classmates who were conversant in their language, it had served as an aid to assist them in acquiring English. Eventually, for these participants, their mother tongue would be pushed back to the periphery, into more intimate context such as when speaking to their family members and relatives at home or to members of their own minority community. Their schools thus served as places to

acculturate them into the mainstream discourse in order to improve their social, economic and political standing but not so much as places to affirm their culture and language.

Thus, it becomes part of “a project of homogeneity, normalization, and the production of the socially functional citizen” (Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001, p. 2).

In our discussion on learning literature,² the participants remembered how their teachers had co-constructed the English classroom based on the books they had or had not chosen, how they had encouraged them to read in and beyond the classroom, as well as the activities they had designed and implemented in the classes.³ They recalled what they loved or did not love, what they had learnt or did not learn, and books they had found difficult to access and those that were more relatable in their literature classes.

Sabah had mixed experiences with the teaching and learning of literature. On many occasions she had found it uninteresting either due to; the books chosen had not appealed to her or the teacher did not approach its teaching well in her opinion. She was more appreciative of teachers who were able to discern a book’s appeal to her students and designed activities that would engage the students to the texts in more personal ways through discussions, which were beyond general comprehensions and personal writings. She was particularly appreciative of the more experienced Ms. Nielsen, who was more in tune she felt to the students’ interest and would change the books according to what the students had found appealing. She was more creative in her teaching approaches and the kinds of activities she would get her students to do, activities like role-play, class discussions and writing personal responses. Ms. Nielson developed Sabah’s love of

²Azlina: Also I want to find out about studying English literature. What was that like? How did the classes go? What were some of the books you read? Were they representative of the various cultural background? How did the teachers treat those books so that they are representative of different kinds of perspectives?

³Azlina: Do you remember how your teacher helped you to access the works, like some of the activities she may have given you that will help to aid your understanding. Perhaps you can give like context, give like a brief overview of the context.

reading but she would often feel discouraged to read when it had felt more like work and less personal rather than for enjoyment and relatability. She went on to discuss books she had loved like *Push*, *Three Cups of Tea* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. She particularly loved the book *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* because she could relate to the struggle felt by the protagonist as he negotiated between living the American dream, feeling rejected due to racial profiling after the events of 9/11, and eventually becoming disillusioned and literally and metaphorically abandoning the American identity, and thus returning home to Pakistan. I found it interesting that the more racism Sabah encountered the more she withdrew into her identity as a Muslim Pakistani and eventually rather symbolically choosing to wear the *niqab*. She said, “The more people were racist towards me the more I identified with myself, the stronger I became in my beliefs, saying no you can't treat me like that. I became more of a Muslim”. She told me in a personal communication that she planned to return to Pakistan to work after she furthered her study in International Law.

Maisara felt Western literature was more foreign to her and she needed help to understand texts, which were more linguistically or culturally different. She discussed about how her understanding was often more literal and she had to be helped to understand it more metaphorically. Her teachers gave a lot of background information and often would explain a lot how to read the text. Rereading this I can't help but think of Rosenblatt's transactional theory, and how the teacher's explanation had deprived her of the opportunity to reread the text in more depth and build her own understanding of the text. I also think it would be a good opportunity for Maisara when encountering foreign texts to reexamine her common assumptions and challenge conventions. Literature could be utilized to build understanding of cultural assumptions and values different from one's own.

Safa confessed that she was not into reading much. We discussed how reading critically entailed a sophisticated understanding of age-appropriate topic. For example,

we interrogated if the concept of adultery was appropriate for her age when she had read it because from my own personal experience I found that rereading a text at different stages of my life helped me to understand the nuances and layers of meanings, which I had missed in my earlier reading. It is not only that the rereading act would help a reader to build sophisticated understanding but life experiences also contributed to it. Other activities that were memorable to Safa was memorizing and performing phrases from *Taming of the Shrew* and building Okonkwo's home based on the description in the book *Things Fall Apart* with the aim to concretize the imagery expressed by the author. The book was chosen because there were many African American students in the class. She felt engaged with the book rather than simply turning the pages to read and felt a sense of accomplishment in reading, understanding and writing about the books she had read, but at the same time she felt there was more that could be done but felt fearful if she was capable of accomplishing them.

Leyla didn't really enjoy reading and felt it was more of a workload. Literature to her was seen as an access to culture. *The Kite Runner* was relatable to her because it was a story about a Muslim family who had servants, embroiled in a time of war because personally her grandfather had died during the Independence war of Bangladesh, and the kite is a normal fixture in her life in Bangladesh.

Hannah had developed a healthy reading appetite and enjoyed reading them for pleasure beyond the curriculum and class. The books chosen were dependent on the teachers and how she or he co-constructed the class through various activities chosen, activities included mock trial, acting, memorizing poems and performing them. The teacher let the students take ownership of their learning. She felt that the teacher had more flexibility when not adhering to the common core. She was introduced to many African literatures and learnt about racism from *Invisible Man*. She also recalled with much glee how she would often refer to 'Monkey Notes' to understand the text.

"She went even simpler and took the comic book.....that was just a joke. It was simple sentences and visual so that was how we read *Macbeth*."

Sabah

I remember in junior high school the English classes.....The books were basically the same thing. The most variety they would have would be like, was it "*Tengo*" or something, I remember reading that book in eighth grade it was about apathy in South AmericaIt was like no one in the class seems very interested in the book and then the teacher was there only to try to help us understand it..... Ninth grade I had Ms. Nielson and she was lovely..... she was born in Guyana she lived in England and then she moved to New York. She had a lot of experience and she was that kind of person who would realize that if you are not interested in the book she might change it for you or give you like interesting books but she was so much into the class and she would realize what the students were enjoying and what they weren't enjoying. I remember her books were excellent, like *12 Angry Men* was a play, we read that and we will come into class and she will set it up like a jury and everyone would do their roles. I had that book for my regent so I remember that book much better than any of the other books that I read and also because ninth grade my teacher was more flexible by the time we got to eleventh grade the teacher had to be more comprehension, answer multiple choice questions (and you get these two essays. She was much more structured.

I remember reading in her class *Romeo and Juliet*. We watched the movie, we had a little same club version of Shakespeare....and she made it very interesting. I remember she made us write twelve portfolios, she would usually give it every Friday, she would give us like questions and then we would have to write an essay from that. At the end of the year we will have to type all those twenty portfolios and give her that. Sometimes they were personal responses.....she was more of a person who would like to have discussions in class, there was no such thing as comprehension questions in her class. It was more of about in relating to the book and learning from the book, the writings would

be a lot more personal. I remember one question was about friendship, what should friendship be.....I have my best years with her and that's when I fell in love with reading, after that I enjoyed reading in her class.

I remember it's in tenth grade for Shakespeare we read *Macbeth* and the teacher made it extremely boring. We used these three same things, we would watch the movie, we would then read the original text and then we will have a similar version but I felt like she wasn't able to teach us, she wasn't really good at teaching us that part. She went even simpler and took the comic book with Shakespeare *Macbeth* that was just a joke. It was simple sentences and visual so that was how we read *Macbeth*.

I remember reading *Things Fall Apart* but the thing is reading novels were mechanisms to teach you grammar but teachers do not encourage you to read that's the problem.....I have only one English teacher in high school and she stayed with me till I graduated. She was my mentor and we have stayed in touch after high school but other than her there was no other teacher who would give us some book and we would read it. It's mostly skimming and answer the questions from the homework.....I remember reading *Things Fall Apart* and the teacher gave us so much work on different cultures, the superstitions in the book, character, plot. She could not make it interesting. It was a workload. She could not encourage you to read for the fun of it. She tried to teach us *Things Fall Apart*, now I look back and I think the book was interesting but at that time we were not..... but the way she was teaching us, she was less about discussion and more about comprehension questions. It was in eleventh grade that we had to (do) the exam for the Regents, in which we just flanked.

I remember reading *Three Cups of Tea*. It's fiction. I think I'm confusing the name *Three Cups of Tea* with some other book. It wasn't Chinese, actually it's American and I think it's a mixture of fiction and non-fiction and the author is writing about a mother

coming to America and then form friends' club,⁴ the name just slipped my mind. They are four families and they are basically all four Chinese and then her experience and then her mother's friends experience and then their children's experience and because of that they are now all friends. I remember I had such a great time reading that book and we watched the movie as well. It was much more interesting. I knew everything about it but the name of the book is not coming.

I remember reading *Push* also in the class. What's the name of the author? Sapphire, right? It was interesting.....The reading is really easy, really basic reading but what she's trying to portray is really a lot. The book isn't thick and the font is big, when you're reading it you think it's like a really easy read then when you're thinking about it, it's really heavy, it's complicated basically. Because she gives a lot more importance to the emotions than the writing. She simply states everything.

I remember reading *Pearl, Of Mice and Men* ---We read both of those books in our class but it wasn't that interesting.....It's also books that you relate to more so like I read *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. He was doing things that were against Islam and suddenly he has a beard, he prays a lot, he went to Pakistan. I really related to it because I lived in post 9/11 and I went to school I faced racism and the feelings you got. You looked at your own country and here in the US you are supposed to be against the war and you are for the war on terror, and you look at your country its suffering because of this, in Pakistan because of what they went through because of this war on terror so your feelings are like split between anti America for America anti-Taliban for Taliban in that sense, you can feel what this person was going through. He was a fictional character but there were so many places in the book I felt like him. I think the more I identified, or the more people were racist towards me the more I identified with myself, the stronger I became in

⁴She was most probably referring to Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck's Club*.

my beliefs, saying no you can't treat me like that. I became more of a Muslim by making me identify as a Muslim.

"I remember when we first read these things we don't get anything, we really don't. Then our teacher ... she'll start explaining."

Maisara

I could say half and half. We did study Western literature and we studied half of the Indian literature because my school was Indian curriculum. The Western literature, yes, I do remember being a little more spaced out like it's very different also because I hadn't experienced that, to me it was definitely a foreign world, this is how it works. The stories were telling me how the world is set up in those places and we read Shakespeare, we didn't do any full book we just had extracts from different books. I think one was *As You Like It* there is an extract of seven stages, where it talks about a boy growing up and then he falls in love and becomes a soldier eventually an old man, seven stages of human being. We needed more help in those stories obviously also the language, Shakespeare's language is obviously different from the west. Even those that were of modern times like I do not remember the author or the story name but it had something to do with the Russian culture and he likes this girl and he got married, the language was relatable to us but because it was a foreign story again we do need help understanding those things in between, reading between the lines, we need help. If it's a story that is related to ourselves, our regional stories we didn't need so much help understanding between the lines because it's more obvious. Poetry was mostly Shakespearean. I like things that are deep and poetry is something like that but yes, we did need help with those because obviously it's foreign, it's like in a foreign place. The teacher gave us background information. When we went to this soldier's home she lets us know.

Another thing is when we're reading our own stories is we understand the background. You don't have to explain because we understand the situation that's how it works in these places of the world or that's how it works in this kind of families. If it's talking about a Hindu family, I'm familiar with Hindu people, I don't need background information, I already have that. Whereas if it's talking about an American soldier in Afghanistan, you know I have no idea what's going on so my teacher would have to explain that this is what is happening and the soldier is going to depart from the whatever girl, I don't know why I'm talking about all the love stories right now. It was a poem, "Curtain," by Helen Spalding it was a very interesting poem. When you're reading poem it's the like the suffering of the soldier then she starts talking about who the person is, he was a soldier himself who lost his limb in World War II and that starts making more sense. We read about Sylvia Plath's *Mirror*. When we read that she was talking about a mirror but it was so weird, she's personalizing the mirror. Then my teacher explains how she was suicidal at that time, it was kind of like a suicide note. (She had) two or three marriages I think. I forgot but yes she had a very disturbing life in general.

We needed more help on how we go about studying it. I remember when we first read these things we don't get anything. We would understand the straightforward meaning, literally, then it's like we're just reading something it doesn't make any sense. Then our teacher would go on the background and she'll start explaining. Also, a lot of times it depends on the time frame because I'm pretty sure western students who are reading Shakespeare are not going to be like this is not how our society works, you have to understand that time frame, how society at that time frame works. Our teacher would go about the time frame and then explain, a personal life of the author really matters obviously it's reflective in their writing. She will go stage by stage but yes I would say that we had a lot of help especially with the poetry she would explain every line and the metaphors in it but then we would understand at the end it would make really good sense and we would be able to answer the questions.

"At that age I don't think I was really a critical reader. In some cases--- it requires a kind of sophisticated---understanding also."

Safa

Until this day I will say I'm not a reader. Before, I would catch on to a book and actually make the time for it, but now I just read it cause we were told to read it for class. There were certain books, I don't have names but I was introduced to the *Harry Potter* books but I didn't really completely read them.....Some of the books we read *Scarlet Letter* is one and we actually saw the movie as well. My impression, I never used to criticize books, sort of like have a big reaction and you've write about. I felt as if there was no need, all of the other students could do that and I could just listen. I used to listen more, you know I believe heavily that this is wrong or this is right. I forget what she did, I think it was adultery and she had the letter A on her --- it was like stamped---on her dress and this is very powerful for a reader but for me at that age I don't think I was really a critical reader. In some cases---it requires a kind of sophisticated---understanding also. Like sort of you know what adultery is. Whether at that stage I knew what it was, I wasn't sure. I think like I can read it, you can look at the story but not get---We talked about it using the book and then comparing what the book had and what the story didn't and then looking at different elements.

Then we read some of Shakespeare's poems, what is it? *Taming of the Shrew*, now you're maybe very good with books but I don't remember what *Taming of the Shrew* was about. I remember we had to read some verses out and with the accent, if we wanted it to be so good. We practiced a few of these verses and we sort of have to memorize it. It was interesting and different from reading other books and you just take out one page and your task is to read it. There was another book, I forgot the name, that book made very much sense to me, do you know a story Okonkwo? He's a character in a--- *Things Fall Apart* was a good one that spoke to me maybe because of the story line. So we actually did a class project as well, building his home with the fact that he had more than one

wife. Even when we were building this home for him like we used real stuff, like leaves, clay, mud, it felt like I was going back home in a sense. I had to build this sort of home for Okonkwo and figure out how I'm going to do everything part by part, like one side is for his one wife and the other side is his other wife and then--I had to make like a demonstration of his home. It was a group(work), it was like three of us I think so we had to get the supplies and that felt real like one of those things that stick your mind. Just seeing the greens, seeing the design of the home in one way kept me in touch with what I was when I was young, I was from a home full of—they made it like lots of trees around and it's different from my life here. I was still travelling but then I adapted sort of. I think besides myself I think most of my classmates also enjoyed that same book, *Things Fall Apart*.

In that school I grew up with a lot of Haitians and a lot of Africans, African-Americans. Besides the fact that this man is an African I think there was so much that everyone else loved about, you know in terms of their understanding. No one sort of said that....from that book it was sort of given he has two wives and he is man of this and that knowledge. It was very much accepted the ideas from those book, it wasn't sort of like you know what's going on, people weren't saying you know I didn't like this or I didn't like that and I think I was one of them as well at that point. Whether that could be different from my other points where I didn't have this feeling maybe for some of the books or maybe because lack of understanding, because of lack of my fluency to read or you know something that I needed concrete to see and upfront from a book I'm just not just reading, turning pages which I felt like I was doing in sixth grade although it was seen as an accomplishment compared to the other students but for me it was just like going through pages and you are writing reports. At that moment I think I was very into it but then I'd look back at it, you're building up stacks but what else are you grabbing away is what I used to ask myself. In one way I can put it as an accomplishment I read more or I understood more or I practiced to write, yes, that's one. That was the purpose,

to write, sort of like what happened in the story, write a brief thing. I felt like it was a baby step and it was helpful as opposed to jumping into if you ask me write a summary right now, I don't know if without that piece if I would be able to feel comfortable. There are so many things we could do but then we have this fear sometimes whether we know how to do, we're not sure.

"I felt like I was more connected to that book than any other book because there were some words in there that I knew."

Leyla

In high school, we read *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *The Kite Runner*, and Shakespeare. They are very different. We cover a lot of different areas of reading just so like in the future we know each--- because in English class that's all we do, is read books and understand and learn how to write. I think there's a difference (in how you interpret the text) depending on where you come from and what your mindset is. I haven't had any firsthand experience. My opinion, for *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, is the billboard with the big eyes that were like the cult symbol for the eyes watching God. I don't think I've ever had any like---because of my culture, any specific opinion. When I was reading *The Kite Runner* because it was like an Asian country with war and stuff, I felt like I was more connected to that book than any other book because there were some words in there that I knew. They were talking about a Muslim family so I can relate to that. They were talking about situations where with the servants and I've been exposed to that when I was in Bangladesh and all the war. The war really touched me because my grandfather passed away during our Independence War. The whole killing people was really upsetting. The kite fights, the kite flying game that they play we have like that in Bangladesh too. My uncle was a champion, my Mom used to tell me stories I've seen people flying kites. The whole running around with kids all over the neighbourhood, I've done that myself. In that

sense I can connect and then having a servant boy that's your age and hangout with him. I had a girl who was just my age, we used to play games and hangout all the time while her Mom used to do the housework.....I've noticed in the Shakespeare, it's like the families, the older people and going against their will and the end result is that you die. I've always been taught to respect my elders. When I saw that there were going against their parents and then at the end they ended up dying, I was thinking this is what happens when you disobey your parents. This also enforces the fact that I cannot go against my parents and my elders. In that sense I can connect but --- I've always felt that it was so different from what I've been brought up with, my cultural beliefs but yes, it is very different. There's no specific thing that you can say, oh, this is different than this and stuff like that.

Literature or reading is like a way to access ---insight---into the culture.

I don't think literature has had too much of an effect on me because for one I don't like reading and two, when I do read, I don't really connect to it on a personal level. I just read because I have to. I don't think about it when I'm reading. I think about the fact that I need to read this, I need to complete my assignment and that's it. Now that you bring you it up, I'm like you know I think about it the Shakespeare and the whole family thing they connect. The only reading that I actually did think about was *The Kite Runner*, I felt really sad, but that's about it. That's the only thing that stood out to me and I could connect with. When I read *The Great Gatsby*, I was like, what is this? I've never heard of the old and the new money and stuff like that. It was something new because I don't know if it's cultural but it would be something new and it did like shocked me.

"Do you guys remember Monkey Notes? If you didn't do the reading, then you went online and search for it."

Hannah

We read a lot of books (in junior high school). That I appreciated because it ended up helping me to grow a healthy reading appetite. So now I read up on my own a few novels when I get a chance. I'm thankful for having gone through the English language arts classes and the state's a lot of emphasis was on reading. So my creative writing teacher in high school he was big on us reading different things so I get to read *Things Fall Apart*, *Native Boy*, *The People's History* so a lot of African literature. Yeah, in high school come senior year if you're in the honors program in the states you take AP English. It's a really neat opportunity for you to turn college credits towards your English but it's a good way for the English teachers to assign books outside of the curriculum and we ended up taking, we also had AP history so that was his way to push his 'communist' agenda (big laugh).....That was the way I was introduced to reading.....I read a ton of books but it has to do with the teaching. If the teachers have an agenda like okay we want to expose the students to African American literature which you wouldn't otherwise get a chance to read and I remember reading *Othello* and this senior year we ended up acting it out. We had a mock up trial, we had lawyers I still remember my friends being silly and she took the fifth and refused to testify and it was so fun. We also read *Of Mice and Men*, *The Painted Veil*. She was so amazing. Now she's a doctorate student in SUNY Albany. And she also had us remember small poems and act them out in class. They weren't just any poem and I remember after a few students acted them out she was a little concern we didn't put up much effort so a few of us, I did put more effort and she was like great, you guys have it together. I think acting it out made it realistic.

Othello Shakespeare is hard to read because it doesn't make sense in the 21st century. There was a first scene in *Othello*, it's quite vulgar so it's interesting that none of us understood what was happening because Shakespeare can be over our head with the

kind of language he used. You don't know what's going on so she kind of she would help us understand it, she helped us take ownership of the play and having a class trial. It was interesting. It was an AP English class so she wasn't held to any standard common core, it made it easier for her. It wasn't going to be tested so she could have fun with it. And the books she gave us like *Invisible Man*, reading *Invisible Man* you are just dumbfounded, I was sixteen or seventeen and I was like taken apart, because the *Invisible Man* was about, I don't remember the details but I remember the first chapter he was living off the grid in Times Square in the basement because he was completely disconnected from live in NY and he realize that he's not going to get anywhere if in the racist society that he lives in. I don't think a lot of young people in NYC in their high school in their senior year got to read a lot of African American literature and mind you my school was like 99.9% black and Latino. I was THE white girl.⁵ And that's not--- I have copies of *Malcolm X*, *The Biography of Frederick Douglass*, *The Soul of Black Folks*, *The Years of Rice and Salt*, and *Color of Water*.

Do you guys remember Monkey Notes? If you didn't do the reading, then you went online and search for it. You type in the title, the author and the summary came out! (laugh) If you wanted the plot, the plot came out. If you wanted the characters, the characters came out. If you wanted to know what the book was in general so you don't look like a dummy in class, they have summaries, they have topics, plot, they explained everything. This was like ten years ago. The kids figure out the formula the shortcut.

I read *Malcolm X* because it was relevant, I was a Muslim. I read the *Years of Rice and Salt* and I don't think most people know about this book and I still have a copy of it. I'm never going to give it away. It is essentially the story of Christian Crusades which didn't take place in the Eastern hemisphere so only Islam Buddhism and Hinduism

⁵It is interesting how Hannah saw herself as 'white' considering she has an Egyptian background. An Iranian American classmate of mine also saw herself as 'white' and was very disturbed when she came to the U.S. and felt she was not perceived as one.

intertwined with Eastern religions so essentially you read it as there's a lot about Eastern religions. I loved it. *The Alchemist*, omg. I didn't read it until I went to college. I was bored one day I went to a friend's house and her husband happened to have this book. So I asked what is this book about. It's one of the best books I've read ever! You have to read the book especially if you're a Muslim because you can relate to it. There's a lot of Sufism and ideology that are very mystic to our Islamic religion. It's so powerful. I also read *A Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. I found out that my love for books was ignited when I was in high school. My English and History AP teachers Ms. Smith and Mr. Salick, of course I'm not going to forget their names. The librarian in the school kept books that weren't in the curriculum, most of the students couldn't really access them because they didn't want them to disappear. So the students she would let them borrow books. She had *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Painted Veil*, *Native Son*, *Black Boy*. Those were the four I remember borrowing from her and returning. In my later years I read *Crime and Punishment*. It is amazing, like I almost picked it up and reread it again. And later on as an adult as I was working one of my colleagues had lots of books that I liked, I read *Hear my Prayer*, really good book. *Beneath the African Sky*, beautiful book. You end up realizing that what you identify with an earlier age so for me I like books that I was introduced to for the fun of it.

In this section, I will examine the issues of text representation and the approaches to the teaching and learning of literature. The table below is a list of texts the participants had remembered reading and the corresponding activities their respective teachers had co-constructed in their classrooms. I made the list so I could have a bird's eye view of some of the books the participants had remembered reading either in the English classroom or for their own personal pleasure and the activities they had remembered doing in their respective classes.

Table 3. Books Read and Classroom Activities

No	Name	Books read	Activities
1	Sabah	Tengo, 12 Angry Men, Angry Tiger, Romeo and Juliet, MacBeth, Things Fall Apart, Three Cups of Tea, Push, Pearl, Of Mice and Men, The Reluctant Fundamentalist	Role play Write essays Answer comprehension questions Portfolio Personal responses Use of comic Watch movies
2	Maisara	As you like it, Shakespeare's poems, Curtain, Sylvia Plath's poems, Brave, New World, 1984	The teacher gave background information
3	Safa	Harry Potter, Scarlett Letter, Taming of the Shrew, Things Fall Apart, Secret Garden, Hemlata ⁶	Read some verses out and with an accent Build a model of Okonkwo's home using leaves, clay, and mud Write a report Watch a movie
4	Leyla	Their Eyes were watching God, The Kite Runner, Shakespeare, The Great Gatsby	Reading and writing connection
5	Hannah	Things Fall Apart, Native Boy, Othello, The Painted Veil, Of Mice and Men, Malcolm X, Invisible Men, The Biography of Frederick Douglas, The Soul of Black Folks, The Years of Rice and Salt, Color of Water, The Alchemist, A hundred years of solitude, The Grapes of Wrath, Native Son, Black Boy, Hear my prayer, Beneath the African Sky, Crime and Punishment, The People's History	Monkey Notes Acting Perform poetry reading
6	Farah	Lord of the Flies	
7	Safeena	Romeo and Juliet, The Great Gatsby	

When selecting texts to read in the classroom, Sabah was appreciative of her teacher Ms. Nielsen who “had a lot of experience and she was that kind of person who would realize that if you are not interested in the book she might change it for you or give you like interesting books..... I remember her books were excellent, like *12 Angry Men*. Ms. Nielsen was an exception to the many teachers she had, whom she felt were not attune to their students' interests nor were they able to sustain their interests with the

⁶Safa could not quite recall the name of the book.

choice of activities they had chosen to further develop their students' understanding of the text. I had written the following response to a classmate in one of my first classes I had enrolled at TC in the Summer of 2010 A&HE 4050 Literature and teaching.

Articles by Probst as an intellectual and pedagogical heir to Rosenblatt -> "Learning to read and write the texts of our lives." -> Re: "Learning to read and write the texts of our lives."

by [Azlina Abdul Aziz](#) - Friday, 4 June 2010, 11:30 AM

Noah,⁷

Reading your piece, I feel a sense of dilemma within me of not wanting to impose my value judgement i.e. literature is good⁸ for my students and therefore they should learn it while at the same time wanting them to learn it because I know it IS good for them. I think we should question the underlying assumption that students should learn something because I think it is good for them as oppose to them wanting to learn it because they have discovered it IS good for them that somehow it has enriched their lives. We know only too well that being present physically in a classroom does not mean much in terms of learning. Perhaps the best way to convince our students is by not trying to convince them. It sounds paradoxical doesn't it. I do know one thing and that is students always can sense the energy we bring into the classroom. All our assumptions and prejudices are seen or sense by them almost subliminally. To some extent one could say as a teacher we can impede or allow learning from taking place. Much focus has been on how ~~to~~ [teachers can](#) get students to learn but little thought into ~~the teachers' role in~~ [aiding those learning how the students learn](#).⁹ Have you watched the movie horse whisperer?! You can beat the horse into submission but the greatest teacher is the one that allows the horse to come to you in its own time and terms.

As a teacher, one of my many dilemmas I face is in selecting texts and activities for the classroom. There is almost no way of gauging how the students would respond to a text and what they would find appealing and interesting. So when Sabah expressed her lack of interest in most of the books she had read that was chosen by her teachers and the

⁷Real name

⁸Note to self: What constitutes as 'good' could further be elaborated.

⁹I made the following changes to reflect my current change of thoughts.

corresponding activities the teachers had designed for the class, I can empathize with both Sabah and her teachers. It is a conundrum for a teacher to want his or her students to gain something from the reading but as messy as classes are, that wish may not always be achievable. What ‘good’ was I referring to there in my writing? Perhaps a better replacement of the word would be meaningful and perhaps it was best to relinquish my desire as a teacher to expect my students to find meaning in everything they read. It is also important for students like Sabah to be able to say, “I did not find this book enjoyable.” I remember being in Professor Browne’s class on ‘Teaching of Reading’ and reading the book ‘The moviegoer’ and finding the text rather tedious to read. He told us it was okay not to like a book. But not liking a book does not necessarily mean we had not learnt anything because it had still involved utilizing the skills of interpretation and analysis. I think perhaps like Sabah, we crave to read texts that absorb our attention and we gain pleasure in reading them. It often feels the ingredients we seek to replicate such ‘experience’ are often elusive particularly in the English classrooms, where reading becomes more a chore and the corresponding activities as Sabah had put it a “workload.”

If we were to examine the list of books read by the participants in this study, we could see the range and variety of books they had remembered reading from mainly fiction but also non-fiction, American, African American, African, Chinese American, Afghan American, Latin American, British, Indian, Russian and South Asian American literary texts. Maisara made the distinction between ‘Western’ and Indian literature when she was living and studying English in Qatar. She said, “We did study Western literature and we studied half of the Indian literature because my school was Indian curriculum.” In the next chapter, Maisara discussed about studying ‘Western’ literature as the ‘ideal’ literature as opposed to Indian/Commonwealth literature, which was an interesting conception because it would suggest in her mind, a construction of a ‘canon’ consisting of British and American literature. Even when she was discussing about authors who

were originally from the U.K but had lived abroad and written about the places they were living in, Maisara did not consider them as ‘Western’ authors. She said,

There are English authors across the globe who are not Western, who are not born in America or Britain because I’ve read G.W. Wilson she’s an American convert but she lived in Egypt most of her life. She is also writing a hijabi comic book coming up for Marvel, she’s the author of that too, it’s all in English language but the entire story is set in Middle East the problems that they face not the Western culture.

By virtue of G. W. Wilson’s emigration to Egypt (i.e., geographical location) and her conversion to Islam (i.e., religion), she was viewed as a non-Western author. Perhaps (and this is conjecture on my part), in Maisara’s mind a Western author is a person located in the U.K, U.S. and maybe even Australia, who is Anglo Saxon or maybe considered ‘Caucasian’ and professes Christianity as a religion or no religion at all.

Is representation of texts crucial in the English classroom to suit the multicultural background of the students in the U.S.? Do we read literature to appreciate the language, to access our own and another’s culture or to examine a social justice issue? Personally, I feel literature serves all the purposes mentioned above. In Leyla’s opinion, “Literature or reading is like a way to access ---insight---into the culture”. While Leyla personally felt that “literature has (not) had too much of an effect on me because for one I don’t like reading and two, when I do read, I don’t really connect to it on a personal level” she did, however, relate more to *The Kite Runner* than any other texts because she felt she had possessed the background information related to the context in the text, which had made it more accessible to her. She said:

Because it was like an Asian country with war, I felt like I was more connected to that book than any other book because there were some words in there that I knew. They were talking about a Muslim family so I can relate to that. They were talking about situations where with the servants and I’ve been exposed to that when I was in Bangladesh. The war really touched me because my grandfather passed away during our Independence War.....The kite flying game that they play we have like that in Bangladesh too. My uncle was a champion, my Mom used to tell me stories..... In that sense I can connect....

Similarly, Sabah and Hannah had found *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *The Alchemist* more relatable because they could connect them to their respective background knowledge and experiences. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* was appealing to Sabah because being a Pakistani American and living through post 9/11 in NYC, and experiencing racism similar to the protagonist, she could empathize with the conflict and struggle felt by him in the book. She said:

It's also books that you relate to more so like I read *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. He was doing things that were against Islam and suddenly he has a beard, he prays a lot, he went to Pakistan. I really related to it because I lived in post 9/11 and I went to school I faced racism and the feelings you got. You looked at your own country and here in the U.S. you are supposed to be against the war and you are for the war on terror, and you look at your country its suffering because of this, in Pakistan because of what they went through because of this war on terror so your feelings are like split between anti America for America anti-Taliban for Taliban in that sense, you can feel what this person was going through. He was a fictional character but there were so many places in the book I felt like him. I think the more I identified, or the more people were racist towards me the more I identified with myself, the stronger I became in my beliefs, saying no you can't treat me like that. I became more of a Muslim by making me identify as a Muslim.

Hannah, on the other hand was enamored with *The Alchemist* because in her opinion, “It's one of the best books I've read ever! You have to read the book especially if you're a Muslim because you can relate to it. There's a lot of Sufism and ideology that are very mystic to our Islamic religion. It's so powerful.” Leyla, Sabah and Hannah felt they could relate more to texts where they could draw from their existing background knowledge as it had made the text more accessible and relatable to them. I do feel to some extent it is important for minorities to see and read the full expression of a version of their reality in the texts they read particularly in English when it is not their mother tongue. Maisara argues about the importance of reading and relating to aspects of herself in a text in the English language, “So when they (authors).... wrote stories of their culture.....you feel connected, there is something in common with the author.....The

person is talking about things I face every day the author is talking about... something that I go through too but in the English language so that makes English yours rather than theirs. I can vocalize my own situation in English.”¹⁰ It was important for Maisara to read literature that had reflected aspects of her life in a text so she felt a sense of ownership of the language. In turn, perhaps she felt she could use the language to express her ‘world’. However, personally I also value literature for opening up spaces to read and understand other ‘worlds’ or else I would not have discovered some of my favorite books like *Jane Eyre*, *Harry Potter*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, *The Grass is Singing*, and *Romeo and Juliet*.

Scholes (1998) in conceptualizing an English education curriculum argues for a movement away from teaching a canon of texts to employing a canon of methods in order to study the three elements of textuality; “how to situate a text (history), how to compose one (production), and how to read one (consumption)” (p. 147). In teaching a canon of texts, it would limit one’s learning experience to the issue of coverage or representation i.e. English, American, multicultural literature. Scholes argues that “material ‘covered’ in classrooms and not incorporated into the communicative lives of students simply fades away” (p. 149). A more powerful means of learning would not be what text one has read but rather one’s ability to deconstruct a text and identify its strengths and limitations. It is a set of skills one acquires that will be applicable to other texts one reads. Scholes conception of English Education moves away from valuing literary texts as cultural capital as part of the nationalistic movement or identification of ‘cultured’ citizens.

According to Hannah her “creative writing teacher in high school he was big on us reading different things so I get to read *Things Fall Apart*, *Native Boy*, *The People's History* so a lot of African literature.....we also had AP history so that was his way to

¹⁰This excerpt was taken from Chapter VII because there was overlapping themes between this Chapter and the next.

push his 'communist' agenda (big laugh)..... If the teachers have an agenda like okay we want to expose the students to African American literature which you wouldn't otherwise get a chance to read.” Indeed, the choices of books read were dependent on the teachers’ decision as to what Hannah cheekily described as his/her “communist agenda.” While we laughed at Hannah’s choice of words during the interview, what she was implying here was there was an element of subversion by her teacher in making the decision to choose more African literature. I’m not quite sure why she would have described reading African literature¹¹ as such but it would suggest to me that she may have constructed and associated English literature with British or American literature perhaps. In addition, her statement suggested that in her teacher’s choice to include African literature, it became a political act. What that political act is, emanates from the political, cultural and social contexts of the U.S. as each writer writes based on a specific historical and political context. Thus, we may see themes on racism, slavery, the great depression, and post 9/11 to name a few. Perhaps, this is what Hannah referred to as a ‘communist agenda,’ when her teacher chose to include themes he had felt pertinent to his students’ understanding of issues related to race and racism as the majority of the students in her class was “99.9% black and Latino” so they may ‘read the word and the world.’

In her article in the *Minnesota English Journal*, Appleman (2007) advocates the use of multiple critical lenses to get students to read the word and the world at a time when we are “poised precariously between ecological, economic, and political crises” (p. 2). She argues that the role of teachers is not only to teach the literacy skills but also to read the world we live in which is steeped in ideology. She asserts, “Our job is not simply to help students read and write; our job is to help them use the skills of writing and reading to understand the world around them. We want them to become, in the words

¹¹Hannah’s conception of African literature here refers to literature from the African continent as well as African American literature in the U.S.

of bell hooks, 'enlightened witnesses,' critically vigilant about the world we live in" (p. 2). She refers to Bonnycastle's (2006) definition of ideology to elucidate it as "a system of thought or 'world view' which an individual acquires (usually unconsciously) from the world around him" (p.3). Examining an ideology would help the students how we have organized and categorized the world. According to Appleman, it is crucial to get students to be aware of the ideologies surrounding them particularly when they are often unconsciously enacted,

When we teach the concept of ideology to young people, we are helping them to discern the system of values and beliefs that help create expectations for individual behavior and for social norms. Although ideology can be individual, it is generally a social and political construct, one that subtly shapes society and culture. As history has taught us, ideologies are not always benign or harmless and they need to be questioned and sometimes resisted. (p. 3)

In response to teachers' objection that teaching critical lenses is too political she has this to say, "being a teacher is essentially a political act, a political stance—a stance that advocates for the literacy rights of everyone, a stance that acknowledges that when you give someone literacy, you give them power. Second, even our seemingly neutral reading of texts is political" (p. 5). She further suggests that we teach our students multiple lenses so they will have multiple interpretations of a text. F. Scott Fitzgerald (1964) expresses the strength of such complex thinking when he says, "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function. One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise." Thus, for the participants in this study, selecting texts that are reflective of the political issues they could relate to and examine the ideology or worldview of the characters in the text were important by way of "reading the word and the world."

While in some texts, the participants had found them more relatable and accessible because they had background information on various aspects of the texts such as the

culture, setting and experiences described, there were some texts they had trouble understanding. I draw on Sabah, Maisara, Safa and Hannah's comments during the interview as they had discussed various aspects of reading literature books that had left them frustrated. Hannah had found Shakespeare's language inaccessible. She said, "I remember reading *Othello*.....Shakespeare is hard to read because it doesn't make sense in the 21st century.....none of us understood what was happening because Shakespeare can be over our head with the kind of language he used." Hannah was referring to the language Shakespeare had used which was poetic but hardly accessible in our present time. Sabah too may have found Shakespeare difficult to read but she did not appreciate her teacher using simplified version of the text to teach the class as she had felt it was rather condescending, "I remember it's in tenth grade for Shakespeare we read *Macbeth* and the teacher.....went even simpler and took the comic book with Shakespeare *Macbeth* that was just a joke. It was simple sentences and visual so that was how we read *Macbeth*. Safa raised the issue of grasping a concept like 'adultery' in the book *The Scarlet Letter* at an age where she may not have had the experience or much knowledge about it. She also saw how at the time of reading, she very much had a worldview where most things were white and black so she could not appreciate the complexity of the story. She also didn't feel she was a critical enough reader and preferred to listen to other commentaries rather than contributing her own responses in class discussion. She said:

Some of the books we read *Scarlet Letter* is one..... I never used to criticize books, sort of like have a big reaction and you've write about. I felt as if there was no need, all of the other students could do that and I could just listen. I used to listen more, you know I believe heavily that this is wrong or this is right. I forget what she did, I think it was adultery and she had the letter A on her --- it was like stamped---on her dress and this is very powerful for a reader but for me at that age I don't think I was really a critical reader. In some cases---it requires a kind of sophisticated--- understanding also. Like sort of you know what adultery is. Whether at that stage I knew what it was, I wasn't sure.

Similarly, Maisara discussed her challenge in reading Shakespeare, which she had initially found difficult to understand and how she had a more literal understanding of it. Her teacher would then provide some explanation and background information¹² she as a reader did not possess, which she had felt ‘Western’ students would have. She said:

I remember when we first read these things we don’t get anything, we really don’t. We would understand the straightforward meaning, literally, then it’s like we’re just reading something it doesn’t make any sense. Then our teacher would go on the background and she’ll start explaining. Also, a lot of times it depends on the time frame because I’m pretty sure western students who are reading Shakespeare are not going to be like this is not how our society works, you have to understand that time frame, how society at that time frame works. Our teacher would go about the time frame and then explain, a personal life of the author really matters obviously it’s reflective in their writing. She will go stage by stage but yes I would say that we had a lot of help then we would understand at the end it would make really good sense and we would be able to answer the questions.

In an effort to understand more difficult text, Hannah resorted to using ‘Monkey Notes’ which is akin to using Cliff Notes. She said,

Do you guys remember Monkey Notes? If you didn't do the reading, then you went online and search for the title, the author and the summary came out! (laugh) If you wanted the plot, the plot came out. If you wanted the characters, the characters came out. If you wanted to know what the book was in general so you don't look like a dummy in class, they have summaries, they have topics, plot, they explained everything.

The following is another entry, my self-reflective response to what we had discussed in the class “Literature and teaching” on the teaching of difficult texts:

¹² Blau (2003) argues, “the academic practice of providing background information for students in introductory lectures by teachers introduces two other perils for student readers. First, it invites students to feel dependent on their teachers and to believe that their capacity to understand the text they read derives from their teacher’s expertise rather than their own. Second, it often becomes a subtle way of over-determining what sort of interpretation students will produce, prejudicing themin favor of one particular interpretation, when others might be equally plausible...” (p.42).

Pedagogical forum: the commentary workshop -> Self reflection

by [Azlina Abdul Aziz](#) - Monday, 31 May 2010, 09:33 PM

Warning: There may be a lack of coherence in the following rambling as I meander through the peaks and valleys that is my mind so please proceed with caution.¹³

I would like to refer to the exercise in the second class of trying to decipher the meaning of the saying(sorry I can't remember what it is but it involved one third of something). At one point I felt pressured to raise my hand and claimed understanding but I resisted the urge in the end partly for the fear I will be asked to explain its meaning and partly thinking what would be the point of it. I felt a little less intelligent and I'm sure for some who did get it they felt a little more intelligent. However, I decided at that point to give myself permission to be 'dumb' or rather allow myself to be in a state of not knowing. It was liberating to say the least. The meaning was then explained to me graciously by a fellow classmate, which I confess I still don't quite understand. I must sit down one day and try to figure it out. Why must it be written in a way that is complicated or abstruse to me at least. I am convinced there must be a better way of presenting it. I wonder sometimes if some writers write for the pleasure of sounding smart. Perhaps for the benefit of all we should work on not just trying to decipher its meaning but also rework the forms so no one comes away feeling more dumb or intelligent than the other. I can imagine how certain clerics or religious figures would easily claim to be in possession of the truth and having learned the truth preach it to people who have never been allowed or perhaps from fear of being blasphemous attempt to figure it out for themselves. If the message is for all then how could it be in possession of a few. If reading is to be treated like writing, then surely editing or rephrasing should be part of it. I wondered if to some extent my language and culture or rather worldview was partly the reason for my inability to understand. At one point I heard myself say I am NOT a literature person, and I was even more surprised when I said this is NOT my language and this is NOT my culture even after learning the language since I was 6 years old. I'm certain these very thoughts are also in my students' mind. There are just many ways of saying the same thing. For example, the phrase confusion is an advanced state of understanding could also be said in the following way "questioning is half of knowing" (Rumi - Fi Hi Ma Fi Hi). There are many proverbs phrased differently by different cultures and yet point to the same thing. Like a journey of a thousand mile begins with a single step. In Malay there is an almost similar proverb "*Sikit-sikit lama lama jadi bukit*" which can be translated to mean if you keep adding a little bit at a time then it'll become a

¹³Sometimes I write to know what I think and sometimes later when rereading what I've written, I'd cringe that I even thought it.

mountain, well in this case '*bukit*' means hill. If we insist on studying the form in its original state i.e. Shakespeare, then I can imagine for second language speakers of English like myself and my students, Shakespeare's wonderful stories or message would be lost. Learning another language like English is complicated enough much less learn an archaic language like Shakespeare's. Shakespeare wrote the play in the language he knew confined to a particular time and space. In other words, he wrote it in the only language he knew. If we insist on studying its original form, then surely many of the sacred texts would not be read by people of other languages. Hence the use of translation or the retelling of ancient stories like "Paradise Lost" by Milton or "Fi Hi Ma Fi Hi" by Rumi etc. It is Milton or Rumi's attempts to understand the ancient stories by rewriting them in order to make them accessible to each people. I wonder if Milton ever discovered Eden in the end? Perhaps great readers do this. I can imagine my students saying why couldn't he have said it this way or that way and they would be justified in their opinion. It doesn't mean that you are 'disrespecting' the writer for his choice of words. You do appreciate the writing but surely not to the extent of glorifying the form at the expense of the meaning. As readers maybe we should be allowed to say this doesn't work for me instead of plugging along quietly hoping you'll see the light of day. Isn't there a sense of empowerment when a reader rewrites it into his or her life that best suits the context he or she is in. This would certainly explain the proverbs or the rewriting of old themes like *East of Eden* (Cain and Abel), *West Side Story* (Romeo and Juliet) etc. Is the purpose of a literature class to come to the same understanding of the text or should we as teachers allow the students to reach a level of understanding appropriate to them? Maybe we are not meant to figure everything all at once and be content with that. As a teacher I would be concerned that my 'smart' students don't go away from the lesson only feeling smug patting each other on the back and those who didn't get it go away feeling 'dumb.' Surely the best lesson aims for the good of all instead of a selected few. There will be no tight conclusion presented at this point. I recognize the limitation of my point of view at this juncture so I would like to end it like this.

Re: Self reflection

by Sheridan Blau - Monday, 31 May 2010, 11:04 PM

I think you raise several difficult and important questions here, Azlina, and I hope we can take them up in class exercises and perhaps in reading assignments. Right now, I'd like us focus on a couple of the most compelling questions I see in your reflection. Tell me if I am wrong in reducing much of what you say to the following questions:

1. Why do writers who presumably want to communicate with an audience of readers make their texts more difficult to understand than is necessary? Why do they seem to want to hide their meaning? This question also challenges my statement in class that the only texts worth reading are those we can't understand? Why would I think and say such a thing?

2. Why should we read difficult ancient texts that are made more difficult by their antiquated language? If we are going to read them, why not do so in a modern translation. This would seem especially important in teaching students who are not native speakers of English? After all, those classic texts were not written in an ancient language. Their language was modern for the readers of the time when they were composed. So why shouldn't we read them in a language that is modern for us?

I hope we can take up these questions in our next class or soon thereafter, and if I am wrong in the way I have framed your questions, please let me know. And now, I apologize for not having time to offer more at this moment than the questions themselves. But that is a start.

I had raised this question on readability of text long before I had met the participants. In the class "Literature and teaching," out of concern for the teaching of Shakespeare to students whose second language is English back home in Malaysia and who may not have the English proficiency to understand 'modern' texts much less archaic language in Shakespeare, I had challenged the viability and necessity of teaching difficult text. I also queried to what extent teachers had a role in providing explanation in the classroom for our students to understand.

In the "Literature workshop in action," Blau (2003) proposes the teaching of literature that would be able "to foster development of a disciplined, autonomous literacy in students while building a culture of learning in the classroom that, unlike the prevailing culture of literary dependence and subservience, promotes the literary and intellectual enfranchisement of student readers" (p. 34). I can visualize Professor Blau frowning at Hannah's suggestion of using 'Monkey Notes' and Maisara's experience of being given the background information of the text by her teacher. And what would being a "critical reader" as Safa had suggested look like? Blau draws on Scholes (1985) theoretical framework on literary competence which includes "1) reading, addressing the

question, What does it say? 2) interpretation, addressing the question, What does it mean? and 3) Criticism, addressing the question, What is its value? or So what?" (pp. 21-24 in Blau, 2003, p. 51). Blau argues that a competent reader continues to have questions about the text s/he reads, contrary to the commonplace notion that competent readers often resolve most of their questions. Providing background information on text according to him could lead to a dependence on the teacher and direct the interpretation of text. He suggests that teachers provide students the opportunity to talk about and discuss their "emerging understanding as it falters and progresses" (p. 41). He also suggests the use of rereading as a strategy to further understanding. Although rereading could generate further questions about the text, it nevertheless should not be seen as diminishing understanding. The issues raised by the participants in this study were: 1) representation of texts in the classroom 2) the value of literary text 3) accessibility of texts and 4) strategies for reading difficult texts.

Chapter VII

ACCESSING CULTURAL DISCOURSES

HIGGINS. There! That's all you get out of Eliza. Ah—ah—ow—oo! No use explaining. As a military man you ought to know that. Give her her orders: that's what she wants. Eliza: you are to live here for the next six months, learning how to speak beautifully, like a lady in a florist's shop. If you're good and do whatever you're told, you shall sleep in a proper bedroom, and have lots to eat, and money to buy chocolates and take rides in taxis. If you're naughty and idle you will sleep in the back kitchen among the black beetles, and be walloped by Mrs. Pearce with a broomstick. At the end of six months you shall go to Buckingham Palace in a carriage, beautifully dressed. If the King finds out you're not a lady, you will be taken by the police to the Tower of London, where your head will be cut off as a warning to other presumptuous flower girls. If you are not found out, you shall have a present of seven-and-sixpence to start life with as a lady in a shop. "If you refuse this offer you will be a most ungrateful and wicked girl; and the angels will weep for you. [To Pickering] Now are you satisfied, Pickering? [To Mrs. Pearce] Can I put it more plainly and fairly, Mrs. Pearce? (Excerpt from: George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*, iBooks)

Professor Higgins warned Eliza of possible repercussions if she were unable to learn to speak like "a lady in a florist's shop" -- that is, she would get herself in a great deal of trouble and her failure to become "a lady" would show how ungrateful she was at his effort to improve her station in life. Of course, the excerpt above borders on incredulity, exaggeration and, at the least, stereotypic assumptions and reinscriptions of class separations and hierarchies. Nevertheless, accessing cultural discourses particularly when those discourses provided access to power and opportunity, as was the case with the English language, the scenario above may have some version of the 'truth' here.

In this study, I follow Foucault's (1971) definition of discourse as "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the

knowledge about - a particular topic at a particular historical moment” (Hall, 1992, p. 291, in Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001, p. 72). Foucault’s conception of discourse is beyond the study of language per se. It examines how language is used; what is said or not said about a particular topic; and what people find meaningful or not meaningful when talking about that topic, which demonstrated how knowledge on the topic is constructed. Hall (1992) states that discourse

governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about.... Just as a discourse ‘rules in’ certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write, or conduct oneself, so also, by definition, it ‘rules out’, limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it. (in Wetherell et al., 2001, p. 72)

In this section, I examined the relationship between discourse, knowledge and power in academia as explicated by Foucault. Based on the participants’ responses, I had examined the discourse of English as a global language, the role of the Arts in interpretation and representation and the discursive practices of academia. If you come from a community whereby your cultural discourses were not seen as particularly ‘valuable’ nor were they very empowering to your community, you would know what it was like having to constantly strive to seek access to cultural discourses not your own in order to gain access to power and opportunity. I wanted to find out to what extent the participants, like me, viewed English as a language of power and opportunity and gaining access to its cultural discourses entailed accessing discourses created in the West.

In this section, I have included excerpts and analyses of how and why my participants and I discussed how English has become a dominant language in the world, including our notations that much of what is often considered “official” knowledge – that is, what gets portrayed in school textbooks as well as in commonly held assumptions about “the facts, the truth” of particular topics, epics, histories, literatures, and so on -- was constructed and written in English. In this chapter, I pay particular attention to participants’ as well as my own perceptions of how we accessed cultural discourses

through the link between interpretation and the arts;¹ how our limited experiences and knowledge may affect our understanding of texts; issues of misrepresentation; learning the conventions of the written discourse; and finally writing as a means to contribute to – as well as perhaps unknowingly reinforcing Western-centric versions of which and whose knowledges “count” -- knowledge in the center of the Western world.

Maisara argued that English is a global and Western language (sic), which had originated from England and had spread to the U.S., Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, where it had become the dominant language. However, I would argue that the notion of English as a Western language could be troubled because there are other countries in the West where English is not spoken and countries like Australia and New Zealand are not from the West. But how easily we forget that. When reading English literature, Maisara said, “Yes, I did study a lot of English literature but that wasn’t the ideal English from the Western world when you said Commonwealth countries.” It was interesting to hear Maisara referred to English literature from the Western world as ‘ideal’ because she was inevitably referring to the ‘canon,’ which in her perception had established its sense of value and status based on its history and origin. In other words, Maisara was elevating the status and legitimacy of the canon above the Commonwealth literature, where English was not the dominant language and its writers spoke the English language as a second or even third language. The underlying assumption here was that English literature that expressed the cultural political and social conditions of its native speakers was considered the ‘true and original’ literature, while Commonwealth literature

¹Azlina: Even my experience of writing when I came here we were asked to not just read text but also write personal responses and for a while I didn’t know what that means, what does it mean to write personal responses because I have never written any before and any of my writing involved distancing myself. It wasn’t like you write I understand this or I do this and I do that, it’s always sort of like the text is this, you write it in the passive form. It’s constructed in a way that you as the reader is being excluded from your writing. I noticed here in the US it’s different, it’s sort of like you take ownership of your interpretation of the text. Was that your experience?

was considered a variation of its origin. It is a similar argument to those made of variations of English spoken by speakers of other languages.

Initially, Maisara felt removed from the world expressed in English literature particularly from the West because it didn't depict her reality or worldview. She said,

A lot of times like if I was to grow up in India, there's a totally different world and culture than the Western world. If I am reading stories, fiction or non-fiction whatever, reports, everything from the Western literature I would not associate anything with it. Yes, it's English language but it looks like along with the language it's another world.

So she saw English literature as an access to another world, creating a binary between English and Commonwealth literature. But her exposure to Commonwealth literature made her see how English could also express other cultures and she felt particularly connected to Indian literature written in English. She said,

So when they wrote stories, they wrote stories of their culture, of the problems they face that I'm facing, it is more associated with us like you feel connected, there is something in common with the author.... The person is talking about things I face every day or whatever situation the author is talking about it's something that I go through too but in the English language so that makes English yours rather than theirs.

Reading literature in English from Commonwealth countries helped her to see how English could be used to express her own reality and worldview, that English no longer belonged solely to native speakers of English.

Safeena compared literature to work of arts, where artists would have to give flexibility to their audience to form their own interpretations. It's a cyclical process of interpreting the text, going back and forth between our own interpretation and the artists' own conception or points of views. Also one should be aware of how your interpretation could be incomplete at the time of reading, and understanding is developed layers upon layers. While she acknowledged the viewers' ownership when interpreting a work of art, nevertheless in her own artistic project, she found it rather disappointing when viewers

did not interpret her work as it was intended to.² Safa added on to this discussion by pointing out that immigrants' lack of experiences and knowledge might affect their interpretations of texts.

This issue of interpretation, especially in relation to literature and the arts, that Safeena and Safa had discussed may not be solely an immigrant issue but a question of privilege too. There are immigrants who are more privileged and at the same time there are non-immigrants who are less privileged. While privileged people may have access to resources and experiences, underprivileged students may not. Many of us educators believe – although this belief in and of itself speaks of a certain privileged of “being educated” not available to all -- that the more access to resources one has, the better her or his vocabulary and socialization, which ultimately affects her or his reading. Safa also believed the links between art and literature gave a person an upper hand when interpreting texts perhaps because some of the skills involved overlap. I felt the same way particularly coming from Malaysia where the teaching of English is more often than not focused on a technical rational conception of the curriculum (at least based on my own experiences), making it devoid of its artistic and humanistic elements. Often times, I thought what would be worthy of writing were? my personal responses to the literary texts I had read in class at TC.

Safeena also discussed the issue of misrepresentation in photography, how readers and photographers conveyed or read images in certain ways not intended by the person in the photo.³ The subject may feel that her image has been misrepresented in how it was

²Azlina: Have you had that experience where the viewers or the audiences' interpretation did not quite match up with yours? What was fascinating about that moment when you find that their interpretation is very different from yours?

³Azlina: I think that's the thing about literature, we can't ensure that the reader is going to see things the way we intend it to. The way I see literature is that there's a framework, the author kind of draws the framework like that paper bag but how people see the paper bag or in this case even not a paper bag, it's sort of like there's a certain variable within the interpretation that allows that.

conveyed and interpreted. She gave the example of the subtlety in which a person views a Muslim depending on the consciousness of the person. You could also just as easily misinterpret another person's look to mean something that it was not intended to. So how your mind or consciousness was constructed and reconstructed – especially via dominant discourses that most often then frame dominant and other controlling social and cultural norms -- determined how you would interpret texts and events. This aspect of our conversation brought me back to my memory of first traveling to the U.S., how my being a Muslim affected my interpretation of events. There was a certain level of ambiguity present in interpretive work, be it in reading a text or in daily interactions.

Finally, we discussed the production of texts, that is, learning the different genres of writing, and thus gaining access to cultural discourses, which are formed based on certain conventions and assumptions.⁴ There are certain accepted and expected structures and formats to writing an abstract, an annotated bibliography, an academic paper, a thesis, a review, and a critique, for example. They were all part of academia, and their conventions were accepted by a group of 'experts,' a people of authority. Sabah was very excited about writing her own paper because she felt empowered that she was contributing her own knowledge to an issue. Safa was more 'comfortable' with learning the rules of writing that is more structured perhaps because there was more certainty that she was doing it 'right.'

⁴Azlina (to Safa): You were describing about the genres of writing like the different kind of texts. I was thinking about like I had one class, it was an introduction to research but I remember the professor sort of taught us how to do annotated bibliography and I've never been exposed to that. He was saying that there is a language to research, language to academia like you need to kind of learn it, and one of it was actually doing annotated bibliography like you were describing about the abstract, we need to have the points and so on, we learned that. This is why I am so fascinated with what you're saying, it's because you're kind of confirming exactly what I'm thinking about, it's that the learning of English is also the learning of a particular discourse or you're learning how text are constructed and how they are constructed to achieve a particular purpose and a particular meaning.

I felt the same with my writing. Creative writing and even personal responses often would leave me unnerved. The ‘freedom’ to write was both liberating and terrifying at the same time. It explained a great deal about why I would adhere so much to this ‘academic’ voice! Not to mention the temptation to ‘clean up’ the interview transcripts of their many repetitions, incomplete utterances, and grammatical errors. I have learnt at TC how important it was to examine how texts are constructed, and ultimately how we can and do “become” producers of texts (Scholes, 1998). Listening to Sabah and Safa, I could see they were more concerned about demonstrating their abilities to produce texts by following the conventions that have been set and less on how they could challenge these conventions. I too never did question why I had to write research articles in a passive authoritative and distant voice, not until I came here to TC and took courses in Narrative Research (see ‘Reconceiving the academic voice’).

“English doesn’t necessarily represent America, English is just a language.”

Maisara

English is ... like a global language. It doesn’t matter what your culture is it’s a language, it applies to everybody. It is stereotypically a Western language and it did originate here.... I did study a lot of English literature but that wasn’t the ideal English from the Western world when you said Commonwealth countries. A lot of times like if I was to grow up in India, there’s a totally different world and culture than the Western world. If I am reading stories, fiction or non-fiction whatever, reports, everything from the Western literature I would not associate anything with it. Yes, it’s English language but it looks like along with the language it’s another world. When I studied English, one of the authors that I remember was Ruskin Bond, he’s an Indian author. It was helpful because these people are Indian people because I’m Bangladeshi myself I associate with the same culture. So when they wrote stories, they wrote stories of their culture, of the

problems they face that I'm facing, it is more associated with us like you feel connected, there is something in common with the author. The author is not talking about something happening in Columbia because that is foreign to me. The person is talking about things I face every day or whatever situation the author is talking about it's something that I go through too but in the English language so that makes English yours rather than theirs. I can vocalize my own situation in English and other authors have done it because there are English authors across the globe who are not Western, who are not born in America or Britain because I've read G.W. Wilson she's an American convert but she lived in Egypt most of her life. She is also writing a *hijabi* comic book coming up for Marvel, she's the author of that too, it's all in English language but the entire story is set in Middle East the problems that they face not the Western culture.

Also I think I remember how one of those stories by Ruskin Bond it was talking about a trainer, how he meets a girl and trained and how obviously her parents restricted because we are more modest and we're not like just hanging out and hook up with whoever we want so those things actually are in the stories but they're written in English. In that way it doesn't seem foreign, it doesn't seem theirs', English doesn't necessarily represent America, English is just a language. I think that helps and plus it's that fact that it's only a language. It doesn't attach it to the Western society it's ours too, it's just a language. When we're learning Western literature but it was in British though because British they were older I guess, but since Shakespeare onwards and also because India was colonized by the British so that's the language.... I think it's like because England is the birth of English and because England literally colonized the entire world think it developed as every region that they colonized I think the language develops and became richer and richer that's why you have combination in English. You have the language structure, it's rooted from some other language but it's always regional except for English, English is not regional. English has words from all over the globe and I think it's because of colonization.

“It’s like a(an) rtist as artist will also try to give that flexibility for the viewer to come up with their own interpretation.”

Safeena

When she (Maisara) was talking about interpretation I always think that when there’s art work, it’s definitely something that ... the artist, whatever that person is saying that is reflected on the art work. As an artist, ... and I’m saying artist as us because I’m an Art minor, it’s like as artist we will also try to give that flexibility for the viewer to come up with their own interpretation. What we do in here especially with the old literature we break it down and we try to go back, try to think what does the author mean by that, why would someone be so inspired by something that that person would end up writing this literature or creating this art work. Once we do that it’s like our own interpretation, then we go back looking at context saying that did actually happen or when you have your personal interpretation since most of the work that we learn in here is back then so we basically don’t have the author. Whenever you go through this personal experience you actually find more stuff that is coming out where you wouldn’t find back then because back then even if the author describes his artwork there is always something missing because you do not find that exact moment.... It’s totally different than any other artwork.

This is how I see it whenever I do my art projects, the very first thing that I do, I go around and then ask people what do they think about my art work. I compare their stuff with my own interpretation, does it match up because if it matches up then I am conveying something, if it doesn’t match up I had to find out that balance if it was in a good position or not. For example the other day I drew a paper bag and then we’re doing this crosshatching where it’s the method where you literally take a pen and just draw lines to create more value in here. The crosshatching it was really that was the first time that it was introduced to me. My paper bag when I posted up my artwork there someone commented it looked like it’s a glass and which is totally different from a paper bag. When we’re discussing it that person was like because it looks like glass it makes it even

more interesting because all this glass it has this reflection in it and it has it's attraction in it it's like super glittery whereas in the outside world it's a little bit darker. It adds more interest in it but that is not what I was trying to---the glass because one part I left it totally blank and it looked like glass. Sometimes it adds more variability in it and sometimes it's kind of disappointing that you're trying to convey something but people are not getting it.

We went through some of the literature that was very disappointing in terms of conveying the message. For example, we also consider photography as artwork so one of the journalists ... like there's this war going on and they had people coming into America because of that war. They had this little campaign where a woman she was portrayed as a very helpless woman and it was also in the newspaper. It touched a lot of people's heart because the way she was portrayed and it was actually a good thing because they were getting help afterwards. The woman who was portrayed in that picture she was very disappointed ... because she said she never wanted her picture to be someone who would be so helpless because she was not....at that stage. She just wanted to convey the message that no matter what position she's in she's very strong and she can handle it. But how did we interpret it? We actually took it totally in the opposite direction. Yes, here's the thing though, the photographer who took the picture there was no description in there. Just an image and you're supposed to interpret it in your own way. That photograph was taken by some other newspaper and they made the news. That woman, the picture that was taken she actually gave the permission to the photographer to take the picture. But when we're talking about journalism, journalism is totally different than a regular photographer because journalism it has a more political side in it....

Whenever I take a picture I have this creepiest picture posted on my Facebook and everyone was like this is very creepy but here's the thing when I took the picture I really didn't think that it was a creepy picture, I have this little caption saying that I wish I can go peek through my future so I would know what's coming ... that was my interpretation of it but then when I show it to someone they were like this is a very creepy picture....

That was something that we were talking about, we're talking about war at that exact moment. That class is basically on interpreting photography ... under context. Basically we're supposed to analyze that photography and trust me the entire class.....they literally felt very sympathetic for that woman but then when we're talking about it as we went through then my teacher explained this is not supposed to be, it's something totally different.

When you're an artist there is always this flexibility and it's given to you because I feel like if I'm geared towards something like if I'm not flexible with my viewers' decision or opinion then you can't work with artwork because it's more like you're working with people. I value my idea, you value yours. I think (interpretations of the image) depends on the person... ---let's just say an example, we talk about Muslim they are seen as inferior to any other culture but in terms of when a person sees a woman wearing a *hijab* they will give them a look, right? In my case I would not say that ever happened to me or it's probably because I do not take it that way. It definitely depends on your personal level. If it was someone else instead of me who really looks at those stuff in that way then even if a normal person giving her a normal look she would take it in a wrong way. So when I'm looking at someone else's picture if that woman is Caucasian I would probably think the same way that I thought of that woman. It might vary in person like if Maisara would have seen the picture she would probably take hers in a different way, if it was someone else other than that particular woman so it depends on a personal level. Now, we're talking about interpretation. I think also interpretation is something like that, it's how your mind is build up⁵. I see everything in the world ---the way I perceive it, the world is totally different in your eyes. Basically I think artwork, literature

⁵How your mind is build up' is determined in part by your interpretation of experiences, multiple identities, your subjectivities and conceptual frameworks.

it also has that power in it and definitely the artist who are dealing with it, that artist have to set the pathway.

“I feel like those interpretations give certain people an upper hand in terms of analyzing even books because you’ve taken that abstract idea and you move it into other.”

Safa

I think sometimes it (interpretative work) also has to do with definitely the experiences in terms of perhaps going to a museum or even a certain TV show that you normally watch but then like an experience watching a movie but if they are artistic sort of the works that they know, the translations that they get from a picture or a painting, I don’t know if they use a lot of family experience, I think immigrants in some sense tend to, like when we criticize something we use just our background sometimes, it escapes our mind to look at the backgrounds of other people, like the experiences of other people for example from the movies or from the books. It’s hard to actually bring those because—those are very subtle, we’re not used to those experiences or we don’t assume that those would happen so it’s we use just talk about what we know....(which) could be irrelevant to maybe the topic like something you were talking about in class so it would be a different answer from someone else who has.

I like the idea of talking about a painting because then you talk about (art)works and you go into the history.... I feel like those interpretations give certain people an upper hand in terms of analyzing even books because you’ve taken that abstract idea and you move it into other, not that a book is a medium for painting but a medium of other things like a music video or a book or a video, a documentary or just a movie. Or a sculpture. Some people will call it nonsense that ... like if there’s a painting and you see certain things or you want to analyze it and say it out, it sort of like being able to tell a story and being able to socialize. When you lack that sometimes I feel that, that follows even when

you speak. It's like you don't go beyond the imaginary point, you just stick to what you are accustomed to, what you were taught. You just see it like this. I think with language, with speaking, with socializing it's about the same, sometime you just have to take the painting and go a little beyond what you see and being able to translate the painting, I think gives you a better way of being able to translate a book also like it can be hand in hand in some sense. I don't know what I thought of paintings or what impressions I have of people who are into that but I know it didn't make sense to me then that you can look at a painting and be able to talk and then delve into it. It's like when I was doing my undergrad, when I was doing all my educational courses, you don't teach reading just by reading you incorporate it with all these other subjects so when people complained about you know, you take up music class or you take up art class it has a lot to do with the reading as wellthe speaking of art for a writer that will one day write about what they did in art class.

I feel that a five year old child speaks that because I've observed, for my undergrad I've observed about two and a half years ago and that was in 207th street in Manhattan, the last stop on the A Train and I was at a school called Mascoutah High School. There are a lot of you can say whites, I don't know if they're all whites but the language that these kids use are so different from the kids that I grew up with. Just one, he sticks in my mind when we went to a trip he had his own camera so for me as an undergrad I did have my own camera but I would think that would I be able to have a camera if I was five? It's not the camera it was the idea of what resources you have to you. Whether he knows how to take a photo is up to him, that's not the point but he has a context to this object that he takes photos and prints it out in an old fashioned way. Then you have knowledge of how printing works, the traditional way not this manual, you click in and you just print. At the same time I learned about x-ray films when I started working at--I think I'm going to forward to college again, I started working in a dental office so I saw how films were made and what x-rays were. You know the word but you don't know because you don't

have the experience, you don't know what it is, what's a sensor, what it's used for, you know the whole experience, you being this untrained technician sort of. Learned new words even, there are so many words till this day I would say I don't know because of my practice or I was not aware of those things.

“I'm more of (a) structure(d) person. You have certain boundaries you stay within, but it has to be done correctly.”

Safa

My writing, especially for the education papers ... I had strict professors, just more conscious of rereading my work. I didn't tell you anything about grad school, one of the first classes in grad school was actually communication in public service. They made a huge emphasis on writing a research paper for the sciences as opposed to a policy paper in the public sector where you're presenting what you have to say. I forget the terms but scientific papers you have your thesis, you have your abstract, you have something that talks about everything but not all the juicy material, like your findings. Policy is different. Policy is if I have two minutes with you I have to tell you what the bottom line is. In policy it's like where you're defending a law, lawmakers do not get a thesis to read, they don't have time for that so it's a different culture of writing.

They kind of made it seem like everything you've learned you have to rethink about it but in one sense if you didn't have practice doing that you do. For some students it was so difficult because they were coming out of the sciences and in some sense they felt that they had to elaborate later on in the page as opposed to saying everything in the front. In one way I liked it because ... it has to be brief and short but correct. In one sense I like the other style better although for education papers we had to say what we're writing and then what you're observing, all the details, all the minutes and all the analysis, it was different. I had to experience that because it's like when you're

submitting the paper then it comes back to you and the paper could be fine but the format was just wrong and hence the entire thing is wrong and we don't use passive voice. I had a professor even on a graduation ceremony he says if anything you learned from this program you do not forget my red pen because he was the person anytime you see him, he taught us these tricks and not to say it's like a huge difference but for work, students who were currently employed for them it made a valuable change because when they had to get grant approvals and they were writing nonsense at first they realized that when I'm sending it up to a person who has only a minute to look at my email I have to know what I'm saying in one line. Then we make jokes about the school too, like they were something wrong with the IT Department and they wrote a message to everyone but the message was not the first line like at the bottom. He used that as an example to say this is not the communication that we use in public service ... just trying to teach about the culture of writing there.

It was just one semester, we looked into different types of papers like memos, policy papers, briefs, notes, the words are similar but there are different type and you learn the different structure, how it is that you present your data. Using his advice and points, it helped a lot.... How do you elaborate, where do you not give up too much. Knowing how to structure and my professor in that communication class was very much the person who would give you sort of a template and test you on it and sort of see are you following the new commands, the rules, the structure. For me I realized that is the best way personally. Maybe reading would help me better in creating a narrative but normally I'm more of the structure person. You have certain boundaries, you stay within but it has to be done correctly.

“I really felt like I was contributing to the English, it was my research, it was my ideas, it was my take on the type of situations.”

Sabah

When I get to college I think it's an extremely different experience. The fact that you get to choose which classes you want to take it changes everything.... I remember taking the class on India-Pakistan Partition and we had six books and we read them cover to cover and that was an extremely different experience. One of my 20 page reports for that class ... we talked about my experience if I am contributing to the literature because this is the fact that our English language is basically the knowledge, provided language, where English is the language in which most researches are or most scientific or social science writing is done. In some way you feel like you write a little essay for your English classes and everything but it was a History class so when I wrote my own research people for that class. It was my first time writing a 20 page paper. I was doing research but I would take some books for example I was working on it, I was skimming through the books so it was like a different technique of research that I learned. It's like you can just skim through the books and find the information you need, it is not based on internet research it was a lot based on books, information I was taking from books. I have thirty books but I never read all of them it was like I was learning how to use the pages, the index, for identifying the pieces I needed. I have an idea for what I wanted in my paper I just needed the information, to kind of prove I'm not just saying this, I have proof of this. That part was very interesting and I really enjoyed writing that paper maybe I could forward that paper to you.

The excerpt below is one of my Facebook entries when the tragedy of MH370 occurred in March 2014:



Azlina Abdul Aziz
March 26 2014

I remember watching CNN when the Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott announced satellite images spotted a few objects in the South Indian Sea. There was a general feeling amongst the broadcasters and their guests that Australia is competent unlike Malaysia, that they will get this right. **One guest went on to say that it was because Australia is an English speaking country** (sic). They have great experiences in managing such crisis. They also have had great relationship with the U.S. and have the technology to carry out the search. I remember half-wishing they will not find anything and days later that has been the case. The coverage since then has toned down considerably in its criticism. They began to give reasons why it was so difficult to find these objects even after being spotted by the satellite. They are more understanding. The truth of the matter is the operation has not been easy from the get go and all the countries are doing their best in this monumental effort. It also shows the biases of a media dealing with a foreign country they hardly know anything about, much less understand.

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\The tragic disappearance and loss of MH370 was such a traumatic event for particularly the families and friends of the passengers and crew on board but also for many people around the world. Even after more than two years, the main body of the aircraft has yet to be found, even though some of its wreckage have been found on Reunion island and also along the coasts of a few countries on the African continent. While there have been so many speculations and conspiracy theories, we have yet to discover the truth to what happened to MH370. The Facebook entry above was one of my many entries throughout the search process that was complex and confusing to say the least. When the search began to move from the South China Sea to the Andaman Sea and eventually the South Indian Ocean, I knew it would be an even more monumental task as the South Indian Ocean was a more inhospitable and rough terrain to work in in comparison to the South China Sea. A number of the guests were 'relieved' (sic) that since they had believed the plane had crashed into the South Indian Ocean, it had meant that the Australian authorities would take charge of the search and do a much better job

than the Malaysian authorities who had struggled to provide coherent answers to the many queries from family members, the media and the public as to where the plane was. I could see my country Malaysia struggling against this weight of the responsibility and they were completely overwhelmed by this unprecedented tragedy. We had little technical expertise to deal with the search alone and had to galvanize the Navies from various countries as well as the aviation experts from around the world to figure out this mystery.

I particularly wanted to draw attention to a statement made by a guest on CNN, in which she said in one segment, “*Australia is an English speaking country*” by way of an explanation as to why Australia would do a better job at finding the plane. I thought it was a curious statement for her to make. What does being an English speaking country have to do with the competency of a country to search for this missing plane? In one statement, I felt she had ‘othered’ my country. Even though the Malaysian representatives had spoken in English during the press conferences and English is our second language, we were not considered as an ‘English speaking country’. Perhaps also implied in her statement is because English is our second language, we do not communicate as effectively as native speakers of the language, even though the Malaysian Transport Minister Hishamuddin Hussein was educated in the U.K. and he speaks English and Malay language fluently. Perhaps also, she was implying because we are not an English speaking country, we were less developed and lacked the resources and expertise than English speaking countries like the U.S., U.K, Australia and New Zealand.

In sum, based on my interpretations, the term “English speaking countries” entailed developed, advanced, competent and effective. To some extent it would be true to say that Malaysia is not as developed or as wealthy as the U.S. and U.K., but there are other non-English speaking countries, which could be considered just as advanced as these countries so I thought it was a peculiar statement to make to refer to only English as being synonymous with advanced technology and development. Does my geographical

location outside the ‘English speaking countries’ then position me as a nonnative speaker even though I may be just as proficient in the language? Is there a cultural discourse or a way of speaking that is evident in these ‘English speaking countries’ that is not evident in non-English speaking countries? If so then what could be the reason for such differences in the way the Malaysian and Australian authorities had spoken that had inspired more confidence even though they did get it wrong on a number of occasions? Have we, Malaysians suffered from the years of viewing and learning English mainly for its utilitarian value and its teaching in the classroom, which focuses on the technical aspects of acquisition in line with the autonomous model of literacy. Is our version of English focused more on what Guillory (1993) terms as a technobureaucratic society, which is concerned with producing “a new class of technical managerial specialists possessed of purely technical/managerial knowledge” (in Graff, 2008, p. 261) at the expense of a more humanistic expression of the English language?

The above anecdote speaks to the constructions of English speaking country and non-English speaking country or to put it in a different way, who are considered native speakers and non-native speakers of English and how these categorizations are also linked to development, power and wealth. Following Pennycook’s (2002) examination of the complicity of English language teaching (ELT) in perpetuating postcolonial discourse, he argues postcolonialism is:

the ground on which European/Western images of the Self and Other have been constructed, the place where constructions of Superiority and Inferiority were produced ... from the native speaker/non-native speaker dichotomy to the images constructed around English as a global language and the assumptions about learners' cultures, much of ELT echoes with the cultural constructions of colonialism. (p.19)

If I were to examine the above anecdote utilizing the conceptual framework on the postcolonial discourse of English as advanced by Pennycook, then we could still see evidences, no matter how small, of its existence in this particular situation. Following the construction of an ‘English speaking country’ by this guest on CNN, it is as if there is a

club that consists of a group of people with a few dominant characteristics, which is based on its origin, language and race, and no matter how much you have made the effort to fulfill most of its requirement, you will never be part of the club. Singapore, for example is one of the most advanced countries in the world and English is one of four official languages and serves as the main language used in the educational institutions, administration, business and media. However, I have a feeling it would not be recognized by that guest on CNN as an 'English speaking country' because they do not have a British origin or heritage. Thus, an English speaking country here refers to a country whose predominant people (i.e., Anglo-Saxon) and culture had originated from England and had migrated to the U.S., Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, and where English had become the dominant language.

In my discussion with Maisara on the origin of English, she said, "It is stereotypically a Western language and it did originate here". As I have mentioned above, the conception of English as a 'Western' language is problematical because not all Western countries speak English. She further qualifies her statement later when she acknowledged that its birth place is in fact England but later it was spread to other countries in the world through colonization. She said, "I think it's like because England is the birth (place) of English and because England literally colonized the entire world (I think it developed ... every region that they colonized I think the language develops and became richer and richer that's why you have combination (of foreign words) in English". The British Empire was not the only colonizing power in the 18th and early 19th century, there were other European colonizers such as the Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch and yet English more than any of the other colonial languages have become dominant in the world, partly due to the influence of the language in the countries it had once colonized; the political, cultural, military and technological hegemony of the U.S. after World War II and the end of the Cold War; and the systematic propagation of English to countries around the world. Maisara rightly pointed out that English developed as a

language through colonization as it absorbed vocabulary from the colonized countries it encountered.

When asked about the role of English in the world, Maisara saw “English as a global language” and on the question of who English belongs to she added, “English doesn’t necessarily represent America, English is just a language”. I would argue, in fact, that the present day English doesn’t represent only the U.S., but rather a language that belongs to those who speak it as a first, second or even third language. This assumption that English as a world language and that it does not belong to only the U.K and the U.S. is advantageous to countries who feel a sense of ownership of the language, that they may adapt the language to suit local flavors and culture. This makes the case for the expansion of varieties of English but the Standard by which the language is measured is still in the center, i.e., England and to some extent the U.S.

Maisara also said that English is a global language because it “has words from all over the globe and I think it’s because of colonization.” The absorption of vocabulary from other languages was also part of the colonization movement as the English colonizers interacted with the local communities and began collecting scientific knowledge. I do feel it was important to acknowledge that while English absorbed vocabulary from other languages due to its history of colonization, it had done so to enrich its expression of the world, while still maintaining ownership over production of new knowledges and ultimately new words. However, as an international and dominant language in the world, it was easy to lose sight of its ‘absorption’ of vocabulary from other languages and even how the ‘English’ has laid claim to knowledges produced in the countries it once colonized. Whereas, I find minority languages having had to absorb a great number of vocabulary from English in order for them to remain up to date with expressions of current realities. It is not an even playing field for languages in the world because English could absorb vocabulary from other languages to enrich and empower itself but minority languages’ absorption of vocabulary from English only serve to

weaken and dominate it. As long as its cultural group did not produce new knowledges, it will continue to be the recipient of other languages rather than creators of new words. At a macro level, as long as dominant countries like the U.S. continue to influence and dictate constructions and categorizations of knowledges, the less dominant countries will continue to become its recipient. They would have less power to affect change in how the 'world' is constructed along economic, political, cultural and social lines.

I am not denying that learning English as a global language and accessing cultural discourses in the U.S. or the U.K. are important in many ways for my participants and me. It is claimed that in 1987 around 300 million of the world's population speak it as their mother tongue, another 300 million as their second language and about 100 million as a foreign language and this number of English speakers may have increased tenfold in the last 31 years (Crystal, 1987, p.358). The British Council (2012) has estimated that there are roughly 1.6 billion learners of English. English in the world is not only limited to being the language of communication but it is used in many other domains. For example, Sabah acknowledged the importance of English in research as "English is the language in which most researches are (in) or most scientific or social science writing is done." According to Crystal, "It is the main language of books, newspapers, airports and air-traffic control, international business and academic conferences, science, technology, medicine, diplomacy, sports, international competitions, pop music, and advertising. Over two-thirds of the world's scientists write in English" (Crystal, 1987, p. 358, in Pennycook, 1994, p. 8).

For the participants in this study, learning English is not just the acquisition of its vocabulary, syntax and phonology but it also involves the learning of academic discourse. Sabah and Safa discussed how they had learnt to read and write various kinds of papers such as scientific and social science reports, policy papers, memos and notes. Sabah explained the process of writing her research paper on the Pakistan and India divide, "I was doing research..... I would take some books.....I was skimming through (them) so it

was like a different technique of research that I learned. It's like you can just skim through the books and find the information you need, it is not based on internet research ... I was learning how to use the pages, the index, for identifying the pieces I needed.”

Safa learnt how to write different genres of writing such as “memos, policy papers, *briefs*, *notes*” and learning the structure, format and purposes to each genre. She said,

I forget the terms but scientific papers you have your thesis, you have your abstract, you ... talk about everything but not ... your findings ... policy is different. Policy is if I have two minutes with you I have to tell you what the bottom line is. In policy it's like where you're defending a law, lawmakers do not get a thesis to read, they don't have time for that so it's a different culture of writing ... we looked into different types of papers like memos, policy papers, *briefs*, *notes*, the words are similar but there are different type and you learn the different structure, how it is that you present your data.

Safa had demonstrated above her knowledge of how a particular text is constructed, which is crucial for her success in academia. Safeena and Safa also had discussed the role of the Arts in interpretation and representation as part of the process of accessing cultural discourses. According to Safeena's definition of interpretation, it “is ... how your mind is build up. I see everything in the world ---the way I perceive it, the world is totally different in your eyes.” Following Schwarz's (2008) model on reading in his book “In Defense of Reading,” the process of reading literary work would involve the interaction between these three factors. They are: “1) authorial intention and interest; 2) the formal text produced by the author for a specific historical audience; and 3) the responses of a particular reader in a specific time” (p. 14). Safeena demonstrated this process when she discussed the process involved in interpretation, which would require the artist or writer to give room for the viewer or reader to make her or his own interpretations that may be different from the one intended by the artist. She said,

I always think that when there's art work ... the artist ... will also try to give that flexibility for the viewer to come up with their own interpretation. What we do ... especially with the old literature we break it down and ... try to think what does the author mean by that, why would someone ... be so

inspired by something that that person would end up writing this literature or creating this art work. Once we do that it's like our own interpretation, then we go back looking at context saying that did actually happen or when you have your personal interpretation since most of the work that we learn here is back then so we basically don't have the author.

As an Art minor herself, she had found it at times rather disappointing but also exciting when viewers make interpretations of her artwork that differed from her own original work. According to Schwarz (2008), a reader belongs to “multiple interpretive communities” (p. 26). He argues,

How we read the texts—and the world—depends on an ever-changing hierarchy of interpretive strategies. These hierarchies constitute our reading of texts—and the world—even as they are constituted by it. That is, as we read, our interpretive strategies are challenged and modified even as they modify what we read. When reading criticism, we need to be aware of the theoretical and methodological assumptions that produce a reading and examine whether we belong to the community of readers who share those assumptions. (p. 27)

Thus, as readers our background knowledges, subjectivities, and theoretical frameworks would be brought to bear on our interpretation of texts. Depending on the interpretive community we were in, we will discover how our interpretive strategies are similar or different from other members in that community. Hence, my struggle is writing a personal response to ‘Paradise Lost’ may have demonstrated conflicting expectations as the person who had condemned my writing to hell had previously studied English literature at one of the Ivy League Universities whereas my background was more on TESL. Apart from the arts figuring quite prominently in interpretive work at TC, I found the European philosophers’ scholarly work were also brought to bear on our readings, which at times would leave me feeling excluded. Similarly, the participants may have encountered instances whereby their own interpretive work were similar or different from others in the interpretive community, which could be seen as a way of learning new perspectives, and as Schwarz had argued could help challenge and modify our interpretation.

The value of learning art had helped Safeena to transfer that knowledge on interpretive work to her other academic work such as reading literature. She said,

This is how I see it whenever I do my art projects, the very first thing that I do, I go around and then ask people what do they think about my art work. I compare their stuff with my own interpretation, does it match up because if it matches up then I am conveying something, if it doesn't match up I had to find out that balance.... Sometimes it adds more variability in it and sometimes it's kind of disappointing that you're trying to convey something but people are not getting it.

While the 'variability' in interpretation may be exciting, it could also lead to misrepresentation, particularly in how the artist or in this case photojournalist unintentionally produce work that the subject being studied felt was misrepresented. The issue of representation and misrepresentation would be one of the most important issues these participants need to deal with as they have real life repercussions for them as Muslim American women. Safeena said:

For example, we also consider photography as artwork so one of the journalists ... they had people coming into America because of that war. They had this little campaign where a woman she was portrayed as a very helpless woman.... It touched a lot of people's heart because the way she was portrayed and it was actually a good thing because they were getting help afterwards. The woman who was portrayed in that picture she was very disappointed ... because she said she never wanted her picture to be someone who would be so helpless.... She just wanted to convey the message that no matter what position she's in she's very strong and she can handle it. But how did we interpret it? We actually took it totally in the opposite direction ... there was no description in there. Just an image and you're supposed to interpret it in your own way.... That woman, the picture that was taken she actually gave the permission to the photographer to take the picture. But when we're talking about journalism, journalism is totally different than a regular photographer because journalism it has a more political side in it.

Safa added on to this discussion on interpretive work and how the immigrants' lack of experiences and knowledge might affect their interpretations of texts. Safa said, when it comes to interpretive work:

I think immigrants in some sense tend to, like when we criticize something we use just our background sometimes, it escapes our mind to look at the backgrounds (and) experiences of other people for example from

the movies or from the books.... I feel like those interpretations give certain people an upper hand in terms of analyzing even books because you've taken that abstract idea and you move it into other.... When you lack that sometimes I feel that, that follows even when you speak.

This issue of interpretation, especially in relation to literature and the arts that Safeena and Safa had discussed may not be solely an immigrant issue but a question of privilege too. Not all immigrants are underprivileged though. Privileged people may have access to resources and experiences underprivileged students may not. Many of us educators believe – although this belief in and of itself speaks of a certain privileged of “being educated” not available to all -- that the more access to resources one has, the better her or his vocabulary and socialization, which ultimately affects her or his reading and writing of texts.

The above anecdotes demonstrate the importance of accessing academic discourses for these participants as they pursue their academic studies in their respective colleges. We collectively had learnt how to write personal response, report paper, policy paper, annotated bibliography, thesis and journal article as part of being in academia. Learning to read and write academic discourse are definitely important parts of learning but it is equally important for these students and myself to examine how texts are constructed, and ultimately how we can and do “become” producers of texts (Scholes, 1998). It may be the case for Sabah that she preferred the structure and formula of writing a particular type of text as learning its structure would help her to write better. She said, “I’m more of (a) structure(d) person. You have certain boundaries, you stay within but it has to be done correctly.” Scholes argues that a more powerful means of learning is one’s ability to deconstruct a text and identify its strengths and limitations. It is a set of skills one acquires that will be applicable to other texts one reads. He sums it up when he says,

One needs to be able to read, interpret, and criticize texts in a wide range of modes, genres, and media. What our students need to function in such a world, then, is an education for a society still struggling to balance its promises of freedom and equality, still hoping to achieve greater measures of social justice, still trying not to homogenize its people but to allow for social

mobility and to make the lower levels of its economic structure tolerable and humane. (p. 84)

Scholes's (1998) conception of English Education is particularly resonant with people who have experienced and is still experiencing various forms of injustice and oppression particularly through the discursive use of the English language. I was privileged enough at TC to take classes like Narrative Inquiry amongst others that drew my attention to examine the construction of various types of writings such as personal responses, annotated bibliography, research paper, and journal article but also to question how these texts are constructed and the epistemology that underlies each choice of construction. More importantly, to read of authors like Laurel Richardson who have chosen to write differently even if it had meant going against the prevailing wind. I certainly would never have conceived of writing a thesis that have included so much of myself and my subjectivities as I was previously 'taught' to write in a manner that would exclude even the word 'I.' There are spaces here in the U.S. for the construction of alternative views, structures, and knowledges by communities who have their own specific concerns, and challenges the dominant narrative.

While the importance and value of English is in no doubt, there are also some troubling aspects to the construction and propagation of English and the ideology it carries. This study is my musings on the teaching and learning of English language for immigrant students as a neutral and natural endeavor within countries like the U.S. where English is the dominant language and also in countries like mine where English is a second language. Pennycook (1994) discusses this taken for granted assumption that the teaching of English is "natural, neutral and beneficial":

It is considered natural because, although there may be some critical reference to the colonial imposition of English, its subsequent expansion is seen as a result of inevitable global forces. It is seen as neutral because it is assumed that once English has in some sense become detached from its original cultural contexts (particularly England and America), it is now a neutral and transparent medium of communication. And it is considered beneficial because a rather blandly optimistic view of international

communication assumes that this occurs on a cooperative and equitable footing. (p. 9)

Many times, and especially throughout this research study, I have and do wonder, though, how neutral English is? Does it create certain biases and expectations particularly in relation to knowledge and experiences from other cultures written in English? Also can it ever be truly representative of different cultural values and worldviews? Are there not things lost in translation? I felt it was important to not treat English as a ‘natural and neutral’ international language but to examine its history, present and future trajectory so as we may reinterpret and rewrite its usages and meanings to affect its speakers who speak it as a first, second or third language. Indeed, the U.S., with its history of immigration, is a fascinating place to examine how minorities are empowered through the democratic process to rewrite and reinterpret constructions of knowledges. I believe, especially as one “result” of this study, that it is this process that could be emulated by less powerful countries in the world. But I also have to wonder about the extent the minorities efforts to reinscribe ‘realities’ – by this, I mean the power of dominant discourses to shape and frame -- at national and international stages, has had and continues to have various levels of “success and failure.” Small countries like Malaysia are constantly having to balance and make the decisions between acquiescing, accepting and rejecting the cultural discourses, power structures and knowledge constructions propagated by more dominant countries like the U.S and the U.K., particularly when these power structures and systems and knowledge constructions are geared in favor of them and are based on unequal power distributions and susceptible to abuses (think 2008 financial crisis). By way of its economic, political and cultural expansions in the world, the U.S. is in a position to affect and influence what happens to other countries. So I feel that the U.S. has moral, ethical and social responsibilities to examine its treatments of minorities by way of gauging its treatments and relationships to communities around the world. I feel at this point in time, how the U.S. treats its Muslim population is being

closely watched (at least by people like me) because that would define its relationship to Muslims and Muslim countries like my own around the world.

When we continue to teach English in ahistorical manner and utilizing a technical rational curriculum, which excludes the autobiography of the students and the political, historical, cultural and social contexts the learning takes place in, we are ignoring and choosing to be oblivious to the possibilities of the past affecting the present. Willingsky (1998) in his book, *Learning to Divide the World: Education at Empire's End*, examines how the acquisition, dissemination and production of knowledge within imperialistic contexts have their remnants in our current conceptions of the world and are still perpetuated within the discourse of education. He argues:

We are schooled in differences great and small, in borderlines and boundaries, in historical struggles and exotic practices, all of which extend the meaning of difference. We are taught to discriminate in both the most innocent and fateful ways so that we can appreciate the differences between civilized and primitive, West and East, first and third worlds. (p. 1)

I would concede that there is so much in how we view the world, which has become so subconscious, and part of an automated response that we do not realize they are part of the colonial past. The act of decolonization involved more than gaining autonomy to include a decolonization of the mind and imagination. Reading Willingsky, he drew my attention to how we are still steeped in imperialistic mind when we continue to compare, contrast, divide the world, construct images of the 'other' and exclude certain narratives and histories. When you are in a privilege position, you may potentially expect the world to bend to your will and support the comfort of your existence. So when a student in one of my classes at TC declared that everybody in the world should learn English, I wondered how much of what she had said was for the benefit of those people learning the language and how much for her own benefit because it would mean she would have access to other countries without having to make the effort to learn another language, i.e. a privileged life. Why is examining the teaching of English from a

postcolonial perspective important then for the Muslim American participants in this study? It is about opening up spaces for discussion on the possibilities of the discursive discourse associated with second language teaching and learning of English being constituted and reconstituted in our English Education experiences.

Chapter VIII

THE BROWNING EFFECT - HIERARCHICAL CONSTRUCTION OF ACCENTS

THE NOTE TAKER. A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere—no right to live. Remember that you are a human being with a soul and the divine gift of articulate speech: that your native language is the language of Shakespeare and Milton and The Bible; and don't sit there crooning like a bilious pigeon.

THE FLOWER GIRL [quite overwhelmed, and looking up at him in mingled wonder and deprecation without daring to raise her head] Ah—ah—ah—ow—ow—oo!

THE NOTE TAKER [whipping out his book] Heavens! what a sound! [He writes; then holds out the book and reads, reproducing her vowels exactly] Ah—ah—ah—ow—ow—ow—oo! (Excerpt from: George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*, iBooks. <https://itun.es/us/dnM01.l>)

In the excerpt of the play *Pygmalion* above, Professor Higgins chided Eliza for speaking a version of the English language, which he deemed unworthy for a human being to utter and even more so considering English is the language used by great writers and poets like Shakespeare and Milton. Professor Higgins constructs a binary to the English language, whereby he advances the conception of a standard English language being far superior to the version of English spoken by Eliza. In *Pygmalion*, the demarcation of the English class system is manifested in the speech a person speaks. Not only can Prof Higgins identify the geographical location in which the speech originates but he inadvertently could identify the socioeconomic background of the community in which that particular speech is spoken. He believes that in changing Eliza's speech, he could possibly change people's perception of her and ultimately advance her

socioeconomic background. These subtle biases could easily be disguised when we adhere to a standard and, particularly for teachers of English, blindly promote and safeguard one version of the English language as the correct and right version. Tiffin, Griffiths and Ashcroft (2007) argue in their book, *The Empire writes back: Theory and practice in postcolonial literature*, that “[o]ne of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language. The imperial education system installs a 'standard' version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all 'variants' as impurities” (p. 7). I wanted to find out if my research participants were aware of such biases and how they chose to respond to them.

Based on my interpretations of my interview data, I concluded that the conception of a standard English language was only prominent to Safeena, Maisara and Safa. I suspect, as English has become a global language and not to mention the participants largely grew up and were educated in the U.S., they were ‘used’ to hearing the language and its many dialects and accents spoken. Nevertheless, I share this issue here because as an English teacher and speaker, it was also prominent to me. In my situation, the sounds of English were very foreign and distant and it was only when I went to the UK that I became more aware of the many English dialects and accents, some of which were even incomprehensible to me. I was even more acutely aware how different my accent was. As an English teacher, I was taught to emulate Received Pronunciation (RP) as it is coded in the dictionary and spoken by the BBC broadcasters.

Although the majority of the participants were not as conscious as I was on the issue of standard English, I was particularly surprised to hear from Safeena as she described and modeled a ‘brown’ accent,¹ a construction used to refer to the accent used

¹I had asked the following questions and it was while responding to them that Safeena had mentioned about the need to get rid of her ‘brown accent’ as part of the process of acquiring English. I had not heard of the term before and decided to probe further. It further led us into discussing about the constructions of various accents. Azlina: What do you think helped you with acquiring English? In your

by South Indian English speakers. In the U.S., according to Safeena and Maisara, this accent was associated with the stereotypical view of South Asians working as taxi drivers or receptionists at call centers. If in *Pygmalion*, Professor Higgins defined the speech in which Eliza had spoken, I queried who had defined ‘brown’ accent, which neither Safeena nor Maisara could tell me. Safeena and Maisara went on to categorize the many accents they had heard of and how these accents were perceived, either negatively or positively. For example, the ‘brown accent’ refers to speakers from the Indian subcontinent; Asian accent refers to speakers from East Asia; African accent refers to speakers from the African continent; Arab accent refers to Arabic speakers; Southern accent refers to speakers from the South of the U.S.; and the New York City boroughs’ accents like Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens. While these categorizations were based on the geographical location of its speakers, they were also constructed based on the participants’ conception of ‘race’ and the social cultural and economic meanings attached to each ‘racial’ group. Personally, I had never categorized accents according to different regions of the world like Maisara and Safeena did, but instead I was more aware of accents constructed according to countries and states/regions within each country.

According to Maisara, as NYC was so diverse, she initially did not feel a sense of alienation when she had first arrived here. Nevertheless, she had made the effort to learn to speak like the locals by acquiring their accent, shedding her ‘brown’ accent’ but not her mother tongue and culture, and learning American vocabulary as opposed to British vocabulary. Similarly, early in Safeena’s education in the U.S., she felt the need to shed her brown accent and acquire a standard American English. She felt it was important to her becoming American and feeling a sense of belonging here. Based on our discussions and my interpretations of interview data, I believe that the participants in this research felt it was important to acquire American English, whilst maintaining their mother

case when you came here apart from the ESL classroom, how did you realize that that helped you to develop the language even more? Is it the reading or is it in socializing with other Americans?

tongue, which they spoke with varying levels of proficiency. As their mother tongues were not taught in public educational settings, they have become languages confined to the home or to be spoken in interactions with members of the same linguistic background.

We also spoke about standards of English we had emulated. While for me, Julie Andrews (aka Maria) and Audrey Hepburn (aka the well-groomed Eliza) were the ones I had emulated, in Safa's case it was her teachers' speech that provided her a model to emulate. Safeena claimed that "British accent... there's more elegance and sophistication whereas American language is like aggressive." Implied in her statement, "British accent" refers to the Received Pronunciation, i.e., Standard form of the language and perhaps the "elegance and sophistication" is with reference to the class or socioeconomic and educational background of its speakers. I was not certain how she had formed the perception that American English – particularly the Bronx accent -- as being more aggressive. I do swoon at hearing Benedict Cumberbatch speak though! So I may be just as guilty at perpetuating this bias.

Safeena would often find herself changing her accent and language depending on who she was speaking to and the context she was in. She would speak Bengali to her customers at the pharmacy she was working in, even though she was not as proficient in Bengali as she was in English, and her accents would also change to mimic the accent of the person she was speaking to. Speakers of languages, particularly of multiple languages, often would demonstrate this sophisticated awareness of language use and appropriacy depending on the context and who they were speaking to. Thus, we will find our speech would change in terms of our choice of languages, accents, and vocabulary from formal to informal to intimate contexts.

Listening to Safa speak about being corrected for her pronunciation particularly for the sounds 'Ps, Hs, Zs, and Fs', I am reminded of how I used to be corrected by my host mother during my stay in the U.K. the first year I had arrived there. She had told me that

she had noticed one of the characteristics of Malaysian speakers were we tended to miss out on the plural 's' sound and we tended to not pronounce the consonant at the end of each word. I was trained to mind my 's'es and consonants. Safa's comments spoke to how characteristics of speech from a language/mother tongue could 'bleed' into another language/second language. Interestingly, when listening to American speakers speak English, they tended to soften the pronunciation of consonants like in the case of the word 'don't' (don instead of don't). I think Safa and I became aware of what sounds 'belonged' to the English language and which versions of English either British or American English. British and American pronunciations were the accepted ones even though they may differ but we knew some aspects of our pronunciations, which were influenced by our mother tongue, that did not.

In my discussions, the three participants demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the many varieties of English spoken; the connotative meanings attached to each form of speech; the standard of English emulated, i.e., British English as opposed to American English; and an ability to speak a range of speeches from informal to formal and standard to slang, according to whom they were speaking to and in what context.

I found it fascinating how subtle our biases can be formed and expressed, at least the ones we were aware of and, much more, the ones we were not. What was even more fascinating was how we had constructed, imposed and attached meanings to these various accents. Nevertheless, these biases were important to interrogate particularly in relation to how we related with ourselves and others, as interactions are too fleeting to notice most of the times. As an English teacher, it was important to examine this issue as I may at times be guilty of perpetuating these biases.

“I can bring some brown accent on if you’re interested in it.”

Safeena

At that time for me I was like no I have to get rid of the brown accent, I have to pick up the English accent because I really---You’ve never heard of brown accent? Welcome to New York. You’ll hear brown accent a lot. Brown accent is considered as the Indian, Pakistan or Bengali accent. I can bring some brown accent on if you’re interested in it. (Safeena and Maisara give Azlina a sample of what a brown accent is.)

Maisara

It’s like how we have stereotype the club, you have the Asian people, you have the brown people, brown people are basically the Indian subcontinent, you have Indians, Bengalis, Sri Lankan, Myanmar, Pakistan, Afghanistan all these are like the brown countries, these are the Indian subcontinents. It’s also known as the Desi People. You also have the Arab accent. You have not heard the term but you have heard the accent. Because that accent is literally found in that region of the world.

Safeena

It’s more like you know how diverse New York City is, you wouldn’t find brown accent anywhere else in America other than New York. I don’t know, ... like in California I never heard a brown accent. When I came here then I started like okay that’s a black hood accent, brown accent. Brooklyn accent. Bronx accent. Brooklyn has a totally different accent. Did you know that all part of East Asian country we call them Asian and Southeast people, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh we call them brown. If you’re from Malaysia your accent would be considered as Asian accent, whereas our accent would be considered as brown accent. When you say Asian it doesn’t mean— It doesn’t mean Asia, it actually means East Asia.

Maisara

You were asking is it defined by the Caucasian people to describe ourselves. I honestly don't know. I'm not really sure. As I grew up I knew the accent is the Indian accent I didn't know it is a Bangladeshi or a Pakistani accent, but the Indian accent refers to the accents spoken by the Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Nepal, the entire region. The accent is very similar, it's thick, I sure know it was the Indian accent. Over here because it is even more diverse, obviously New York is like mad diverse right, people over here call us the brown people because we have the skin color, we're neither black we're neither white we're in between so we're brown. I think it's just a generalization because if you say Indian accent it would refer to one particular country but it is more than one country, that's the Indian subcontinent and so it's a whole bunch of countries, so I think this generalizes brown accent. Honestly I don't know the answer to who developed it because I just heard it and it made sense to me. You do get to hear it, I think one thing about the brown accent is it's very different.

Safeena

We will just make fun of it, brown accent. You need to take a lot more cab to become more familiar with brown accent because there's also stereotypes saying that Indian people, if you're Indian then your job is like a taxi driver.

Maisara

Or the call center people.

“I tend to speak sophisticated at times.”

Maisara

I learned British English and as I grew up the accent was still Indian, the brown accent, the thick accent, I had that, I really had that. If I would speak to one of my friends

from India right you would see my accent change. Right now I am speaking your accent, I don't speak this accent. I really don't realize this but I switch accents... I can do Arab accent from talking to a legit Arab. Some people say I pretend, I'm not pretending. Unknowingly I just blend into whatever. It's both a good and bad thing. For example, I don't swear or curse but when I'm around these people it's really hard for me to refrain because I unknowingly blend into your—like I'm speaking to you and you're speaking in a British accent right? I'm blending into you because you're speaking to me. I really can't help it. It's me being weird, I just tend to adapt to the person I'm talking to. Right now if I was really speaking to a person with really bad grammar I probably started making grammar mistakes. Sophisticated? I think Safeena would agree with that? I tend to speak sophisticated at times. My cognitive function is really weird because I am able to adapt like this. When I came here I didn't face a hard time with the accent because ... it was my home and they never thought that I was a foreigner. You could ask people who knew me from the beginning they wouldn't say I was a foreigner because I was able to speak their language, use the same words, occasionally I would say washroom, instead of toilet because I find washroom, when you say toilet it's bathroom.

Safeena

In California they never use bathroom, it's washroom. Okay. I tend to adapt very easily which is like both good and bad like I said it has its advantage, perks and at the same I have situations—you would find this interesting. I'm not very good at speaking Bengali but I still work in a pharmacy where most of my customers are Bengali and when they speak Bengali to me all of a sudden I speak really good Bengali. I am not kidding you because one of these guys he goes like you speak so good Bengali and I'm like are you kidding me? I know that I don't know this but this guy, he was a customer who's like you speak Bengali very well, I was like I don't think so. For me I know your research

focuses on language transformation and I just didn't have such a hard time because---
Yes, I tend to literally shape myself around whoever.

As far as keeping in touch I would say okay, one of the things with brown culture especially is they really want to stay with their culture, hold on to their traditions, they are really strong with it. When we have family gatherings or elders in the family they don't speak English very well, they do speak English but not very well necessarily. When I'm with my cousins because they speak English, we all speak English but with aunts, uncles, grandparents, we have to speak Bengali and yes I do keep in touch with them so I am able to speak Bengali at home when needed. I actually speak Bengali with my parents, I don't speak English. I guess I am more comfortable with English in terms of vocabulary ... because I understand it but I am able to speak Bengali. The thing is the question about the hardness, how hard it is to be balanced? For me it's I just blend in without realizing so I don't feel the hardness of it. I'll tell you an interesting thing that happened to me, one of my uncles who I look up as an elder person he spoke to me in English and I replied to him in Bengali although English is my preferred language, you know why this happened because I have this mindset, they are my adults, they always speak Bengali, all of a sudden when he spoke English although I'm good at English I'm in Bengali mode with him so I'm speaking to him in Bengali although he is speaking English to me.

Maisara

I think it happens when you are exposed to different accent, different language. Psychologically proven if you learn two languages when you're five years old that's when your language it develops in one area of your brain. If you learn it after five years old then two different languages develop in two different areas. The way you derive information is like you get the information, translate it into your mother language then you translate to another language that you want to say. I don't know that's how I felt. When I'm talking without realizing what I'm saying it's easier for me to communicate.

As soon as I have this thing am I speaking it in a correct way or am I speaking the language in a sophisticated or professional way everything just goes wrong and I started speaking my own language.

“I do like British accent there’s more elegance and sophistication whereas American language is like aggressive.”

Safeena

I do like British accent there’s more elegance and sophistication whereas American language is like aggressive. Like when you have that accent ... and they are really educated, I personally love the way that sounds like a Southern accent whereas like you can hear the education and the intellect with the way they speak I think it’s a beautiful combination because it’s like look at this contrast between the stereotype of the accent with who they’re saying, the paradox. But the accent generally is like looked down, as soon as it comes out talking like that, hater, hater. Yes, it’s associated with like being less educated.

Maisara

It’s like seeing those people who are more like doing the labor work.

Safa

British accent (has more prestige), like yours. Maybe, I don’t know what the Malaysian accent is. To me with the way you speak is the British accent. In your mind, you had an ideal. In my mind I don’t know if I did but I would consider my fourth and fifth grade teachers the way they spoke standard and all. At the age I wouldn’t think that they would speak slang and until this day I’m friends with teachers so I am aware you speak in a certain tone with your students and then afterwards you yourself you can be slang or whatever, ... but for me I didn’t see that in them because I thought that they

always spoke like that. I didn't have this perception that everyone must speak like them, I sort of I did like people who spoke in like not a fast pace but not too slow, sort of something in the middle. If there were to be an ideal I would consider that to be a normal way of speaking. We have dialects, I can tell if I'm hearing a Texan accent or a Texas accent, I don't know if that's the proper term, Canadians I can't tell but when we do make fun of the different dialects it would be like we can tell someone who's from the west side and someone from the south like Texas because there's a type of—like I have a friend she is usually travelling from Texas to New York and when she comes back she'll say “Y'all” and we don't say y'all, we say you all. We were aware but we cannot repeat it and so we knew. Then with speaking with teachers in a formal way as opposed to speaking with your friend, then you have a different way of talking you're speaking in slang. Whether you call it practice, it was just the habit also not junior high, I want to say high school, when you feel comfortable you don't have this need of speaking full completely with your friends, with your teacher you do.

Safeena

Bronx accent, I think they are the most aggressive. I just saw this not too long ago, there's a comedian, he was making fun of the different New York accents, he literally went through each borough and he said like people from Queens they sound like this and he would change from each borough and it was so perfect and he says I'm from Brooklyn and do the Brooklyn accent, it's more like on the defense but the Bronx is like more the offense.

“Ps, the Hs, the Zs, the Fs, would be my weakness.”

Safa

I started being corrected for my pronunciation when I was in the fourth grade, there were certain letters I could not pronounce. “H, z” “P, f”. Pronunciation yes, even with the word “supreme,” I would not be able to say “supreme” when I was it fourth grade or fifth because my brother who was in junior high, who’s also in that class before I joined, he used to say “supreme” and I would say something else. Ps, the Hs, the Zs, the Fs, would be my weakness. I don’t know maybe because when you’re taught when we say “f” even this day if someone’s new from back home they will say “ep” or they will say “z” in the British way is “zed,” we are the same. For me I think that was easy to correct, in school my teacher just said “z,” so I’m going to say “z” from now on and I think I picked it up as I spoke as I saw the letters were—they’re like on the wall and for other students that could mean nothing but for me that could be it’s there, there’s a photo with the letter. In fourth grade you don’t need that, if I think about it you learn all that in first or second or even it’s like a review for you at those years and it’s there for decoration purposes like in fourth grade we’re not practicing the letters so but for me seeing I think helped.... If I see letters written in a certain way in script, I used to practice in script in fourth grade and then I would prefer the regular way of writing that’s when I became more comfortable writing and pronouncing just listening. I am very oral, I listen, I can repeat.

I grew up with a lot of African-Americans in junior high. Actually my class was a merge full of immigrants. When someone from the African descent spoke then I knew the sort of accent he was using, it was in English but it was a different accent. Even my own kind when they speak there’s a certain pronunciation that comes out it could be so different from the Standard English. Then on the streets in high school, I went to high school in Brooklyn and the majority was—like the neighborhood was full of Africans and Haitians, yes I was able to differentiate the language. Some pronunciations were

unconscious, you just catch it. Remember I told you the word supreme, I was conscious that I did not know how to say it whereas my brother did. If Mom read it wrong, she would read it in one way and then my brother would fix it that's sort of like him fixing mine unconsciously for me.

When rereading this section on the hierarchical constructions of accents, I posit that Safeena, Safa, and Maisara have interpreted the sounds of English as being tied to geographical regions, and racial and stereotypical categories of English speakers. In other words, the way a person sound was linked to the racialized discourse and stereotypes people may have of a particular linguistic or racial community like the South Indian community being described above as speaking with a 'brown' accent and holding stereotypical jobs like a cab driver or a receptionist at a call center. Motha (2014) describes this construction of language variation and hierarchies as involving the interconnection of place and race. She says:

The language we refer to as English, not so much a single language as a collection of varieties and variations that have been socially coded to belong under the same broad umbrella, is connected to places— be these nations, regions, cities, suburbs, islands— and also, less prominently, to other identity categories, such as gender, race, history, religion, or socioeconomics, and attributed varying levels of social legitimacy accordingly. (p. 40)

Thus, the hierarchical construction of accents involves English dialects spoken within the center the U.K and U.S as well as English varieties that developed in countries where English had developed as a second or foreign language. It is not surprising then to hear of meanings and perceptions attached to a Cockney, Yorkshire, Brooklyn, or Bronx accents. In the conversation above, there is a desire to sound like native speakers (read Standard British English), a sense of shame that their accents were influenced by their mother tongues, a construction of meanings attached to different accents, and an awareness of how accents connote levels of education, status, and power.

In this study, I would like to examine these constructions based on two concepts; the first is ‘passing’ as explicated by Motha (2014) in her book, *Race, Empire, and English Language Teaching: Creating Responsible and Ethical Anti-Racist Practice*, in which she argues that ‘passing’ is “[t]he desire to “sound like a native” and it “seemed to be related to performativity” (p. 93). As much as I would like to do away with this concept of ‘native speakers’ as British, American or Australian Caucasian speakers of Standard English and follow Chomsky’s definition that “everyone is a native speaker of the particular (language) that person has ‘grown’ in his/her mind/brain” (Paikeday, 1985, p. 58, in Willinsky, 1998, p. 195), I feel it would fail to take into considerations the systematic institutionalizations of Standard British English as *the* model of English propagated by the Oxford, Cambridge and Merriam Webster’s dictionaries, the BBC and the British Council. In other words, while the concept of native speakers could further subsumed diverse racial speakers of English, who have acquired Standard English as suggested by Chomsky, what is considered as Standard English is still to a large extent determined by a small group of people who have ‘authority’ over the language by regulating, sanctioning and propagating one version of the language above all else as *the* ‘Standard’ to be upheld.

The second concept I would like to utilize to examine this, is following Walter Dignolo and Reuben Vanquez’s (2013) *Decolonial Aesthetics* as “the consciousness that the modern/colonial project has implied not only control of the economy, the political, and knowledge, but also control over the senses and perception,” albeit a conscious or unconscious control.

In *Pygmalion*, Eliza with the training and encouragement of Professor Higgins and Colonel Pickering, performs this act of ‘passing’ as argued by Motha (2014) in her study. ‘Passing’ is an act when a person attempts to change and transform into an image or persona he or she emulates or desire. In Eliza’s case, it had entailed changing her accent, demeanor, style of dressing and way of talking. In Motha’s research, she discovers that

some students felt a sense of shame being in an ESL class and made as much effort to be part of the mainstream class so as to shed the label as an ESL student and the negative connotations attached to it. These “students were eager to exit ESOL so that they could “pass” as non-ESOL, and some asked to have the blinds drawn in order to conceal their presence in the classroom and thus their enrollment in ESOL. One student habitually pretended not to know the ESOL teacher in order to publicly repudiate any relationship with ESOL services” (p. 93). In Chapter VI, “Interpretation of the Immigrants’ English Education Experiences,” unlike the students in Motha’s research, the participants in this research had found and sought safety and solace from their ESL classes to the extent that Sabah had even chosen to fail her ESOL exam so as to remain in the ESL class. They had also sought solidarity and camaraderie with other immigrant students who were struggling to learn English as they did.

The participants in this research may not have gone through such drastic changes as that of Eliza, but consciously or unconsciously, they have received subtle or unsubtle messages on aspects of themselves they needed to change so as to ‘assimilate’ to the local community and made the decision to retain or reinforce aspects of their ‘difference’ tied to their multiple identities. This act of ‘passing’ should be seen as an evolving fluctuating process, which Maisara had demonstrated when she would change her accents according to the sounds of the people she spoke to. Motha (2014), however, argues that the term ‘passing’ has a negative connotation to it, in that it “suggests theft, implying that the identity being donned is illegitimately obtained, purloined. In order to pass as something, logic demands as a point of departure that one is unequivocally not that thing” (pp. 94-95). It becomes like a persona one puts on much like an actor and then put aside to return to a ‘real’ self. This view suggests the ‘self’ is a fixed category and there are legitimate and illegitimate ‘selves.’ It reminds me of my colleague’s query as to how I could ‘look’ Malay and sound ‘British’ or my former lecturer’s image of me dressing in a blouse and skirt rather than Malaysia’s national dress ‘*Baju Kurung*’ to suit my accent.

Both examples assume a legitimacy and illegitimacy of a ‘self’ attached to concepts like second language speakers, race and nationality. Such view limits possibilities and imaginative crossings. Motha (2014) goes on to argue that “[s]uch ideologies exclude the possibility of gradation in these identities..... However, the reality is that nativeness is not a concrete category” (pp. 94-95).

Pfeiffer (2003), in her research on racial passing among African Americans, found that passing could be “associated with a lack of loyalty, self-hatred, and an abdication of Black identity, all undergirded by an assumption that Blackness and Whiteness are mutually exclusive” (in Motha, 2014, p. 94). Motha (2014) makes a similar argument in that ESL speakers when making the effort to speak like native speakers of English could be accused as hating “part of oneself that is not a “native-English speaker,” the self-hatred of the colonized” (p. 94). I’m not certain that is always the case here. My own interpretation is that these participants were eager to access the language in order to succeed academically and career wise since they all viewed their migration to the U.S. as giving them access to “job security and educational opportunities” (Farah), and their general belief that “the U.S would give us a better life and future.” What they have done is to develop a sophisticated linguistic repertoire and awareness as to when and with whom one speaks a particular language or dialect with. In other words, they may have learnt to compartmentalize the languages they spoke to different context, person and function. It may not necessarily be shame that always drive their choice of language acquisition or use, but a pragmatic one. Willinsky (1998), in his book, *Learning to Divide the World: Education at Empire’s End*, argues, “Languages are not lost by accident or unwillingly forsaken. They give way to other desires, desires to join and be heard in other conversations, which left us happy enough to leave behind the accent and inflection of our former history and geography” (p. 190). Thus, learning to sound like a native speaker of English was not seen as a threat to their racial identity nor should it be.

It may be the case that these participants and I would never ‘sound’ like a native speaker of English nor do we need to. There is a range of intelligible pronunciations in that as long as you are close enough to the ‘ideal’ pronunciation and intelligible to the general speakers of the language, it is good enough. A few researchers (Braine, 1999; Cook, 1999) have argued “that the goal of nativeness or even native-like proficiency was not only untenable for language learners, it was of dubious utility and desirability” (Motha, 2014, p. 42). In other words, second language speakers of English may not need to ‘pass’ off completely as a native speaker like that demanded of Eliza Doolittle, in order to do well academically and economically (except if you’re a BBC² presenter). Nor will they suffer the threat Professor Higgins gave Eliza: “If the King finds out you’re not a lady, you will be taken by the police to the Tower of London, where your head will be cut off as a warning to other presumptuous flower girls” (Excerpt from: Shaw, 1912, *Pygmalion*, iBooks).

At the same time, I am reluctant to use the word ‘natural’ when describing the transition my participants and I have gone through in our journey as second language speakers of English because it assumes the decision making process as not being affected by the discourse of language and power. How then do we explain sufficiently the reason Safeena declared that “British accent (has) more elegance and sophistication whereas American language is like aggressive”; Safa’s perception of her weakness when she found it difficult to pronounce certain letters like “H, z” “P, f”; and Safeena’s strong feeling that she had “to get rid of the brown accent, I have to pick up the English accent.”

Here, I would like to turn to a concept developed by Mignolo and Vanquez (2013) called ‘decolonial aesthesis’ by way of explaining how our perceptions and senses are shaped by films, art, theatre, and literature and following this study, ESL teaching and

²The BBC has been a role model of Received Pronunciation and indirectly sanction the accepted ‘sounds of English.’

learning. They argue that modern and postmodern movements have a dominant agenda of controlling our idea and values related to beauty, perception, taste, smell, touch, and auditory. It challenges the notion that the shaping of these perception and senses are ‘universal’ and ‘natural’ constructions. This concept is very similar to Bourdieu’s discussion of ‘Distinction’ in which he argues, “systems of domination find expression in virtually all areas of cultural practice and symbolic exchange” (Johnson, 1993, p. 2, in Bourdieu, 1993, p. 2). We begin to develop a general sense of taste which classifies objects and in turn “classify the classifiers. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make ... in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 2). In my own interpretation, making the effort to sound like a native speaker is simply pragmatic, but to form judgments, attach meanings to various accents and labeling a particular accent as ‘sophisticated,’ ‘aggressive,’ ‘educated,’ ‘uneducated,’ and ‘posh’ involve another layer of value judgment. The pertinent question is how do we form such judgments? Mignolo and Vanquez (2013) argue that ‘coloniality’ as a dominant movement to control not only “the economy, the political, and knowledge, but also control over the senses and perception” could help to explain these very subtle constructions of our sensibility. As part of an exam Mignolo had administered to his students studying his course on ‘Decolonial aesthetics’, Michelle K,³ a student of Mignolo, had written a letter to her younger self by way of explaining the workings of coloniality on her own perception and senses. In the letter she had written this about coloniality:

Coloniality continues, in fact, whenever bright young men and women from all over the world decide to cap off their educations by going on pilgrimage to pinnacles of Western civilization...., and learn that this is the

³ You can read the entirety of the letter at:

1). <https://decolonizingthecoldwar.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/bebop-2013-catalogue-online.pdf>
 2). <http://waltermignolo.com/decolonial-aesthetics-from-singapore-to-cambridge-to-duke-university/>

good life. It continues whenever anyone anywhere in the world walks down a street and sees a billboard on the modern cathedral that is a shopping mall, and sees in that conjunction of power, wealth, and beauty an image of desire. In other words, it happens these days not by the strength of arms or the power of states, but by the captivation of the eyes, the training of the taste, by unwritten rules of thumb – that we all learn everywhere, without even knowing it. Coloniality is far from over: it is *all* over. It is perhaps the most powerful set of forces in the modern world.

I posit here that the participants' discussion on the hierarchical constructions of accents could be more sufficiently explained by utilizing Mignolo and Vanquez's (2013) conception of 'decolonial aesthesis.' I have chosen to include this theme in my writing, even though only three of the participants made conscious mentions of it while for the other participants, it may be unconscious or it did not figure so prominently in their consciousness in relation to the interpretations of their English education experiences, because when doing my own reflexive writing, I had discovered how my perception of accents was shaped by the films I had watched like *The Sound of Music* and *My Fair Lady*. While I am only examining one aspect of this colonial aesthesis i.e. accents, it speaks to other subtle forms 'coloniality' could take shape. How often do we go about our daily life without questioning these underlying assumptions or worse still view them as a 'natural' progression of an education?

Chapter IX

THE *HIJABIS* AND NON *HIJABIS*:

CONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE MUSLIM AMERICANS

HIGGINS [rising hastily and running to Mrs. Higgins] Here she is, mother. [He stands on tiptoe and makes signs over his mother's head to Eliza to indicate to her which lady is her hostess].

Eliza, who is exquisitely dressed, produces an impression of such remarkable distinction and beauty as she enters that they all rise, quite flustered. Guided by Higgins's signals, she comes to Mrs. Higgins with studied grace.

LIZA [speaking with pedantic correctness of pronunciation and great beauty of tone] How do you do, Mrs. Higgins? [She gasps slightly in making sure of the H in Higgins, but is quite successful]. Mr. Higgins told me I might come.

MRS. HIGGINS [cordially] Quite right: I'm very glad indeed to see you.

HIGGINS [eagerly] Well? Is Eliza presentable [he swoops on his mother and drags her to the ottoman, where she sits down in Eliza's place with her son on her left]?

MRS. HIGGINS. You silly boy, of course she's not presentable. She's a triumph of your art and of her dressmaker's; but if you suppose for a moment that she doesn't give herself away in every sentence she utters, you must be perfectly cracked about her. (Excerpt from: George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*, iBooks)

In the excerpt from *Pygmalion* above, Eliza fell short of impressing Mrs. Higgins with her speech after months of being under Professor Higgins' tutelage and hours of repeated practice. Even though she may have looked and dressed the part, and her pronunciation and intonation were perfect, her choice of topic was seen as less becoming of a 'lady'. Mrs. Higgins had attributed her uncouth conversation to the influence of

Professor Higgins! The excerpt above represented a construction of a high class lady, who members of that part of the community would deem as ‘acceptable’ or the ‘norm.’ In our postmodern world, such concerns may be seen as rigid or unexpected. We may no longer need to adhere to such rigid constructions but nevertheless there are still subtle ways in which our experiences and the media send messages of how we and others should view certain constructs. Thus, in this research I wanted to inquire deeply into how and to what extent – or not -- the participants felt aspects of their multiple identities, such as being a *hijabi* or non *hijabi*, fit into the social cultural and political contexts they were in and to what extent they feel that they do – or perhaps even must -- acquiesce, reinterpret or reject the many narratives inscribed upon these constructs.

The *hijab* has become an identity marker for Muslim women and it is also a point of contention outside as well as inside the Muslim community. Not only are the styles and colors of the *hijab* as varied as fashion, but the idea of modesty varies greatly in predominantly Muslim countries and in countries where Muslims are minorities. Thus, it entails that its treatment too ranges from it being legally obligatory on women to it being seen as a choice a woman decides for herself to it being banned altogether in France. I remember being on a transit in Dubai, as I was flying home to Malaysia during the summer break, and seeing a woman in full black *hijab* that covered her whole body except her eyes. She pushed her trolley into the toilet, and minutes later she emerged from the toilet in blue jeans and long sleeve shirt, and the only way I had recognized she was the same person was by the luggage on the trolley she was pushing. I was somewhat perplexed by her ‘unravelling,’ but then I thought she must’ve come from countries like Saudi Arabia where it was obligatory for her to don the *hijab*. She only removed it when she felt it was ‘safe’ for her to do so. My friend Maryam, who was originally from Iran, also spoke to me about how she was forced to wear the *hijab* and being ‘policed’ on her actions and what she wore. She saw the *hijab* as oppressive and I don’t blame her as it was imposed against her will.

My own experience was somewhat different as I did not feel the pressure to wear it as I was growing up and in Malaysia, it is not legally obligatory either. I started wearing the veil when I was 22 years old when I was studying in the U.K. While the general community in which I had lived was conservative, and after puberty girls were encouraged to wear veils, within my own family, my parents had never made my sisters and I feel like we had to. My mother wore the veil when she was much older, as some Muslim women saw the need to wear it as a symbolic gesture of leaving ‘worldly’ pursuits behind as one ages and moving a step forward in preparation for the afterlife. While other women who don the *hijab* at an earlier age saw the need to maintain their modesty, protect themselves from admiring, envious or lustful eyes, and freeing themselves from being sexual objects so they could pursue their goals in this life. The concept of modesty itself is so varied amongst the Muslim community. Some women do not feel the need to wear a veil, while others would wear a loose scarf (e.g., Benazir Bhutto) or a wrap on the head (e.g., Malaysian singer songwriter Yuna). The veil itself varies in terms of length, color, style and thickness.

In this section, I’ve interpreted themes related to how I heard and saw participants discuss their relationship to the *hijab*; how they negotiated being practicing Muslims in the U.S.; how they interpreted the U.S. and perhaps world-wide media perpetuated negative perceptions of Muslims; if and how they countered prejudice and ignorance; and how they perceived aspects of being Muslims that were suspected and rejected by the larger public.¹

As Muslims, they were aware of how their practices, such as fasting during Ramadan or wearing the *hijab*, may be viewed as being ‘different’ because they would

¹Azlina: I was talking about your identity as a Muslim. How do you find being a Muslim American here, your experience being a Muslim American? I want to ask you about the *hijab*, your decision to wear the *hijab* and what do you think of people’s perception, what are their reactions towards you wearing the *hijab*?

sometimes be asked questions about it. In particular, some people may view these practices as being harsh or oppressive and as contradicting Western lifestyles. These participants, from my point of view, seemed to have developed a double consciousness in that they were aware that there were aspects to their Muslimness that would be suspected, scrutinized and even rejected.

For example, Safeena was asked questions about her practices because some people found the Muslim way of life hard, though she thought that people were becoming more accepting as she explained it to them. She was aware of how her way of life may contradict 'Western' living. Being here in the U.S. I think that my study participants were in a position to also examine their own and others' cultural practices that they agree or disagree with. There are aspects of practices here in the U.S. that Safeena, for example, found troubling and aspects of practices in some Islamic countries as well equally troubling. It's a lens in which they all seemed to be able to hold on to competing narratives in their minds, and to use these to judge their own and others' cultural practices.

While Leyla relayed to me that she had never experienced racism because people may not have been aware she was a Muslim, as she did not wear a *hijab*, she did get affected when she heard of other Muslim women being mistreated because of their religious garment. She recalled incidents where a Muslim girl was being told to get out of the country and another Muslim being told she didn't belong at the 9/11 memorial, regardless of the fact that Muslims were victims too in 9/11. She didn't understand how people could spew such vitriol towards a person they knew nothing about. Having organized an Islamic awareness week, she hoped that would help build the bridge between Muslim community in NY and the larger public and close the gap of ignorance. Leyla felt that as a Muslim while she dressed modestly, she felt like she was not modest enough because she was not covering her head. I remember in our conversation, I tried to convince her that she didn't need to wear a headscarf to be considered modest but she

still somehow felt strongly that she should. I didn't want her to feel judged for not wearing a *hijab* as I remembered I too didn't wear the *hijab* until I was 22 years old and I would not have appreciated being judged for it.

Farah too didn't wear the headscarf in school so the other students didn't know she was a Muslim until she told them she could not date because of her religion. She was aware of how her not dating could be perceived as being different when she said, "and to explain the weirdness." She demarcated her identity as Muslim into private space. So she was more American in public spaces but remained a Muslim at home. Her brother tried to hide it from his friends initially in High School but now he was more open about his identity as a Muslim. We discussed how we got more respect being *hijabis*. People wouldn't curse around you or tell crude jokes, flirt with you, date you unless they were serious, and respected our personal space. Also there were certain expectations that come with wearing a *hijab*, like you have to behave better in public.

We discussed the media's role in portraying Muslim women negatively. However, this negative perception could be countered by acts of kindness by Muslims, and convince people that we are not a threat to the public. It was crucial for Muslims to interact with non-Muslims in order to counter the negative perception portrayed in the media. Thus, the importance of Muslims to be full part of the community is important, we all agreed, because isolating yourself would only be counterproductive. Hannah, for example, decided to set up a more inclusive society, since there were not enough Muslims in her college, that included students of Eastern cultures. They would make visits to a mosque and a Hindu temple, and experience Indian food. Safa did a lesson on *henna*, which is part of her cultural heritage, with her students because they were curious about her identity as a Muslim.

Farah felt the Muslim community in the U.S. – or at least in New York City -- was too judgmental of its own community particularly when you did not fulfill the standards accorded to being a Muslim like wearing a *hijab*, etc. A safe community space like the

MSA of NYU was needed so Muslims would feel safe from judgments from a wider community, who may not always be as understanding of our problems or issues and easily attribute it to everything wrong in Islam. They also felt we needed to counter the judgment and ignorance in our own community particularly in relation to interfaith relationships and understandings, so Muslims would not feel threatened by other faiths.

In this study, as the concept, opinions, meanings and treatment of the *hijab* varied greatly in society, the participants demonstrated levels of awareness of the *hijab*'s acceptance in their daily interaction, not just amongst the non-Muslims but also within the Muslim community itself. The *hijab* served as an identity and religious marker, a code of conduct, a threat, an education, and a form of respect for these participants.

“I think nowadays when they’re so used to watching *Hijabis* they have more respect toward it than just sympathy.”

Safeena

I was going through Facebook, a friend she posted one of the pictures, she was like white people asking this white girl, aren't you hot in this? *Hijabi* was like we're even hotter inside. Wearing a *hijab*, I think nowadays when they're so used to watching *Hijabis* they have more respect toward it than just sympathy. I think every year that I get that question, I got *Ramadan* and *Hijab*, ... I think each year their respect is developing, probably it's just me-- About *hijab* one girl comes in and she was like, “Are you Muslim?” People would ask me about *Ramadan*, “You can't eat at all the entire day, I would die if that has to happen to me, Islam is so hard.” I'll tell you why it is such an inconvenience to them because the western society is built exactly opposite to the *deen*, the standard. In the sense that you know how Islam is a way of life, there are many ways to do certain things, everything about the society even at a lifestyle we live right now is not compatible with Islam. For example, in the bathroom, it's a very popular example we

don't have water in the bathroom. Here's what annoys me it's not even about Islam it's about hygiene.

“I've never been picked on maybe because I don't wear a *hijab*.”

Leyla

I've never been picked on maybe because I don't wear a *hijab*. I have been told that I look like a Muslim girl. I've never had a problem with the community but it does hurt me when I see things happen to others who were like mistreated. The other day, Wednesday morning, I woke up and I was on my Facebook and a friend of mine actually posted a news report and I read it and it was in Queens, a fifteen year old girl who was on the bus on Tuesday morning and a man in his mid thirties starting cursing and spitting at her because she was wearing a *hijab* and he was like you're a Muslim why are you are and she was like--- he was just cursing at her and like spitting at her and everybody else who was on the bus didn't even say anything, they were just laughing and watching what was happening. And the police are investigating it like a hate crime. The fact that you're watching a fifteen year old girl --- forget about the fact that she's Muslim ... trying to go to school in the morning and a man is cursing and spitting at her and you're watching and laughing about it. It's inhuman to do it, it's not normal, why would you not help the girl. She's fifteen years old, it's not like she's a twenty year old girl and she can help herself. It's so devastating, I woke up in the morning and that was just the first thing I read, it was just so upsetting. I think if this is more than ten years after the 9/11 and you're still treating people this way, like why? You don't know if that girl has been born here, you don't know if she lost someone at the 9/11 event or if she has family who's getting hurt now because of the wars back in the other countries. You don't know who's what so who are you to judge someone just because they have a headscarf or because they are dressed

a certain way or they say certain things, they believe in certain things, you can't judge them. Why do you do that? As a Muslim seeing that makes me really upset.

Whenever I'm able to expose the community to Islam and the right things in Islam and how kind Islam is, this week we were having the Islamic awareness week in our school and we were giving talks and telling the people about Islam and informing them about the misconceptions they have, that's really good. I feel like everyone should do this and teach non-Muslims about Islam, even Muslim people. Me, even though I'm Muslim, there are a lot things I don't know and I still need to learn.... That's really helpful as well as a Muslim in a non-Muslim community, it's hard sometimes. I've never personally had an experience where someone was like, oh you're Muslim, you don't (*inaudible*) or something like that. I've had a friend who was right after the 9/11 they were at one of the memorials site, she was sitting on the bench and some guy just came up to her and she was like you can't sit here. Some Caucasian guy was like, you can't stay here this is--- I forgot but what it was because she was Muslim, she was being told not to be there. There are so many things that people don't understand and they just judge people based on not the right things. Like I said, I'm still very disconnected from the Islamic clique community and stuff but I'm starting to get more involved but no, I don't like looking to cases and stuff like that.

I don't think I've ever been --like because I'm Muslim I've been treated differently than anyone else. I haven't had that experience, maybe because of the way I dress or the way I present myself when I'm outside. Maybe it would have been different if I was wearing a *hijab* and it was apparent too that I am Muslim. From the way I am, if you really know what Muslims are like, you might be able to tell I'm Muslim but if you're just another man passing by me or another person passing by me, you don't necessarily know that I'm a Muslim. I do have sometimes like people assume I'm Muslim because I look so Bengali and it's assumed to that Bengalis are Muslim. Other than that I've never had to---so I've never had an incident. Being a Muslim person I do present myself in a

certain way. I feel I'm more modest, I never wear tank tops, I never wear shorts, I'm always wearing jeans up to my ankle, mostly covering my arms, wearing clothes that have sleeves and stuff like that. I, myself like to be at least a little bit modest, maybe not as modest as I should be, but I'm working on it. I feel very strongly about Islam but I've never been judged because of it.... Honestly, modesty is to cover everything, not to show off the shape of your body and stuff like that. It doesn't give me the right to judge someone else who is wearing a miniskirt and who is Muslim since I'm not doing the right thing. I've been thinking about everything lately like I'm getting there---but yes, I've never had an incident where I was being judged because I was a Muslim.

“I wasn't wearing the *hijab* so nobody knew I was a Muslim.”

Farah

I wasn't wearing the *hijab* so nobody knew I was a Muslim. No or even college until recently so my brother and I didn't go through much oppression because they didn't know we were Muslims. In middle school nobody cares, it never come up. But high school, no one talks about it until it's different from them like why did you do, why are you not doing this? For example, like dating, I would have people asking me and I said I can't, my religion we don't do that, and they're like what religion are you by the way? And I'm like I'm a Muslim like oh it's very hard for them to process, like you know that's when it will come out. Usually it won't come up.

My brother really hated being a Muslim, I never cared about it, my brother he hid it for a while because boys and girls go through different struggles, my brother's struggle is like mine is nothing compared to what he went through in high school, it changed his personality, and he viewed himself completely, so there's a problem, it's sad, there's a deep problem in the African American community, like I think it's all because of poverty, you know because you're poor, and you look upon yourself down, you have to find ways

to put everybody else's down. So my brother has his own story so that's why he felt like he had to hide his religion but now *Alhamdulillah*, he talks about it and he talks about it with his friends, and he's like I don't care, I'm going to talk about it anyway, so now *Alhamdulillah* because he is in college now it's different, but in high school that conversation never really happened unless like I said about dating, like why aren't you dating, why don't you want to go out with me, and I'm like cause I don't like you. Just because you like me doesn't mean it's mutual. Honestly, I love the excuse because I didn't have to explain anything you know, I never like talking to guys anyway. So it's like an excuse to leave me alone. And to explain the weirdness. (laugh) I used to be in the middle.

When I was at home I pray everything and when I was in school like before wearing the *hijab*, I don't think I remembered I was a Muslim. You became that culture. So that's what you do. You minimize bringing anything about Islam or having to explain anything like you just don't talk about it so at home you're one person at school your friends would never know this person...you do things and your friends would ask what are you doing so that's what you do, you just balance it out and until usually you go through a situation that forces you to choose a side and for me I ended up choosing my religion. But some people or some situations forces you to go to the extreme like in the beginning through middle and high school you are hovering in the middle I don't know what it is but it was just there. I feel it's the media. They make people question us.

So like most of my friends are non-Muslims and before I was wearing the *hijab*, they knew I was a Muslim, it's also the way you carry yourself, I always maintain don't curse in front of me I don't like that or don't say certain vulgar words out loud so my friends would always be cautious of what they say or where they invite me to, and when I become a *hijabi*, before I became a *hijab* I never had a *hijab* friend ever, barely had Muslims in my school so when I came to college I see Muslims wow Muslims. They see her with respect like holy they saw her like that. I saw her as pure she's better than me

she's pure. You have that instant she's a godly kind of girl but the second she started cursing and like behaving like what they knew Muslim women didn't do, the respect just went down. From my perspective she lost that respect that is given. It's both what you wear and your behavior. Your behavior confirms what this represents.

But the media tries to make Muslims like bad people and so sometimes people who never talk to Muslims just want to hate but the second they start talking to a Muslim they'd say I'm so sorry. So I went to a conference once and there was this woman. She was doing voluntary work during the hurricane. She and a group of *hijabi* volunteers went to help the neighborhood; they'll buy pizza or hot food to give it to people for free. So she went to this house and she knocked the door of we have pizza do you want some. The lady opened the door and she said I'm so sorry I'm so sorry. And the *hijabis* were wondering what was going on. Apparently the lady was one of the heads who headed up effort against the Islamic Centre near ground zero. She was one of the women headed up the demonstrations. She said I'm so sorry. I didn't know. They tell us these things. I didn't know. I've never met Muslims before. This is the first time I'm talking to a Muslim. That little act of kindness that *Hijabi* and her friends did change this extremist woman against Islam. She said I'm sorry begging for forgiveness so think of the media, the more we separate ourselves from the community because we are afraid they may think we are bad it becomes extremist in their views. Until they interact with a Muslim, we are terrorists.

“I was a student-teacher with the *hijab* ... these were third grade students who were interested in asking what I am, who I am and then I did a lesson on henna.”

Safa

I think the fact that I was a student-teacher with the *hijab* ... these were third grade students who were interested in asking what I am, who I am and then I did a lesson on

henna and what it was and the tree and then the fact that we did like a project with everyone getting henna. I feel that the students saw something different in their class. They did see student teachers as maybe in their second grade, in their first grade but then at third that's when you question or you ask and you have your own comfort they are sort of like mini adults I feel that in third. in first and kindergarten I observe a bridge class and it's kind of like me in terms of seeing everybody as equal, you see that in K1 bridge, the students—yes, they pick up differences but they're not so picky about it to exaggerate about the differences.

In third, the students, not towards me I'm saying amongst one another and if I were to put myself as a student in that context I would be more of that first grader than that third who would sort of question and like fidget in class like instead of going along, they would test the limits of the teachers and I was able to see that. I think in both they wondered who I am, the look but in the first, we went on a trip to the New York Botanical Garden and it felt as if there was a lot of—this is a group thing but I think if we did that trip for the third grader it would be different, like my experience or their perception towards me would be different as opposed to the little ones. I don't know if that made sense to you. The first graders obviously I didn't do the henna experience with them, I did that with the third graders because there was one who asked what it was and then I talked about it with the teacher and I said can I do that and then I was able to teach them. The students loved the henna experience, most of the girls and even some of the boys. I told them where I can it get from and I got it and some of the parents also, they were whites, some of the parents were whites, some were mixed and some of the students were mixed, black and white and then their kids were half and half.

“Does this make my head look big?”

Hannah

I was the only Muslim woman on campus who wears a *hijab* in Skidmore college liberal arts upstate New York, it's a cute college, really pricy. There were expectations on campus from different administrators in college who asked me to head an MSA and I said with whom? Me, myself and I? Like how would this work. There were four other Muslim people on campus but I didn't know what I had to say they would identify with it. So I created something different which was more inclusive, that's where I came from, called Hayat, which means 'life' like six different languages like Arabic, Urdu, Turkish, Hindi, and two others. It's essentially the meaning of Eastern relationship, who people identify with in terms of the Middle East, Malaysia and India and those were the people who came to the club. We went to the mosque to see what it looks like, we got back on the bus and then went to an Indian food and restaurant nearby and then got back on the bus to go to a Hindu temple.

I read the book a year or two ago, *Does this make my head look big?*, written by an Australian Muslim girl, she had a Middle Eastern background, she's an Aussie. She talked about how she self identified as a Muslim, she decided she would wear the *hijab*, her parents were doctors and like medical college doctors. It's interesting because she found her middle and it was great. I remember after reading it and putting it down going to my friend's house, “Your niece she would love this book you need to make her read this book”, because she was a young Muslim woman and I thought this was a way to kind of guide her to have like a middle ground.

I'm pretty much in the middle, I wore the *hijab* in high school I wore the *hijab* as early as middle school so I know some of my friends wouldn't curse around me, to this day I'm a student teacher, the teachers wouldn't curse around me, they would apologize, I'm like you don't need to curse, there are other ways to express your feelings, there are

other words, if you want I can help you figure out a few words. That's the kind of respect that you get as a Muslim *hijabi*. Like guys don't talk to you, I'm just like really?! Whatever. None of the BS, no flirting, things are kept to a minimum, like my friends you don't need to hug me, we like see each other everyday it's not necessary. I think I got a little more respect than some of the teachers. These were not even Muslim guys, there weren't any Muslim guys in my school, not even one. So all the non-Muslim guys were extremely respectful and kept their distance and like no she's like marriage material, you don't do anything to her. (laugh) We went to a lot of school trips, we were at an outer city trip. The coordinator walked in and I didn't have my *hijab* so I ducked under the desk and he was like 'Alright I'm sorry, I'm coming out, Is everything ok?' and I said, "Yes ... I was just wearing my *hijab* ... I'm fully clothed everything's fine ... we're good we're alright."

“She’s not a terrorist. She’s not reading the Quran.”

Sabah

High school middle school I wear pants shirts it was just the *hijab*. But when I went to college it was more my own like I can make my own decision in that sense and I decided I was going to wear the *niqab* now. I chose the religion side as well. Like the respect you get like you know I remember in High School they would not say anything in front of me. I knew they would probably talk behind my back and they would make fun of you. The boys they behaved, the jokes would not be in front of you. I actually remember one boy he was a senior when I was a freshman so he was when we would walk past each other in the hallway he would say, ‘*Assalamualaikum*’ he was Muslim but that was it, no eye contact nothing, he would just walk straight by you. I remember we would go to Pace university campus on a school trip, when we used to go for a four-day trip there, the teacher would stay up all night, to make sure we don't cross rooms (to the

boys/girls). At night the (male) teacher Singh would double check the rooms but he wouldn't come into my room because then I wouldn't sleep in my *hijab* so the lady Arun would always check on me and they would always take night pictures of you sleeping for fun, embarrassing pictures of you sleeping they would share on your last day but they never took a picture of me. I take the bus everyday and people see me with the *Niqab* and they start moving away. They'll keep a little distance. But if you get a conversation started all of a sudden they are calm now. "Oh the bus is coming," I'll say. They'll calm down. She knows how to speak English. I remember once I held a woman's hand because it was snowing and she was about to slip. At first she seemed reluctant to take my hand but then she did. And she said thank you thank you. And yesterday when I caught a train, a woman she just rushed into the train she was about to come and sit next to me and then she stopped, she then she saw me reading a book and it was an English book she came and sat next to me, ok she's fine. She's not a terrorist. She's not reading the *Quran*² (we laugh).

"We need an accepting community, we have a judgmental community."

Farah

We need an accepting community, we have a judgmental community. When I was a *non hijabi*, I wouldn't go to the MSA because I didn't want I felt left out, it was a daunting thing, and even my *non hijabi* friends reluctantly come there, I have to say "Come it's ok." So when I become a *hijabi* I realize we don't have a community that says it's ok if you don't have a beard, it's ok if you don't wear *hijab*, we are all sisters and brothers. I don't know why but we have this looking down being judgmental, and so we

²Here is a list of incidents where Muslims or suspected Muslims were escorted off planes or detained when they were perceived as threats. <https://www.mintpressnews.com/9-things-they-wont-let-you-do-on-a-plane-if-you-are-muslim/219274/>

need a non-judgmental community so that's why I love about NYU. Their MSA is so non judgmental. I feel so comfortable when I go there. All types of Muslims. People are good they have knowledge but no wisdom, a lot of sisters have so much knowledge but no wisdom. They see your actions and they conclude because you are this. I remember one sister said *astagfirullah*³ to read the Bible or the Torah, some people read it to know what's in those books, it's haram, you're Muslims, they will attack your Muslimness. Yes, so what happens is I had my middle ground Muslim saw me wearing the *hijab* and going to the MSA and they told me be careful because some people there who are going to judge you and that's when I realize they don't go to the MSA as much. They go for *Jumaat*⁴ prayer but they don't go because they see there's a group of extremely religious people who see one action and don't understand like knowledge but no wisdom. They don't know how to apply the *Sunnah*.⁵ They are good at quoting it they don't think about this person's situation what's their intention and that's the problem.

In my discussion of the *hijab*, I had utilized “postcolonial,” “third world women feminism” and “poststructuralism” as my conceptual frameworks, so as to examine the symbolic meanings and interpretations my participants had attached to it and their experiences; its treatment in the U.S. in positioning the participants' sense of belonging; whilst being cognizant of the varied discourses surrounding this one piece of clothing, without absolving myself of the potential biasness that Mohanty (1988) had argued so succinctly Western feminist researchers may be guilty of when researching with/on third world women. Mohanty's main protest is that there are “assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality ... and inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of

³Astagfirullah means ‘I seek forgiveness from Allah s.w.t’

⁴Jumaat - Friday

⁵Sunnah is a way of life for Muslims following the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) practices.

Western scholarship on the 'third world' in the context of a world system dominated by the West” (p. 63). In this study, I could extend this further to how the discourse surrounding the *hijab* as a garment that exemplifies modesty don by Muslim women (not all of them) could be viewed as signs of oppression, subservience, or a threat through Western eyes.

Joan Wallach Scott (2007), in her book *The Politics of the Veil*, examined the issue of the French’s decision in 2004 to ban religious symbols, such as the veil, cross, turbans and skullcap, in public schools. Scott argues that the ban was particularly focused on the veil, even though it had covered all religious symbols, so as to appear ‘fair’ in its treatment. In her book, Scott examined how “the veil became a screen onto which were projected images of strangeness and fantasies of danger.” France’s ban on the veil was soon followed by a few other European (e.g., Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey) and African (e.g., Chad, Cameroon, Niger) countries (Sanghani, 2016), although most of the ban had focused on the full or partly covered face or the *niqab* (remember my own discomfort when meeting a Muslim woman wearing the *niqab*). Scott’s examination of the ban in France provided a more nuanced argument and she argued that the decision was not based on the reductionist factor of ‘culture’ alone, which would ultimately perpetuate the sole ‘clash of civilizations’ argument. Instead, she convincingly argued the complex intertwining of various factors such as France’s “racism, postcolonial guilt and fear, and nationalist ideologies, including republicanism, secularism, abstract individualism, and, especially, French norms of sexual conduct taken to be both natural and universal” (Scott, 2007, p. 10) as contributing to the passing of the law against the use of this religious marker in public.

I find myself when discussing about the *hijab*, in constant tensions between adhering to an Islamic practice it claimed would protect women from being sexually objectified and a practice that constructs meanings of women’s sexuality not necessarily in a positive light. The *hijab* is more than a piece of cloth. It is closely tied to the concept

of ‘modesty’ is Islam, which Leyla described as “cover(ing) everything, not to show off the shape of your body.” It is tied to Muslim women’s identity, sexuality, religiosity, politics and culture. I cannot examine the *hijab* without entangling my own and my participants’ experiences and interpretations of it as a symbol, and my awareness of how other non-Muslims may reinscribe their own values and interpretations.

I remember, in my teenage years, when I was growing up in the conservative East coast state of Malaysia, Terengganu, walking home from school, and encountering an older man who looked at me (or to be more precise, my chest) and declared how ‘big’ I was (Note: he wasn’t referring to my height). In one utterance, he had made me feel self-conscious and ashamed of my sexuality. The message I had received in that one encounter was how dangerous being a fully bodied woman was and the ideal modest figure, at least from the perspective of this one misguided old man, is a prepubescent body, flat chested and without curves. I take care to hide my chest behind my veil when I am in Malaysia but not in the U.S. though. The perverted patriarchal view of some Muslim men who blame women’s bodies for enticing men to sin, irks me, as if they hold no responsibility, accountability and self-restraint. Neither do I enjoy men’s ‘attention’ when they stare, glare, follow, wolf whistle or chat you up, when you are just walking on the street. While these two approaches seem the opposite on their treatment of women, the first being a fear of women’s sexuality and the latter an exploitation of it, they are in fact two sides of the same coin. Personally, I feel they completely disrespect women because they limit our humanity to one aspect of our being. What is more important to me as a Muslim woman is the rights and opportunity I receive, that is, if I am given access to education, equal pay and treatment. Muslims who insist on Muslim women’s adherence to the *hijab*, as mentioned by Farah when she referred to a judgmental Muslim community, who would chastise its members they felt had acted in ways that was perceived as less Muslim, irks me. It is equally irksome when some people want to ban it altogether on the premise that it is a sign of oppression of women and we Muslim women

need to be emancipated from such backward archaic practice. Both are infantile treatment of women. I feel Muslim women should be given the choice to choose when (if at all), how, what form and the meanings they attach to wearing the *hijab*.

The concept, opinions, meanings and treatment of the *hijab* varied greatly in society. In this study, the participants demonstrated levels of awareness of the *hijab*'s acceptance in their daily interaction, not just amongst the non-Muslims but also within the Muslim community itself. The *hijab* served as an identity and religious marker, a code of conduct, a threat, an exotic piece of clothing, an education, and a form of respect for these participants. I know for me in Malaysia, my wearing the *hijab* is seen as the norm and any form of scrutiny would be on my fashion choice or my adherence to the concept of 'modesty' when wearing it. I remember, whilst in the U.S., a Korean student had asked me if I felt warm wearing the *hijab* (it was summer and we were having a picnic at Central Park!), in which I responded, "*Well, it keeps me warm in the winter*". The question I was asked bear similar sentiments with the question Maisara was asked, "*Hey, how do you guys go swimming, you wear all that stuff?*"

There are other instances, however, whereby a few of the participants felt they were accepted and respected. Sabah's account of going on a school fieldtrip and spending the night, and the teacher's nightly ritual was to check on the students in their room, but the male teacher would not come into Sabah's room out of respect for her privacy. She had also recounted how the teachers would skip taking photos of her, a practice they had done with other students, while she was sleeping because she wasn't wearing her *niqab*. She said,

I remember we would go to Pace university campus on a school trip, when we used to go for a four-day trip there, the teacher would stay up all night, to make sure we don't cross rooms (to the boys/girls). At night the (male) teacher Singh would double check the rooms but he wouldn't come into my room because then I wouldn't sleep in my *hijab* so the lady Arun would always check on me and they would always take night pictures of you

sleeping for fun, embarrassing pictures of you sleeping they would share on your last day but they never took a picture of me.

Their actions had touched Sabah since it had demonstrated a level of sensitivity and respect towards her beliefs. Hannah too had talked about feeling respected by her school mates and teachers. She gave a few examples like her teachers not cursing in front of her, how her male schoolmates would see her as 'marriage' material only and the coordinator of a school trip who profusely apologized to her for walking in when she wasn't wearing the *hijab*. She said,

I wore the hijab as early as middle school so I know some of my friends wouldn't curse around me ... the teachers wouldn't curse around me, they would apologize.... That's the kind of respect that you get as a Muslim hijabi. Like guys don't talk to you, I'm just like really?! Whatever. None of the BS, no flirting, things are kept to a minimum, like my friends you don't need to hug me, we like see each other everyday it's not necessary. I think I got a little more respect than some of the teachers. These were not even Muslim guys, there weren't any Muslim guys in my school, not even one. So all the non-Muslim guys were extremely respectful and kept their distance and like no she's like marriage material, you don't do anything to her. (laugh) We went to a lot of school trips, we were at an outer city trip. The coordinator walked in and I didn't have my hijab so I ducked under the desk and he was like 'Allright I'm sorry, I'm coming out, Is everything ok?' and I said "Yes...I was just wearing my hijab...I'm fully clothed everything's fine...we're good we're alright."

A few of the participants like Leyla, Hannah and Sabah would educate people about their own culture and appease people's concern by reassuring them of their non-threatening existence respectively, something I would never need to do in Malaysia.

Leyla would make the effort

to expose the community to Islam and the right things in Islam and how kind Islam is, this week we were having the Islamic awareness week in our school and we were giving talks and telling the people about Islam and informing them about the misconceptions they have, that's really good. I feel like everyone should do this and teach non-Muslims about Islam, even Muslim people.

Farah discussed about a touching story relayed by a participant at a conference she had attended, who was part of a group of Muslim volunteers, through their kindness and

generosity, had distributed food to victims of a hurricane, and in turn had changed this woman's perception about Muslims. It also highlighted for Farah the importance of the Muslim community to be part of and contribute to the community at large because "Until they interact with a Muslim, we are terrorists." Farah recalled,

So I went to a conference once and there was this woman. She was doing voluntary work during the hurricane. She and a group of hijabi volunteers went to help the neighborhood; they'll buy pizza or hot food to give it to people for free. So she went to this house and she knocked the door of we have pizza do you want some. The lady opened the door and she said I'm so sorry I'm so sorry. And the hijabis were wondering what was going on. Apparently the lady was one of the heads who headed up effort against the Islamic Centre near ground zero. She was one of the women headed up the demonstrations. She said I'm so sorry. I didn't know. They tell us these things. I didn't know. I've never met Muslims before. This is the first time I'm talking to a Muslim. That little act of kindness that Hijabi and her friends did change this extremist woman against Islam. She said I'm sorry begging for forgiveness so think of the media, the more we separate ourselves from the community because we are afraid they may think we are bad it becomes extremist in their views. Until they interact with a Muslim, we are terrorists.

Sabah particularly felt the need to pacify what she had perceived as people's anxiety over her appearance of wearing the *niqab*. She saw the need to strike up a conversation in English and read an English book so as not to seem 'foreign' by way I suppose of compensating her 'foreign' look, which if we were to watch Fox's news of symbols of Muslim women's oppression and subservience. She said,

I take the bus everyday and people see me with the Niqab and they start moving away. They'll keep a little distance. But if you get a conversation started all of a sudden they are calm now. "Oh the bus is coming," I'll say. They'll calm down. She knows how to speak English. I remember once I held a woman's hand because it was snowing and she was about to slip. At first she seemed reluctant to take my hand but then she did. And she said thank you thank you. And yesterday when I caught a train, a woman she just rushed into the train she was about to come and sit next to me and then she stopped, she then she saw me reading a book and it was an English book she came and sat next to me, ok she's fine. She's not a terrorist. She's not reading the Quran. (we laugh).

Some of the signs and symbols that we Muslims have held in reverence had the possibility of being seen as a threat. There have been cases of Muslims who were barred from flying because another fellow passenger had heard them speak in Arabic or use the word ‘Allah’ or ‘Allahuakhbar.’ Sabah was aware how she would be perceived had she been reading the Quran instead of an English book when she said, “She’s not a terrorist. She’s not reading the Quran.” Like a conversation I had overheard of the mosque being associated with bedbugs (read more in the next Chapter X), some of the symbols we had held dear had been subverted in their meanings.

The participants in this study may not face a ban of the *hijab* in the U.S. like in France due to its policy of multiculturalism, and they may have encountered in their own experiences various degree of acceptance, but at the most extreme, it may be seen as a threat and in turn literally become a threat to their own safety and well-being. How ‘dangerous’ the *hijab* is, to some extent is dependent on worldly affairs, when there have been Muslim terrorist’s attacks or right wing politicians trumped up rhetoric to fear Islam and Muslims. While Leyla did not wear the *hijab*, she was still cognizant of hate crime cases involving Muslims. She recalled reading a news post on Facebook of a fifteen-year-old Muslim girl wearing a *hijab* being verbally abused in Queens. The *hijab* is a marker of our identity as Muslims and the following case demonstrated the threat Muslim women could potentially face in public. Leyla said,

I was on my Facebook and a friend of mine actually posted a news report ... and it was in Queens, a fifteen year old girl who was on the bus on Tuesday morning and a man in his mid-thirties starting cursing and spitting at her because she was wearing a hijab and he was like you’re a Muslim why are you are and she was like--- he was just cursing at her and like spitting at her and everybody else who was on the bus didn’t even say anything, they were just laughing and watching what was happening. And the police are investigating it like a hate crime.

Another incident had involved a friend of Leyla who was chastised for being at the 9/11 memorial. She said, “Right after the 9/11 they were at one of the memorials site, she

was sitting on the bench and some guy just came up to her and she was like you can't sit here. Some Caucasian guy was like, you can't stay here this is--- I forgot but what it was because she was Muslim, she was being told not to be there.”

One of the most outrageous comments I have read in the media recently was written by the former 'Sun' editor, Kelvin MacKenzie (2016), after the U.K's Channel 4 news had featured a Muslim hijabi journalist to cover the news including the Muslim terrorist attack in Nice, France. The heading of his article had read, “Why did Channel 4 have a presenter in a hijab fronting coverage of Muslim terror in Nice?” He had written in his column, “Was it appropriate for her to be on camera when there had been yet another shocking slaughter by a Muslim?... Was it done to stick one in the eye of the ordinary viewer who looks at the hijab as a sign of the slavery of Muslim women by a male-dominated and clearly violent religion?” His outrageous piece had garnered not only condemnation but rather disturbingly some support. His accusation was just wrong on so many levels. Firstly, it had conflated the act of a few Muslim terrorists with all Muslims. Secondly, it had equated the hijab with a lack of human rights and equality, when you are actually seeing an accomplished female Muslim journalist on TV doing her job (Irony is obviously lost on him). Why was she targeted? What was wrong for a female Muslim journalist reporting on Islamic terrorism? They have been many male Muslim journalists like Mehdi Hassan (Al Jazeera) and Faisal Islam (Sky News) who have reported on terrorism and why were they not targeted? What was it about the hijab more so than other Islamic 'markings' then that had stirred so much hatred and fear? It also begs the question; does that mean journalists should never report on crimes committed by their own racial or religious group?

In response to MacKenzie's vitriolic comment, Fatima Manji retorted, “Kelvin MacKenzie has attempted to smear 1.6 billion Muslims in suggesting they are inherently violent. He has attempted to smear half of them (Muslims) further by suggesting they are helpless slaves (a)nd he has attempted to smear me by suggesting I would sympathise

with a terrorist” (Plunkett, 2016, July 19). As of Tuesday, July 19th, the Independent Press Standards Organisation (Ipsos) had received 1,400 complaints regarding MacKenzie’s racist and bigoted remarks (Plunkett, 2016, July 19th). Personally, I had experienced incidents of racism when I was in the U.K between 1991 – 1997 usually committed by ignorant youths who would shout racist and derogative comments as my friends and I were walking in the predominantly white English county of ‘Bognor Regis.’ However, of late, out of fear from the threats and attacks from Muslim terrorists, the rhetoric had become louder and bolder. I would venture to suggest that racism and Islamophobia had been undercurrents in some Western countries like the U.K since before 9/11 or 7/7. How else can you explain the British colonization of half of the world or slavery in the U.S.? These racist undertones did not end the day colonization did, though that would be a neat narrative to believe in. As Edward Said has argued, though colonization had ended when colonized countries had gained independence, imperialism or coloniality as advanced by Mignolo, has taken on other forms.

I cannot help but think as I am rereading and rewriting this section back home in Malaysia, how safe⁶ I feel here, how my wearing the *hijab* is neither seen as a threat nor an exotic piece of clothing, how my reading the Quran is seen with admiration rather than concern, not having to pacify people’s anxiety over my presence in public, and not feeling the need to educate the public about my religion and convince non-Muslims it is a peaceful religion. I wanted to include the *hijab* in this research because I felt it was one of the most visible and symbolic piece of clothing for Muslim women and its use has provided one of the most contentious argument between third world women and western feminists in general, which is linked to gender, religion, politics, and culture. It also speaks to the poststructuralist conception of agency, in examining to what extent these Muslim women would accept, reject or acquiesce to the internal and external meanings

⁶I may be subjected to petty crimes like snatch thief but not hates crimes due to my religion.

constructed by their own, the Muslim community and Western perception and interpretations of the *hijab*. As Scott (2007) had succinctly argued in her book, *The Politics of the Veil*, we cannot examine the issues relating to the *hijab* without linking it to postcolonialism, racism, secularism and nationalism.

Chapter X

BEING AMERICAN, ISLAMOPHOBIA, AND SURVEILLANCE

LIZA. I know. I am not blaming him. It is his way, isn't it? But it made such a difference to me that you didn't do it. You see, really and truly, apart from the things anyone can pick up (the dressing and the proper way of speaking, and so on), the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated. I shall always be a flower girl to Professor Higgins, because he always treats me as a flower girl, and always will; but I know I can be a lady to you, because you always treat me as a lady, and always will. (Excerpt from: George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*, iBooks)

I chose the above excerpt because Eliza spoke about the construction of 'being a lady', that it is not just the changes in how one speaks, dress and think but also how one is treated by members of a community that makes one a lady. Thus, I see difference as an internal and external construction, which is fluid and manifests itself depending on the contexts we are in or whom we interact with. The excerpt above spoke particularly to this issue, of how the treatment and messages one receives feed into the construction of one's multiple identities.

In the previous section, I had interrogated how my participants experienced varying levels of acceptance, respect, and understanding for being *hijabis* or *non hijabis*, and also how they would educate non-Muslims around them about Islam and being Muslims in order to counter ignorance and prejudice. In this section I will interrogate how difference is constructed in relation to being Muslim Americans, Islamophobia and surveillance. I

was interested to find out how they saw their identity as Americans¹ and if they were aware of issues of Islamophobia and surveillance.²

Farah discussed how the media often judges the actions or crimes of people of religion particularly Muslims, differently or rather more harshly than those who are not Muslims or are atheists. I remember engaging in a Facebook comments on issues of Cadbury chocolate not being *halal* in Malaysia. Some commentaries pointed out to the incredulity of a ‘backward’ and ‘archaic’ religious teachings that forbade its practitioners from consuming porcine ingredients. I argued that should the consumers be vegetarian and the product consumed contained meat, then most likely, people would not have responded with such vitriol (but then again knowing how some people are on social media, they might have still responded similarly). There are certainly biases in the media’s treatment of stories related to Muslims as opposed to non-Muslim Americans. Very often the actions of some extremists that only represent less than 1% of more than a billion Muslims, is often seen as symptomatic of everything wrong in Islam and tend to be generalized to the whole community, perpetuated by the media like Fox News. Discussions on Muslim extremism are often essentialized and reduced to Islam the religion rather than examining the historical social cultural political aspects to conflicts in the Middle East³. Farah recalled an experience of a Russian man who countered his

¹Azlina: When do you feel a sense of developing your identity as an American here? Do you feel that you’re part of America?

²Azlina: Are you aware of issues of Muslim surveillance or even surveillance in general? How do you see it?

³Azlina: I feel the issue about Muslim women and how Muslim women are position within the society is a complex one because it doesn’t involve just the religion but also the social economic political and cultural aspects to inform how the religion is practiced. I see the kind of oppression against women happening in less developing countries where there is more patriarchy. I have also wondered why is it that I don’t see that happening in Malaysia for example. Why don’t I see that in certain other developing countries where you see it more in this part of the world but you don’t see it in other parts of the world for example, why we don’t see that here in the US. They are practicing the same religion but how is it that the system is not constructed in that way, it’s not practiced in that way. I feel to simply point to the religion

misperception of Muslims by visiting a mosque and meeting its community. A place of worship that he saw as a threat turned out to be an access to understanding Islam and Muslims.

In discussions of negotiating between being an American and a Muslim, most of the participants felt they had found the right balance between the two. However, discussions with Leyla and Farah were particularly interesting as Leyla spoke of it as an ongoing evolving process while Farah completely rejected her American identity. Leyla didn't see herself as completely American because she felt that in her private live she still lived a Bangladeshi lifestyle, in that she spoke Bengali, ate Bengali food and wore traditional clothes at home. Her image of being American would involve living an American lifestyle in private and public spaces. She also felt she no longer fit in completely in her Bangladeshi community and yet she was not completely American in the larger community. So she had learned to negotiate a balance of being both. Farah however, did not see herself as being an American because her values differentiated her from others she felt. She didn't see how they could be reconciled with being 'American'. She even differentiated herself from the African American community.

I went on to ask the participants about issues of surveillance. I wouldn't say I was surprised to find that issues of surveillance did not figure as prominently in their mind as it did mine. Muslim surveillance is done so discreetly that it does not impose on our day-to-day conduct and protests against surveillance are usually conducted by various Muslim organizations they may not be involved with. Maisara, however, saw a bigger picture to surveillance. She drew attention to how surveillance has become part of a global movement and she would be right in her argument particularly since the Snowden's revelation on the global extent to NSA surveillance. We are all being surveilled through our social media and smartphones. Not only do intelligence bodies have access to our

itself without looking at the nuances of the argument and looking at the complexity of the society in creating those situations. I think that's very shallow.

activities but consumer companies too monitor our online activities to market their products. We are all living in Orwell's *1984* (almost). A terrifying thought.

“The way the media portrays it it's more like a questioning, the judgment comes in, we are judged.”

Farah

It's interesting like we respect whatever you want to do it's only—as most Americans have their values, which is great I think but it's not towards the Muslims. It's different, everything that has nothing to do with religion, they accept it. But when religion comes in they no longer accept it. In fact, when it's religious it becomes a question, the way the media portrays it it's more like a questioning, the judgment comes in, we are judged, that's what I've noticed. All their acts, like whatever crazy moments don't get judged but if it's something that is religion based it is some aspect of the media you see judgment is coming out. You know what it is? When Ayaan Hirsi Ali talked about forced marriage, I don't need to be a Somalian to understand that's cultural. If she really wanted to know does religion say this, pick up the *Quran* that is all you need to do. You don't need to know a *Mufti*, you don't need to know an *Imam*, all you have to do is pick up the *Quran* and read it, that is all you need to do and you'll find the truth. This is why it bothers me like why—honestly—I don't even know why people think like this, it's not fair. It is funny because she goes to a FOX TV show that particularly hates Muslim to condemn Islam. She knows very well this is essential to her religion and to very specific places and she knows this is not what Islam teaches. If you did think so then read the *Quran*. It's very shallow. It's hypocritical.

I have forgotten his name but I think there was this guy, he had a movie that became so controversial, he was the first guy to do this thing, I think he was from a Russian background, you know now he's a Muslim. He converted. Let me tell you,

people like him in their hearts they were told Islam is so and so. He said they were feeding him with these things, all he was doing was just spitting out hatred but then he became a Muslim. This is why as Muslims this is the lesson, through love, love is the only way to conquer your enemy. This man he truly believes if you go to a mosque you are going to die that day, he believes they'll kill you. I said why don't you come to a mosque and I had to convince him to come and he was scared for his life to go to the mosque because he thinks I'm going to get so and so. But he said when I walk in there people were so nice to him, they were greeting him, cordial, they had a nice discussion. So he said I came out I was alive and he said I did not see knife and crazy, I didn't see that. He kept coming and coming and just having this casual discussion and then he began doing his own research irrespective of what they are telling him, he is doing his own research. As he is doing it something in his heart just told him what they are saying about these people is not true. He realized that what he is doing is wrong and he just couldn't ignore it. As he is doing his research this feeling grows and grows and one day he said he doesn't care if he has no job because he loves this organization, he basically became jobless, had no money, nothing but he said Islam is the truth, he cannot continue to deceive people. Now where he's from he is building schools to teach young kids all about Islam and to bring non-Muslim and Muslim kids together. He has done so much that a Muslim can never be able to do and because he has that speaking charisma and everything, you will see him in the news. I was watching him talking about his biography and his efforts, I was so happy. There are some people who became Muslim and he redefined the Muslims in their entire town, how did that happen? So many stories like this.

**“There’s always room to grow I feel
and I can’t say I’m a hundred percent American now.”**

Leyla

I think I started (developing my identity as an American) when I got into high school, I believe. There’s always room to grow I feel and I can’t say I’m a hundred percent American now. Because I feel that when I go home, I’m speaking in Bengali, I’m not speaking in English all the time. The only time I do speak English is when I’m talking to my siblings, other than that, with my Mom, my roommate, my parents, my grandparents and relatives whenever they call, I’m always speaking in Bengali. I feel like I found the right balance but I don’t think I have forgotten Bangladesh and I’m American now. Do you understand what I’m saying? Because I don’t know how to explain it but yes, I don’t think I’m a hundred percent American --- I guess a hundred percent American is like the food you eat, the kind of people you interact with because we’re so diverse in New York. It’s like when you go home are you still the same as you were outside. When you go home, I’m wearing my traditional clothes, I’m eating my traditional food, I can eat a hundred burgers outside but I am going to go home and have my traditional food for dinner no matter what. You know what I’m saying? It’s not like a hundred percent American as I guess I would think like have a specific schedule, this is how you work, this is what you eat, this is how you’re dressed and that’s how it is all throughout. I feel like that’s not me. I go home and I’m in a different environment than I am outside and I’m a different person, not literally but---Yes, that’s the perfect balance that is what I’m talking about. Right, that’s for me.

I’m not talking of the same for everyone else. Some people might think I feel like when someone has become a hundred percent Americanized there are going to be like, “Oh, I don’t like wearing traditional clothes. It’s so uncomfortable, it’s so much work, it’s heavy or it doesn’t look good, I can’t go into public wearing these clothes.” That’s not me, I love wearing my traditional clothes. I might not go on the train with it because I

don't want to ruin it but that doesn't stop me from wearing it and going out. I mean I don't wear it on an everyday basis. If I were to wear it every day then I would still like---I don't think I'm at all Americanized, I'm still Bengali. Because I wear jeans when I go to school but then I'm wearing my traditional clothes when I'm home or I'm going to a gathering with family so that's like the balance. Whenever I'm in a Bengali community they might think I'm a little too Americanized, when I'm in an American community they are like, oh you're so like, they say and stuff. I've always had that comment. There was this one time when I was speaking to my brother, we were speaking in English and my Aunt was just sitting on the table, she was like look at them speaking in English they're so like fluent, they talk so nice. They don't hear the American accent all the time, whatever English they hear it's like British English and their accent as well. Obviously we were different for them. That goes back to the balance I was talking about earlier. The way I am at home is the way I was over there. That's where the balance comes in. I never had like a comment like, oh you're too Americanized, you're wearing jeans all the time and stuff like that. I know the difference and how to be in that environment versus how to be in America and when I'm in school. I've never had that problem. For me the only difference was the language basically. Even then, the only people I spoke English with were my two cousins, they went to English schools and they know British English. I was speaking to them and they come into them like accent and my fluent English but other than that I was very Bengali.

“If people ask me where are you from? I never said America, to be honest with you I don't like saying I'm American.”

Farah

I should (feel I'm part of America) because I came here when I was in fifth grade, I'm now living here for a very long time but I feel like I don't because it's a choice. I was

having a discussion with one of my friends she was like even though she was here for a long time, she was born here but of course her parents weren't. I think it's a choice because there are some people they come here and they are just waiting to throw away their identity and pick up the American identity and they just want to be Americans. As soon as they get the American Certificate, the naturalization card, they think they're American. For someone like me I've always had such strong values I've come from Kuwait, the way you grow up just the school system bring forth values. The whole idea of respecting your elders was enforced every single day in school of sharing and caring and all these things that are Islamic and also human I think. I didn't really go from Islam I went to an Indian school so there where the Indian values, which is basically like human values, being kind, respectful, it's all about community.

When I came here and I see that the ideals and values are so different, I rebel, I refuse to change. If people ask me, where are you from? What are you? I never said America, to be honest with you I don't like saying I'm American. Due to what they value, what they think is valuable, what life is all about, that's not me and I don't want to be associated with that, I just tell them I'm Nigerian. I'm happy they call me African, Black-African, I don't want to be called African-American, I don't like that. African-American means something else, something different. African-American is as different to an African as a Russian is different from an English man, we all are the same color but we're so different. If you have an African-American and me in this table, you will see the difference, I don't have to tell you, you will know the way we think, our beliefs and values are different. The only thing similar is maybe musically, music branches through different cultures so that's understandable but the way I think and the way they think is different. The only thing they have is that they came here is slaves, their religion also came from Nigeria, came from West Africa they were Muslims, they came here and the religion was stripped with them. This is so different from where my values are.

When I came here the pain I had in my heart I never experienced it in Kuwait even after all that racism. Here because there was people your own color doing it to you and the idea of individualism is when someone picks on you, if he collectively picks on you but no one collectively supports you. It's a collective thing to pick on someone, to bully someone, to make fun of them because they speak differently, they think differently. I was hated because I didn't wander in class because I go to classes on time, I will do my work because of my values, I was hated for that. They literally hated on me because I had these values. For me because I have this strong base I could see that these values they have were not productive ... and for me I totally dissociated from them. That's how we were able to get where we are because we maintain the values we had when we came here.... It was like everybody knew me in high school, I knew nobody but they knew me. I was a very shy, quiet person I didn't talk to anyone but they all knew me because I was that different. I'm a religious type, I would dress differently I just didn't dressed like they did, I would talk differently they consider me smart because I speak properly, I could read properly and things that I guess I took for granted like in Kuwait.

Over here it's highlighted ... that you could write well, that you could speak well, that you study, you do well. I was really different,⁴ I didn't hang out randomly just for the sake of it. I wasn't interested in their conversation because it was all about television shows. My conversations were just different, the way I think was different and it was just so obvious and that is how you survive. Imagine I came from a school that was considered as the worst school in my region and was in Brooklyn ... and I was able to go to a very elite program. If we⁵ didn't choose to be different we will not be here, none of

⁴I think more than any of the other participants, Farah to me was the one who had felt or at least were able to articulate the intensity of 'difference' I too at times had felt either at TC or even at my faculty here in Malaysia.

⁵We were commiserating over how challenging it was studying in college in our respective programs and what it took for us to be there.

us will be where we are in, in the programs we're in, and this is the difference between a successful kid.... Yes, from my experience it's hard, I can feel you but let me tell you it's going to be the reason—it's what's helping you, go through your education, do what you need to do and get out of here. First of all, this environment and this way of thinking you don't need that ... at least your focus is there and you have a destination.... When I was in middle school, high school this is what I noticed with students who are also immigrants like myself and those immigrants who have good family background and they didn't do well it wasn't because they were not smart or any incapability nobody wanted to be like me. Nobody wanted to stand out and be the one to be picked on, the one who is different. There is a sacrifice to being different.... You cannot follow everyone, you have to be your own leader and have your own values and don't just take values of everyone regardless of whether it's good or bad.

“My opinion on the surveillance of Muslims, I'm technologically oriented kind of person, surveillance is global right now.”

Maisara

But I have a page opened on my internet, they are still doing surveillance on us but through informants and people on the inside. Everywhere. This is probably Bed-Stuy area, I live around there, this was years ago when I was a kid, you know those tabs, those bug that you like stick here and records everything, they found some of those things and this is pre 9/11. No, it's like 9/11 was the perfect occurrence to use as a scapegoat, that's what it's like. But we became popular. We became notorious. My opinion on the surveillance of Muslims, I'm technologically oriented kind of person, surveillance is global right now. CCTV cameras are very advanced they can track you down like if I tell this particular camera that this is so and so person, just basically give an identity, give a label to this person this camera is smart enough to communicate with other cameras and

literally track me down through my entire day and entire ride in the city and they have records. Data gets cheaper gets cheaper, data like information, recordings of video, as data gets cheaper and cheaper—it will record infinitely many things and keep it stored any minute they need.

The way I envision surveillance taking place is not necessarily physically people sitting with hand cameras but all these information regardless of what religion, what ethnicity, what you associate yourself with it is all taken into account and stored. A lot of them with permission, a lot of them without permission, there's a lot of things that they know about us. Technology today even if you're riding in the car, doors closed, and you're talking to yourself satellites up there can actually make out what you're saying. Although it's closed, if the window is open and they can hear you but when the window is closed when you speak there's vibrations in the air and the vibrations are reflected on the glass and the satellite up there can actually sense the reflections on the glass and kind of figure out what you're trying to say.

Technology in terms of surveillance and this is how much I know, as a technologist person I know that U.S. is 25 years ahead of technology underground. How much they tell us, how much they let us know this is technology, they are 25 years ahead all the time but it is kept behind the scenes. In terms of surveillance tracking us they have every single detail of every single human on the planet right now, not every single human at least in America. If you come to countries which are not as technology oriented like the Middle East which is like a rich country, all the rich countries are technology advanced, like these things, I'll be honest with you, these are spying devices that we are paying for. For the most part they say that they are doing it for our protection and I wouldn't mind if they really are doing it for our protection. But here's what they end up doing is, giving a certain circumstance and they need a bad guy and they happened to have some footage of you or some data of you that kind of fills in the stereotypical bad guy role, they are just

going to play that card because they stored all those information, data collection for over the years.

It's not necessarily Muslims, it's everybody. Here's why the "Muslim" it's very easy to display our card more often than others, it's not an exception. My opinion is that they're doing it to anybody and everybody they just focus a little bit more on us because it's very easy for us to be framed. Let's say there's a crime that occurred and a white person is more likely than the Muslim person to actually do it, a Caucasian person, they would still probably frame the Muslim because it's easier.... Did you read the story about how Target knew this girl was pregnant before her Mom even knew? This is not even a government ... so what happened was you know when you sign up for a website shopping list and they send you weekly emails on your computer. Target has this thing that they personalize it depending on what you search for. Basically what happened is her Mom was going through her emails and this girl is getting advertisement for pregnant women stuff, baby stuff and she was shocked, she was outraged she called Target that they are giving wrong influence to her child and Target apologized as there must have been a mistake. They talked to the daughter and it turned out the daughter was pregnant. Imagine the situation the mother doesn't know the daughter was pregnant. The idea is she just got pregnant, it's not even in the family but the supermarket next door knows that you're pregnant.

If you read futuristic novels like *Brave New World* or *1984* Orwell, police state they call it, it's like ... do not ever discuss (about terrorism) if you do it we will catch you and put you to jail. They kind of try to impose this on us and the only way we can fight it is we keep talking. If one person and the entire America is talking about this you're not supposed to talk but they're talking, you can catch them, if 50 million people in America talk about the same topic they can't do anything. Yes, terrorism is going to ring their bell but you have to not care about, it's kind of like an internal protest. Here's the thing, they are watching you.... Ultimately no matter how patriotic, no matter how much you support

America and you follow all the rules and what not if they see you as an easy victim for their benefit, they're going to take advantage of you. For me personally I would use the word how I wanted, I'm not going to overuse it, I'm just like if I want to use the word I will use it, you're not putting on labels, no, I'm going to say what I want to say.

No, but here's the thing the fourth amendment the right to privacy it has been broken like crazy. We have the right to privacy but we don't have any rights right now. To conclude that's what I think about surveillance, it's done to everybody, it's just targeted to us because we are easy excuse and nobody will question that the Muslim is the bad guy. Another thing, I'm talking about the propaganda, my Dad he works in security so he was saying how they had a workshop and thing about watch out for suspicious activities and what not and they were playing a video, pictures and stuff and all of these people are like Pakistani, in a turban, they are the stereotypical Muslims. It's unfair to associate terrorism with Islamic—here's the thing issue about innocent employees, employers are not necessarily judgemental because they never had a bad experience with Muslims or whatever but by indoctrinating the word terrorism and putting these picture what are you putting their head? That is propaganda. There are people who have spoken out.... You should read *1984* by Orwell.

“I feel I've read more about it than to experience it.”

Safa

I feel I've read more about Muslim surveillance than to experience it but like in high school maybe, let me think, I think it was in seventh grade or eighth grade when they had the attack here and I remember people were just evacuated from school, not evacuated, the parents were just picking up—I wasn't picked up. I would agree in some sense given the background. Say for example if you're studying, if you're a PoliSci major then you're more aware of all of these, maybe like certain majors that emerge you into

these topics then you experience it like something with securities, depending if you're travelling a lot, then I'm not, I've always been here for the moment. It's different for me to say I experienced something, like my experience is very limited in that sense. I don't feel like it was so different from everyone else like whether they're Muslim or non-Muslim. In high school you had to go through security and never once did I feel it was because of my *hijab* that they did something extra to be honest. Some people could say it's just you're self prejudice or that they did this to me because I'm wearing this but for me I try to use logic and if my logic is not wrong, it's not because of my *hijab*. In high school that's when we were introduced to the—just for example you have to go through the metal detector. For me I used these clips, they're like long daggers and that would sometimes—sometimes I'd forget so I have to go step aside but I'm not the only one, it's everyone—say someone who's sneaking in a device in school like a tape recorder, they took it away, it was like an MP3 so we're not allowed to. No, this is the college life, it's different than I learned.... That security went well although we felt it was hassle sometimes but it was necessary.

I looked at the title for this chapter again and wondered why I had named it 'Being American, Islamophobia, and Surveillance.' Why did I group these terms together? I suddenly remembered in 2010, when I had first arrived in the U.S., I went to the AMC theatre at Lincoln Street to buy a ticket for a movie I had wanted to watch. As I was waiting in line, I could hear two people having a conversation about the proposed Islamic center near Ground Zero. One man said to an elderly lady, "What is happening to New York? First we have bedbugs (summer infestation) and now a mosque!" Listening to what he had said, that particular phrase had caught my attention and I was surprised and somewhat perplexed. Something about what he had said did not sound 'right.' What was it? I ignored the conversation and went to the counter to purchase my ticket. As I was walking up the escalator, I had reflected on what the man had said and the ball dropped.

How could he have associated the mosque, a place of worship for Muslims with bedbugs? In one line, he had denigrated a place exalted by Muslim worshippers and sinisterly suggested, an annoying infestation of the Muslim community into public spaces in the U.S. Perhaps if I had listened more, he would've suggested that we Muslims crawled back into the hole we came from.

Sadly, for American Muslims, learning the English language and academic discourse alone do not entail a complete acceptance into the U.S. society. Eliza in a dress could pass off as a duchess but not Aliza in a *hijab*.⁶ Five of the participants saw themselves as American and felt they have a well-balanced hyphenated identity as Muslim American or Bangladeshi American except for Leyla and Farah. Leyla did not see herself “.....a hundred percent American” while Farah preferred to be called “African, Black-African” rather than American. Farah went on to say, “I don’t want to be called African-American, I don’t like that. African-American means something else, something different.” Identity constructions are influenced by interpretations of internal and external narratives. How these participants saw themselves, and how they had interpreted and responded to the subtle and unsubtle messages about who they are would in turn help construct their identity. Leyla had demarcated her identity into American and non-American. She has an image in her mind as to what an American would eat and wear. Her own Bangladeshi culture like her language, food and clothing was seen as un-American. I would venture further to say that her being a Muslim and wearing the *hijab* would thus be categorized as un-American. One could infer from Leyla’s narrative that

⁶This statement was borne out of my frustration with the current climate of Islamophobia. No matter how proficient you are in English or well-adjusted in English speaking countries, you will not be completely accepted. I was rather despondent over ignorant, racist and bigoted statements made by right wing politicians in the U.S and elsewhere, who have made Islamophobia part of mainstream conversation. It is also a provocative statement that draws attention to a very culturally specific construction of a socially imaginary identity that one may desire but would never be able to achieve.

her image of an American is probably someone who is white, Christian, eats lots of burgers, drink sodas and only speak American English. Farah, on the other hand, had completely rejected her American identity (although this may be seen more as an ongoing fluctuating process) and she even saw herself as being a “Black African” distinguishing herself from African American probably because she had the unfortunate experience of being bullied and alienated due to the values and standards she had upheld that had helped her to excel academically. There is a false imaginary representation in the mind of some immigrants like Leyla and Farah of an ‘American’ person and the closer one is in terms of your physical attributes, values and culture to this imaginary construct, the closer he or she is to being an American. Unlike Standard British English i.e. Received Pronunciation that is sanctioned, regulated and perpetuated by the British royalty, the BBC, the Oxford dictionary, and the British Council, the U.S. as a land of immigrants cannot sanction what ‘group’ of people is considered as ‘American’ and even if such decree is made, the original American would be the Native American.

Even as I am writing this, I fear that some readers may read this and question Leyla and Farah’s ‘loyalty’ to the U.S. and accuse them of being unable to assimilate within the country they have settled in. More than any other minority in the U.S. there is fear amongst some Americans particularly right wing politicians, amplified further by, though it was present prior to, the tragic event of 9/11 and the Muslim terrorists’ attacks in various countries since then, that Muslims would not be able to assimilate in the U.S. and would bring religious beliefs that are contradictory to its values and would be a threat to their lives. I do feel rather protective of these participants and took care not to invite too much scrutiny or cast them in a bad light. Hence, I felt the need to point out that Farah’s construction of her identity as Black African may change when in fact I’m not sure if it will and even if it doesn’t, what of it?

Nathan Lean (2012), in his book *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Fear of Muslims*, argues that there is a concerted effort by the rights groups

to create and instill fear amongst American about Muslim and Islam. While some fear like Muslim terrorists' attacks may be justified but much is exaggerated. One of the things these right wing groups does is to mark and position Muslim Americans as an outsider to the country, with religious values that are deemed to be contradictory and a threat to the American values, and whose sole aim is to take over the country. Lean says,

The predominant sentiment among many right-wing Americans regarding Muslims, for instance, is that they are not welcome in "our" country. Such ferocity and dogged nationalism is predicated on the assumption that Muslims are immigrants and that the religion of Islam is not a fluid or borderless belief system, but rather originates from afar and has, with the relocation of populations from Morocco to Bahrain, invaded the United States. (Kindle Locations 268-274)

For Muslim Americans, I felt for now, looking at the current climate, I could not disassociate their identity from both islamophobia and surveillance. According to Kumar (2012), Islamophobia "denote(s) the phenomenon of cultural racism against Muslims" (Kindle Locations 123-124). The clarion calls from a few republican politicians, in proportion to the Muslim terrorists' attacks, like Donald Trump's suggestion to 'Ban Muslims' (Diamond, 2015, December 8), Newt Gingrich's proposal to test Muslim American's belief in Sharia Law and deporting them if they do (Tatum, Klundt, & Malloy, 2016, July 16), and Ted Cruz's call to "patrol and secure" Muslim neighborhood (Diamond, 2016, March 23) have demonstrated the blatant and outright levels of Islamophobia perpetuated by Republican politicians. Another Republican politician Steve King then up the ante on their political rhetoric during a show on MSNBC, when he was questioned over the lack of racial diversity in the Republican party. He said,

I'd ask you to go back through history and figure out, where are these contributions that have been made by these other categories of people (sic) that you're talking about, where did any other subgroup (sic) of people contribute more to civilization?....than Western civilization itself. It's rooted in Western Europe, Eastern Europe and the United States of America and every place where the footprint of Christianity settled the world. That's all of Western civilization. (Bump, 2016, July 18)

I read Mr. King's outrageous comment and cringe because it is this very ideology of White supremacy, Christian enlightenment and denigration of the 'other' that had led Great Britain and other European colonial powers to colonize almost the rest of the world. Mr. King failed to mention World War I and World War II, imperialism and colonization, slavery, the Bosnian genocide amongst others as also part of Western Civilization's 'contributions'. In addition, Mr. King's Western Civilization is an imaginary conception which has assumed that there were no non-Christian non-white people living in these Western countries or even if there were, they had never been part of the worldly contributions he claimed they made. In response to Mr. King's statement, other columnists have made a list of contributions to civilization made by his imaginary 'sub-groups' or 'others'. Basu (2016, July 24) in her article "How non-Western non-Christians paved way for King" made a list of contributions by the Egyptian, Mesopotamia, Indian and Chinese civilizations, which had included a slew of innovations from Algebra, Engineering, Yoga, gun powder to peanut butter. She further retorted his claims that non-western 'subgroups' (sic) had not contributed to making America great,

You say America is an exceptional nation and the front-runner of Western civilization, ... It's clear from how you choose your words that non-white people and those of other religions don't count toward this greatness. Nor do the Native Americans who populated the land before your ancestors arrived, count among our "roots." Or the African-Americans who arrived as slaves and helped build America's economic foundation. Or the Chinese people who helped build the transcontinental railroad. Or Mexican-Americans who harvested the crops. Or Indians who built Silicon Valley. (Basu, 2016, July 24)

She then ended her column by reminding Mr. King that, "As several on my Facebook feed also pointed out, the Christianity you hold above all other religions, and Christ Himself, had non-Western, non-Christian origins. Think about it next time before you speak" (Basu, 2016, July 24). What scares me more about the political rhetoric spoken by these Republican politicians is not so much that they have said it but that there are so many people who support them enough to vote them into a position of power.

Mr. Trump has secured himself the Republican Presidential candidacy. He could potentially be the next President of the United States of America. The U.S like all other healthy democratic countries is a land of contradictions, consisting of conflicting narratives and just as there have been political rhetoric based on fear and division so too are there more sobering voices based love, unity and hope like during the Democratic National Convention.

The role of the right wing media also contributes to perpetuating Islamophobia. As Farah had said when referring to the biasness of media reporting,

It's different, everything that has nothing to do with religion, they accept it. But when religion comes in they no longer accept it. In fact, when it's religious it becomes a question, the way the media portrays it it's more like a questioning, the judgment comes in, we are judged, that's what I've noticed. All their acts, like whatever crazy moments don't get judged but if it's something that is religion based it is some aspect of the media you see judgment is coming out.

In post 9/11, I think we Muslims are being scrutinized much more. I've seen the kind of comments or the vitriol that comes out of people particularly on Facebook on cases involving Muslims such as when a Muslim parent beat a child and that becomes a larger issue where abuse is seen as being accepted in Islam or in the case of terrorism, violence is accepted in Islam. So a few minor cases and somehow that's symptomatic of Islam in general instead of examining the social cultural and political aspects to the problem. I find the reaction of the Muslim community of completely defending the religion shuts you out of examining Islamic practices in their respective countries. We need to address these issues, we are human beings, we are Muslims but we are not angels, and people are trying to negotiate how they live their life in this world, and yet we are not tackling all those issues because we are so fearful that people will see that like airing out our dirty laundry. They will see it as symptomatic prove Islam is like a bad religion and so you're not willing to go there because you are fearful of the stigma, which is counterproductive.

There are a number of examples which demonstrate the biasness of particularly mainstream media when reporting on Islam or Muslims. They include; more coverage on terrorist acts carried out in the West as opposed to predominantly Muslim countries; humanizing and amplifying the pain and suffering of victims in western countries more so than in Islamic countries; and discussions of Muslim terrorism would usually exclude historical, political, and cultural factors. Esposito (cited in Lean, 2012), argues, “Islam’s portrayal as a triple threat (political, civilizational, and demographic) has been magnified by a number of journalists and scholars who trivialize the complexity of political, social, and religious dynamics in the Muslim world” (Kindle Locations 147-148). Thus, it is not that the threat from Muslim terrorists are not real but that the responses from the media influences the way we begin to respond to these and other crimes. It was reported in the news recently that there was a stabbing attack in Japan that killed more than 19 people (Al Jazeera, 2016, July 26). Reading the news, I immediately felt a sense of alarm but then after learning that it was committed by a Japanese man who was not associated with Muslim terrorists, I felt a sense of relief and went about my daily activities. The crime committed by this mad Japanese man was equally horrific to the stabbing cases in Germany or France but I didn’t feel like I wanted to follow the story any further unlike atrocities committed by Muslim terrorists. The same could be said of terrorists attacks in the Middle East and the West. You have become immune to hearing suicide bombings in some Middle eastern country but it still shocks us when it happens outside the Middle East. Our responses or lack of responses to various cases of terror related crimes are troubling and it speaks to how we have been conditioned by the media. Esposito (2012) further argues,

Islam is often viewed as the cause rather than the context for radicalism, extremism, and terrorism. Islam as the culprit is a simple answer, easier than considering the core political issues and grievances that resonate in much of the Muslim world (that is, the failures of many Muslim governments and societies, American foreign policy of intervention and dominance, Western support for authoritarian regimes, the invasion and occupation of Iraq, or

support for Israel's wars in Gaza and Lebanon). (Cited in Lean, 2012, Kindle Locations 142-145)

The media's misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims are troublesome since it reduces the issues relating to terrorism to simplistic soundbites, conflates the madness of Muslim terrorists with more than a billion Muslims, and instills the belief that Islam is inherently violent. There are consequences to interpretations and representations. It has led to the surveillance of the Muslim community, biases, prejudiced and hate crimes against Muslims. The issue of surveillance did not figure prominently in my participants' consciousness as it is done very discreetly. Safa said, "I feel I've read more about Muslim surveillance than to experience it" and in Maisara's opinion she felt that, "surveillance is global right now". We discussed how as Muslims we had to be careful not to use certain words like 'terrorism' so as not to raise alarm. Those words could further include '*Allahu Akhbar*',⁷ 'bomb' and as Sabah had mentioned in the previous chapter "*Hijabis* and non-*hijabis*" even the act of reading the *Quran* have a higher potential of causing great fear. However, Maisara refused to be cowed by what she viewed as intimidation. She said, "They kind of try to impose this on us and the only way we can fight it is we keep talking.....Yes, terrorism is going to ring their bell but you have to not care about, it's kind of like an internal protest". She acknowledged that Muslims in general are under more scrutiny than other groups in the U.S. and regardless how upstanding you are as its citizens, you have to take care not to be victimized by the system. She argues, "Here's the thing, they are watching you.... Ultimately no matter how patriotic,⁸ no matter how much you support America and you follow all the rules and what not if they see you as an easy victim for their benefit, they're going to take advantage of you." The act of surveillance

⁷Allahu Akhbar – God is great

⁸The verbal attack on Khizr and Ghazala Khan by Donald Trump is one such example. Donald Trump had even stereotyped Ghazala Khan as a timid subservient Muslim woman, who was not allowed to speak instead of a grieving mother of a son, who had sacrificed his life for the country.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/31/us/politics/donald-trump-khizr-khan-wife-ghazala.html>

is indeed pervasive, as it was exposed by Edward Snowden and according to Maisara, “the fourth amendment the right to privacy it has been broken like crazy. We have the right to privacy but we don’t have any rights right now” but while surveillance “it’s done to everybody, it’s just targeted to us because we are easy excuse and nobody will question that the Muslim is the bad guy.” Safa cautioned though against misinterpreting situations as discrimination against Muslim women because of the *hijab* particularly in security situations where it would involve everybody like in her school,

In high school you had to go through security and never once did I feel it was because of my hijab that they did something extra to be honest. Some people could say it’s just you’re self prejudice or that they did this to me because I’m wearing this but for me I try to use logic and if my logic is not wrong, it’s not because of my hijab. In high school ... you have to go through the metal detector. For me I used these clips, they’re like long daggers and that would sometimes.... I’d forget so I have to go step aside but I’m not the only one, it’s everyone.

While most of the participants in this study may not encounter too many Islamophobic interactions and witnessed the rise of hate crimes against us following Muslim terrorist attacks, it would be prudent for us to make mental notes of these tragic and horrific crimes as well as cases of prejudice and hate crimes against us. I remember after learning the news about a man being pushed onto a subway track in NYC by a crazed woman who had thought he was a Muslim, I took care not to stand too close to the edge of the subway track as the train approaches. Sadly, these are the times we live in.

When I first walked into the Arab American Association of New York in 2012, where I taught an ESL elementary class for six months, and a site that had served as an impetus to my study, where issues of English Education for Muslim immigrants and Muslim surveillance became prominent to me and led me to further interrogate how female Muslim American’s multiple identities, situated within a particular sociocultural historical and political contexts affected their interpretations of their English Education, the disastrous world events of 2014 had not occurred. We had not yet seen the tragic loss

of three Malaysian based air carriers MH370, MH17 and QZ8501; the 51-day Gaza massacres that saw 2145 mostly Palestinian civilians dead, and 69 Israelis, mainly soldiers dead. (Haboosh, Anadolu Agency, 27 August 2014); the emergence and brutality of ISIL; ‘Black lives matter’ protests; the Sydney hostage incident that killed two people; and the Pakistan Taliban attack on an Army school in Peshawar, killing 145 people, including 132 schoolchildren. I had hoped with the ushering of a new year 2015, things would have calmed down but then the Paris attack happened, killing 12 of *Charlie Hebdo’s* staff, four French Jewish citizens and one policewoman. It feels strange to come to the end of my six-year study, in which I feel the world is more unsettled, restless, intolerant and above all dangerous. The rhetoric I heard coming from Muslim extremists and far-right wing anti-Islam groups was troubling and disconcerting but there were voices of sanity between these calls to violence and hatred, more calming and nuanced voices pushing back against the fear and hate. I think about my participants and what it would mean to them and to myself. We cannot afford to be naïve anymore that events in the Middle East and elsewhere would not in some way affect Muslims around the world.

If we were to look at the present disturbing state of some Muslim and predominantly Muslim countries, some scholars have begun to look at countries in the periphery of the Muslim ‘world’ like Indonesia, Turkey and even Malaysia as models of fairly successful democratic progressive and moderate Muslim countries (Kaplan, 2014). According to Kaplan when discussing about Malaysia’s economy,

Thus, in a way, Mahathir’s⁹ achievement was greater: coming to power the year V. S. Naipaul published his book, he proved Naipaul wrong, demonstrating that Islam was not incompatible with economic dynamism and social energy...By his ability to combine religiosity and devoutness with science and technology, Mahathir made Malaysia, at the far periphery of the Muslim world in Southeast Asia, central to the values debate in the Middle East...Saifuddin Abdullah, the deputy education minister, told me that Mahathir “defined moderate Islam for the entire world, by building a

⁹Mahathir Mohammad was Malaysia’s fourth Prime Minister.

modern country with Islamic technocrats. Mahathir knew,” Saifuddin went on, “how to be modern without being Western— as he looked toward Japan and South Korea, not just the West.” Mahathir in his own person signaled the rise of middle-level powers and of the non-Western 'rest' of the globe.” (2014, Kindle Locations 1435-1440)

Reading the above quotation, I feel a sense of pride that Malaysia, a majority Muslim country has created its own unique identity that holds on to the fundamentals of Islam, whilst being open to learn from other cultures not solely from the West but also the East, from our neighbors. While our legal system, administration and policing were partly inherited from the British, we were open to learn from countries like Japan, South Korea and China on science and technology. In turn, Malaysia developed its own brand of Islamic banking and finance, that are more in line with our Islamic values. In the last economic crisis in 2008, Islamic banking did not suffer from it as much as conventional banking. It is important that we don't become mere consumers but also producers of knowledge so we may contribute to world knowledges. This is my hope for the Muslim American women in this study, that they may stay rooted in their identity as Muslims, whilst being open to learn from and challenge the knowledge constructed in the U.S. and eventually contribute to that body of knowledge.

Even President Obama at the United Nation General Assembly in 2014 cited Tunisia, Indonesia, and Malaysia as models of 'successful' Muslim countries. I listened to his speech and found it troubling. After all, the religion did not originate in my part of the world. We are not guardians of holy sites like the *Kaabah*¹⁰ or *Hira cave*,¹¹ nor are we as a people recipient of Allah's message. Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) blood does not course through our veins. Our language Malay is not the language of the *Koran* or *Hadiths*. Islam came to my part of the world mainly through Muslim traders and slowly

¹⁰Kaabah – It is a historical holy site in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, where all Muslims around the world prostrate in its direction when performing their daily prayers.

¹¹Hira is the cave the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) meditated in and first received the word of Allah.

began to replace animism and Hinduism. I grew up learning about the great but distant Islamic ‘civilization’, where Muslims were Scientific and Mathematical intellectuals, successful traders, artists and poets. What deeply saddens me looking at the state of things in the Middle East is how repressive some of the Islamic states are, how undemocratic, how deeply divided along sectarian lines they have become, and how violence has erupted in the region from time to time. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan further exacerbated violence and instability in the region. Where is the great Islamic ‘civilization’ I grew up learning about? It must have been utterly humiliating for Arab countries in the Middle East, in which Islam originates and I’m sure which take pride in their history and culture, to be sidelined in the President’s speech. Maybe I should not even be talking about a Muslim civilization or even a Muslim world. Am I too falling into the trap of adhering to narratives constructed by the media about the Muslim ‘world’ or ‘community’? And surely there must be stories of ‘success’ that are either missing or diminished in the mainstream media. There is no unified essentialized Muslim ‘world’ or ‘community’! There are only Muslim or predominantly Muslim countries that are constructed along varied political, cultural, economic, and social lines. We are as similar as we are different. And yet oftentimes when I hear discussions on issues related to Islam or Muslims, these complexity and nuances are often missing in the neatly packaged news sound bites.

Regardless of how far removed my participants and I are from the events in the Middle East, it has not stopped us from being essentialized and for our Muslim ‘community’ to be treated as a monolith (and at times I too fall into that trap); questioned about our religion; targeted for surveillance and harassment; demanded to denounce extremism and violence; in the case of the participants, questioned about their allegiance to the U.S. and its ‘values’ and called to further assimilate to an ‘American’ culture. This rhetoric comes in ebbs and flows, whenever another ‘terrorist’ event occurs perpetrated by Muslim extremist somewhere in this world and calls into question the ‘compatibility’

of Islam and Muslims in a ‘modern’ society, regardless of the fact these ‘extremist’ acts are perpetrated by a small minority of 1.6 billion Muslims in this world. Unfortunately, I am beginning to come to the conclusion that for as long as the Middle East remains a region of instability and turmoil, that blue piece of paper will remain tucked away behind the door of our consciousness. And no matter how many murals of the Statue of Liberty Muslim Americans draw, their identities and values will continue to be scrutinized and questioned. How the U.S., Europe and other countries where Muslims are a minority, respond to its Muslim community is crucial to encourage a sense of belonging and engage them as part of a full participation in society. It also highlights the possible role Muslims in different parts of the world could play in the discussion of Islam and Muslims in the Middle East, particularly to the question of negotiating between maintaining our identities and values and Western values. I am beginning to believe Western capitalism and democracy as espoused by the U.S. are advanced in this world through their concerted effort using hard and soft power, and is aimed at shaping countries around the world into their mirror image. The closer a country and its people are in reflecting its own image, the more ‘friendly’ and less of a threat they are to the ‘Western’ world.

At times I wondered how far these young Muslim American women in this study will get to fully express their multiple identities because being a Muslim is to be aware that there are aspects of our beliefs and practices that will be scrutinized, ridiculed or suspected. I may have the ‘comfort’ of being in a predominantly Muslim community but being in a globalized world, Muslim Malaysians are not shielded from such scrutiny. For example, I read the following excerpt from Bond and Simons (2009) *The Next Front: Southeast Asia and the Road to Global Peace with Islam* with some great deal of concern:

The story of such remarkable progress unfolding in what had long been a drowsy corner of Southeast Asia has spread across the *umma*,¹² inspiring Muslims around the world and earning their admiration. In 2006 Malaysia took over simultaneously the chairmanships of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Non-aligned Movement, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. But something is out of kilter. While the skyline soars toward the future, Malaysia's Muslim Street is moving in a different direction. In the 1970s and 1980s, it was unusual for Malay women to cover their hair or to wear anything more modest than the traditional sarong kabaya, a hip-hugging, ankle-length skirt and snug blouse. Typical for men were lightweight trousers and loose batik shirt, a cool, relaxed style reminiscent of the Hawaiian aloha look. Arab dress was limited to the handful of traveling businessmen from the Middle East. Now more than 80 percent of Malay women wear a closely wrapped head scarf. (Excerpt from: Bond & Simons, 2009, Kindle Locations 2163-2171).

While the authors began to describe Malaysia in rather positive terms due to our economic progress particularly after we had gained independence, the following sentences stood out for me and I felt disturbed, "But something is out of kilter. While the skyline soars toward the future, Malaysia's Muslim Street is moving in a different direction." What did they mean? Why did they say that? Why are they suggesting that our developmental progress contradicts with the 'look on the streets'? In their assumption, does a progress of a nation entail not just the successful global capitalist market being set up in the country but also with a more 'Western' way of dressing? Or in other words, the more we progress the less 'Islamic' we become. Are they suggesting being more Islamic (whatever that means) makes a nation less progressive? Worse still, do they think Islam is incompatible with progress? Did they know that many Muslim Malaysians would take great pride in our religiosity? Are we too perceived as a possible threat to the U.S. much like the Arabs in the Middle East?! It is these biases that unfortunately as Muslims we will encounter. There are of course valid criticisms against some of the practices we see in some of the Muslim countries but it may be erroneous to view it as a problem with Islam rather than its interpretation or cultural influences. It is also important to note that

¹²The whole community of Muslims

struggle exists within these Muslim countries for a more just and equal society much like any other countries. It is these efforts and struggle that should be nurtured, through civil societies, rather than through a barrel of a gun or economic sanctions. I wish for healing hands now (however naïve it may be) for the Middle East. They've bled too much.

Chapter XI

ENGLISH, ISLAM, AND EMPIRE

"Until The Lion Learns How To Write - Every Story Will Glorify The Hunter." ~ African Proverb

'Gone Forever' by Bariss Mills

Halfway through shaving, it came –
 the word for a poem.
 I should have scribbled it
 on the mirror with a soapy finger,
 or shouted it to my wife in the kitchen,
 or muttered it to myself till it ran
 in my head like a tune.
 But now it's gone with the whiskers
 down the drain. Gone forever,
 like the girls I never kissed,
 and the places I never visited –
 the lost lives I never lived.

I see this study as the mirror we scribble with our soapy finger, the partner we shout to in the kitchen or our muttering self as we pin down our flighty thoughts while sharing our interpretation of our 'English Education' experiences. It is a community space where we get to share our partial stories, troubled by our limited agency and selective memories. These stories are not meant to be generalized. They are at best blotches of paint colors drawn by the hand of a painter (me), forming some semblance of paintings, that are open to interpretation and reinterpretation by both the painters and their viewers.

This research is one version of Muslim immigrants' interpretation of their English Education experiences in the U.S. intersected by their multiple identities such as Muslim,

immigrants, women, American, and second language learners of English. I was interested to find out the discourse Muslim American immigrants had utilized when describing their interpretations of their English Education experiences in the U.S. and their experiences being Muslims here. My interpretations of this study were framed by my autobiographical forms of self-reflexive inquiry, of examining my own limited, partial and incomplete experiences as a Muslim woman, second language speaker of English and English teacher, as an international student who was educated in the UK for six years and who was pursuing her graduate study in the U.S. as well as the conceptual frameworks of postcolonialism, third world women feminism and poststructuralist.

These theoretical frameworks as well as my own subjectivities as a researcher, had affected how I had constructed this research and my analysis and interpretations of the participants' responses. However, postcolonialism and third world women feminism are prone to grand generalization, which assumed and trapped postcolonial and third world individuals in experiences that failed to recognize and acknowledge how each person is subjected to, construct and is reconstructed within a particular discursive system one may be conscious and subconscious of. These theoretical frameworks as well as my own subjectivities as a researcher, have the potential to affect how I had constructed this research and my interpretations of the participants' responses, thus 'trapping' them in a grand narrative. Poststructuralism in particular was invaluable in troubling and disrupting the other two theoretical frameworks. While I have to acknowledge as a researcher I was 'compelled' to interpret these responses, I hope by combining poststructuralism to postcolonialism and third world women feminism theoretical frameworks, I have possibly disrupted and complicated the Muslim American female immigrants' interpretations of their English Education experiences. Firstly, following the crisis of representation, it had placed me the researcher under scrutiny, by not absolving me of my 'guilt' in how I had chosen to construct this research and my 'reading' or interpretation of the interviews. Furthermore, key concepts in poststructuralism such as 'memory,'

‘experiences,’ ‘agency,’ ‘difference,’ and ‘reflective subjectivities’ had helped me to interpret and construct the participants’ English education, and their identities as Muslims, women and immigrants as limiting, fluctuating, and subjected to discursive systems.

In this study, I had utilized Smith and Watson’s (2001) definition, experience as “an interpretation of the past and of our place in a culturally and historically specific present” (p. 24). Experience is a socially constructed series of events, based on the external material ‘reality’ we encounter, enacted by our internal (sub)consciousness on the external events (Scott, 1992). How we interpret and make meanings of those events are dependent on social, cultural, political and religious discursive scripts we have been exposed to and have internalized. Memory, according to Smith and Watson (2001), “is an interpretation of a past that can never be fully recovered” (p. 16). Our memories are selective, contextual, historical and deeply political. What we choose to remember and how we choose to remember events, become like a stitched quilt, “[t]hat is, we inevitably organize or form fragments of memory into complex constructions that become the stories of our lives” (Schacter, in Smith & Watson, 2001, p. 16). In this study, I see ‘difference’ as an internal and external construction based on notions of race, religion, accents, language, nationality and so on. Difference is how we define ourselves, how we define others and how others define us. It is an imaginary, discursive and fluid construction that occurs in our daily interaction with others and ourselves.

In a discussion of agency, Smith and Watson (2001) argue that as much as we would like to think ourselves as individuals with complete agency, we are nevertheless influenced by the cultural as well as social scripts and sanctions. They argue,

We have noted that discursive systems emergent in social structures shape the operations of memory, experience, identity, and embodiment. People tell stories of their lives through the cultural scripts available to them, and they are governed by cultural strictures about self-presentation in public. (p. 42)

It speaks to our limited agency and disrupt the view of the researcher as an authority figure, who is always more enlightened and have risen beyond his or her neurosis. In addition, as a researcher I had come from a post positivistic to learning about a poststructuralist epistemology, whereby the conception of a researcher as objective, authoritative, and fully conscious of him/herself were disrupted by a self whose memory, agency and experiences are limited. Thus, the participants' retelling and remembering were disrupted by their limited and partial experiences, memory and agency, whilst being embedded in discursive systems relating to English Education.

My own interrogation of my subjectivities in the chapter 'My own postcolonial English education' was my attempt to make conscious my own multiple subjectivities and how these could easily shape how I had constructed this research, what my research questions were, how I had chosen my participants, what questions I had chosen to ask, and to what extent my interpretative theoretical frameworks and subjectivities had imposed upon and framed my interpretations and representations of my participants' points of view. Following Laurel Richardson's 'writing as inquiry,' this thesis had been a process of discovery and it had been a surprise at times where it had led me. Very often we tend to write to tell people about a particular issue but often we fail to acknowledge that it is in the act of writing that we discover our beliefs and how we construct and interpret the world we live it. In other words, we attempt although at times it may be limited and limiting, to articulate what would otherwise be a conscious, at times almost unconscious, and others remained unconscious thoughts still. Only in writing did I make visible how I had constructed my experiences and multiple identities, that at times have not risen above (as much as I desire it to) the binaries or grand narrative I seek to overcome. I was not always as 'enlightened' as I wish I was. In reflecting on my English Education experiences, I was drawing attention to aspects of learning and teaching the language that was informed by its discursive systems. There may be aspects of it I may not have noticed which other readers may be able to.

When constructing and representing the interviews with the participants, I chose to straddle between a researcher's authoritative and supportive voice. I wanted to move away from traditional qualitative researches, where the researcher would extract short snippets of the participants' narrative as an afterthought to his or her well-articulated arguments. Instead, I had constructed stretches of speech by the participants grouped under a few themes I had found to be prominent (based on my research questions, my theoretical frameworks and my subjectivities); 'Interpretation of the Immigrants' English Education Experiences,' 'Accessing cultural discourses,' 'The Browning effect – Hierarchical Constructions of Accents,' 'The *Hijabis* and non-*Hijabis*,' and 'Being American, Islamophobia, and Surveillance.' While I did try to honor the participants' responses by composing stretches of their speeches, I had also done some editing such as deleting comments I did not find relevant to the themes, removing redundant comments, reorganizing some of the comments for cohesion, and removing my own dialogue. Within each theme, I had constructed sub-themes based on the participants' own phrases. These phrases were chosen because I felt they had represented the main point each participant was trying to address and it gave the readers an overview of the issues raised by the participants. This did not mean I chose to completely privilege and romanticize the narrators voice as some people may criticize. I did utilize my subjectivities and conceptual frameworks after each section to interpret and analyze the data. In parts on my musings, I would acknowledge if my interpretation of what the participants had said was conjecture on my part especially when the meaning was unclear or when the participants contradicted themselves or changed their minds about an issue. I felt I needed to balance between my role as a researcher when 'imposing' my own subjectivities and interpretative theoretical frameworks, determining how the data was represented, while also giving space for my very articulate participants to speak. I didn't want my voice to completely overwhelm what the participants had to say, as most times I felt they had said it better than I could. I also did not want to extract short snippets of their dialogues as

only supporting details to my analysis and interpretation as I did in previous traditional qualitative researches I had carried out in the past. My interpretation of the data was by no means exhaustive. I recognized my own limitations in how I had chosen to interpret, analyze and represent the data. In constructing stretches of speeches, I was also leaving some room for other readers to ‘notice’ and take away other readings from them instead of leaving my readers with no choice to possible alternative interpretations had I only constructed and extracted snippets of their speeches to explicate my ‘theories.’ When representing the data, I did not always choose findings that represented the majority at the expense of minority views such as in the case of ‘The Browning Effect – Hierarchical Constructions of Accents.’ Nor did I choose findings that only confirmed my own experiences or interpretations.

I began each chapter of my “musings” with an excerpt from the play *Pygmalion* because having interrogated my autobiography of my postcolonial English Education, I had found that some of the themes in *Pygmalion* had figured quite prominently in my consciousness in relation to learning the English language as a means to access a language of power and opportunity, and how transformational or non-transformational learning English could be for me and my participants. The play also touched on feeling a sense of belonging and non-belonging and making decisions on which space(s) we choose to occupy at different time and places in our lives.

I cannot deny that postcolonialism had shaped much of my perception of the ‘world’ I lived in as I had interrogated in the section ‘My postcolonial English Education.’ In this study, I see imperialism as an advancement of economic, political and cultural values by a few dominant and powerful countries. I did not assume a direct continuation of imperialism as practiced more than 100 years ago but I acknowledged and questioned the different forms it may have taken on at present, which I had interrogated in this study. When interrogating my postcolonial English Education, I had found that my construction of my early English Education spoke to the subtle ways in

which the discursive system of English Education could have an effect on one's perception in how he or she views him/herself and other's speech and how we are not always conscious of our reenacting the very power structures we oppose.

Apart from acquiring the grammatical structures, phonology and morphology of English, another aspect of my English Education is the acquisition of knowledge as constructed in English speaking countries. I saw dissemination of English and its teaching as the prerogative of the English speaking communities, who speak it as their mother tongue. In other words, not only were we suppose to emulate the structure and form of the language from British English but we also learnt how it should be taught from native speakers of English. It almost always felt I had to aspire to speak and teach English like the native speakers and I was a recipient of these knowledges. As much as I would like to do away with this concept of 'native speakers' as British, American or Australian Caucasian speakers of Standard English and follow Chomsky's definition that "everyone is a native speaker of the particular (language) that person has 'grown' in his/her mind/brain" (Paikeday, 1985, p. 58, in Willinsky, 1998, p. 195), I felt it would fail to take into considerations the systematic institutionalizations of Standard British English as *the* model of English propagated by the Oxford, Cambridge and Merriam Webster dictionaries, the BBC and the British Council. In other words, while the concept of native speakers could further subsumed diverse racial speakers of English, who have acquired Standard English as suggested by Chomsky, what is considered as Standard English is still to a large extent determined by a small group of people who have 'authority' over the language by regulating, sanctioning and propagating one version of the language above all else as *the* 'Standard' to be upheld.

If as espoused by Ashcroft that postcolonial transformation involved an appropriation of the language, in my case I felt it was more incumbent upon me as an English teacher to be a 'guardian' of the language rather than one of many of its creators. When I had arrived in Teachers College, to begin my doctoral program in English

Education, having completed my undergraduate and Masters in TESOL and applied linguistics respectively, learning about how to read and teach literature was new to me. Where previously, I had learnt about teaching English to second language speakers based on a technical rational conception of the curriculum, I was learning about teaching literature grounded in a more 'humanistic' curriculum that attended to the arts and the students' autobiography. In my classes at TC, I had learnt how to talk about a text, how to deconstruct a text, and how a text is written.

When interrogating my postcolonial English Education, I had conveyed past experiences as how I think I saw them at the time and yet these interpretations did not necessarily have a direct continuous line to my present perception. It also speaks to a continuous and ongoing movement of the 'self' that is not fixed and constantly in perpetual motion, which is not always easily constructed in text. We researchers, like painters and writers, attempt to paint or pen down a scene, while that scene changes in movement and light, affected too by our own internal consciousness. There was a perpetual tension here I frustratingly was not always able to convey. I had also struggled with a feeling of vulnerability in exposing myself particularly in an academic setting that highly values the researcher as an authority, who was always self-aware and conscious and not subjected to struggles to grasp concepts or even worse not knowing! And at other times in my writings, I sound like the very authoritative figure I had conceived in my imagination. Added to this layer is the feeling of an outsider on the periphery of a center, where knowledges are created, a fictive boundary that requires for me crossings of seas and imagination. To sum up, my interrogation of my postcolonial English Education was a construction of a self at an intersection of old and new knowledges; straddling between two geographic locations; and negotiating my multiples selves and feelings of belonging that are in motion.

In examining Muslim immigrants' interpretation of their English Education experiences, postcolonialism as a theoretical framework was pertinent particularly when

recognizing the unequal power distributions between immigrants and the U.S. or in my case as a second language speaker of English and what I conceived as ‘native speakers’. What I found valuable in postcolonial theory is that it had helped me to examine the politics of immigrant education in the U.S.; to question the role of English and English teaching in the U.S. and globally as ‘natural and neutral’ endeavor; and to examine what discursive system it had constructed and perpetuated for my participants. There was a desire amongst a few of the participants to sound like native speakers (read Standard British English), a sense of shame that their accents were influenced by their mother tongues, a construction of meanings attached to different accents, and an awareness of how accents connote levels of education, status, and power. I did recognize following poststructuralist framework, that what became pertinent in our discussions was affected by our own subjectivities, partial experience, limited memory and agency.

When interrogating the participants’ interpretation of their English Education experiences particularly in relation to their ESL education, what I had found missing in their narrative, in their retelling, in their remembering was a more culturally relevant curriculum that valued and incorporated the students’ cultural knowledge and background. What I had found to be overwhelming instead was the participants’ feeling of alienation during their initial early education; a recognition that aspects of themselves that were different and the need to change some of them so as to gradually assimilate into the local community (although later on in their lives some of them may choose to reinforce aspects of their ‘difference’); and a strong desire for comfort and safety either from the ESL classes, their teachers and fellow ESL classmates. What the participants remembered was that the ESL classes were aimed at improving their English and focused on grammatical accuracy and developing the four skills i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking. In other words, immigrant ESL education for these participants had focused mainly on reducing the literacy gap between dominant and minority students (Delpit, 2001; Hirsh, 1988; Ogbu, 1978) and the curriculum that they had experienced were based

on a technical rational conception, not that dissimilar from Malaysia's approach to teaching ESL. Such curriculum views literacy as an autonomous and neutral practice which fails to take account the power relations in which literacy practices are imbedded (Street, 1993).

The role of their mother tongue was rather limited, although if they were fortunate enough to have teachers or fellow classmates who were conversant in their language, it had served as an aid to assist them in acquiring English. Eventually, for these participants, their mother tongue would be pushed back to the periphery, into more intimate context such as when speaking to their family members and relatives at home or to members of their own minority community. Their schools thus served as places to acculturate them into the mainstream discourse in order to improve their social, economic and political standing but not so much as places to affirm their culture and language. Thus, it had become part of "a project of homogeneity, normalization, and the production of the socially functional citizen" (Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001, p. 2).

When recalling their literature classes, the participants had discussed the variety of texts represented, the books they had related to, the various classroom activities they had engaged in and texts they had found difficult accessing. Leyla, Sabah, and Hannah felt they could relate more to texts where they could draw from their existing background knowledge as it made the text more accessible and relatable to them. I do feel to some extent it is important for minorities to see and read the full expression of a version of their reality in the texts they read particularly in English when it is not their mother tongue. It was important for Maisara to read literature that had reflected aspects of her life in a text so she felt a sense of ownership of the language. In turn, perhaps she felt she could use the language to express her 'world'. However, personally I also value literature for opening up spaces to read and understand other 'worlds.' We don't only read to see ourselves for that would be limiting but we also read to discover other imaginary worlds too. Scholes (1998) argue that a more powerful means of learning would not be what text

one has read but rather one's ability to deconstruct a text and identify its strengths and limitations. Scholes conception of English Education moves away from valuing literary texts as cultural capital as part of the nationalistic movement or identification of 'cultured' citizens. for the participants in this study, selecting texts that are reflective of the political issues they could relate to and examine the ideology or worldview of the characters in the text were important by way of "reading the word and the world."

On the issue of reading difficult texts as the participants had encountered in their reading of literature, Blau (2003) argues that a competent reader continues to have questions about the text s/he reads, contrary to the commonplace notion that competent readers often resolve most of their questions. Providing background information on text according to him could lead to a dependence on the teacher and direct the interpretation of text. He suggests that teachers provide students the opportunity to talk about and discuss their "emerging understanding as it falters and progresses" (p. 41). I could imagine Professor Blau cringing at the thought that for some of the participants, they were given background information, their teachers would explain the text away, and even they had resorted to reading 'Monkey Notes'!

I also examined the relationship between discourse, knowledge and power in academia as explicated by Foucault. Based on the participants' responses, I had examined the discourse of English as a global language, the role of the Arts in interpretation and representation and the discursive practices of academia. If you come from a community whereby your cultural discourses were not seen as particularly 'valuable' nor were they very empowering to your community, you would know what it was like having to constantly strive to seek access to cultural discourses not your own in order to gain access to power and opportunity. I wanted to find out to what extent the participants, like me, viewed English as a language of power and opportunity and gaining access to its cultural discourses entailed accessing discourses created in the West.

On the role of English in the world, I had argued that the present day English doesn't represent only the U.S., but rather a language that belongs to those who speak it as a first, second or even third language. This assumption that English as a world language and that it does not belong to only the U.K and the U.S. is advantageous to countries who feel a sense of ownership of the language, that they may adapt the language to suit local flavors and culture. This makes the case for the expansion of varieties of English but the Standard by which the language is measured is still in the center, i.e., England and to some extent the U.S.

The absorption of vocabulary from other languages was also part of the colonization movement as the English colonizers interacted with the local communities and began collecting scientific knowledge. I did feel it was important to acknowledge that while English absorbed vocabulary from other languages due to its history of colonization, it had done so to enrich its expression of the world, while still maintaining ownership over production of new knowledges and ultimately new words. However, as an international and dominant language in the world, it was easy to lose sight of its 'absorption' of vocabulary from other languages and even how the 'English' has laid claim to knowledges produced in the countries it once colonized. Whereas, I find minority languages having had to absorb a great number of vocabulary from English in order for them to remain up to date with expressions of current realities. It is not an even playing field for languages in the world because English could absorb vocabulary from other languages to enrich and empower itself but minority languages' absorption of vocabulary from English only serve to weaken and dominate it. As long as its cultural group did not produce new knowledges, it will continue to be the recipient of other languages rather than creators of new words. At a macro level, as long as dominant countries like the U.S. continue to influence and dictate constructions and categorizations of knowledges, the less dominant countries will continue to become its recipient. They

would have less power to affect change in how the ‘world’ is constructed along economic, political, cultural and social lines.

For the participants in this study, learning English was not just the acquisition of its vocabulary, syntax and phonology but it had also involved the learning of academic discourse. I paid particular attention to the participants’ as well as my own perceptions of how we accessed cultural discourses through the link between interpretation and the arts; how our limited experiences and knowledge may have affected our understanding of texts; issues of misrepresentation; learning the conventions of the written discourse; and finally writing as a means to contribute to – as well as perhaps unknowingly reinforcing Western-centric versions of which and whose knowledges “count” -- knowledge in the center of the Western world.

As readers our background knowledges, subjectivities, and theoretical frameworks would be brought to bear on our interpretation of texts. Depending on the interpretive community we were in, we will discover how our interpretive strategies are similar or different from other members in that community. The participants may have encountered instances whereby their own interpretive work were similar or different from others in the interpretive community, which could be seen as a way of learning new perspectives, and as Schwarz (2008) had argued could help challenge and modify our interpretation. This issue of interpretation, especially in relation to literature and the arts that Safeena and Safa had discussed may not be solely an immigrant issue but a question of privilege too. Not all immigrants are underprivileged though. Privileged people may have access to resources and experiences underprivileged students may not. Many of us educators believe – although this belief in and of itself speaks of a certain privileged of “being educated” not available to all -- that the more access to resources one has, the better her or his vocabulary and socialization, which ultimately affects her or his reading and writing of texts.

Accessing academic discourses for these participants was very important as they pursue their academic studies in their respective colleges. We collectively had learnt how to write personal response, report paper, policy paper, annotated bibliography, thesis and journal article as part of being in academia. Learning to read and write academic discourse were definitely important parts of learning but it was equally important for these students and myself to examine how texts are constructed, and ultimately how we can and do “become” producers of texts (Scholes, 1998). My own interpretation is that these participants were eager to access the language in order to succeed academically and career wise since they all viewed their migration to the U.S. as giving them access to “job security and educational opportunities” (Farah), and their general belief that “the U.S would give us a better life and future.” What they had done was to develop a sophisticated linguistic repertoire and awareness as to when and with whom they spoke a particular language or dialect with. In other words, they may have learnt to compartmentalize the languages they spoke to different context, person and function. It may not necessarily be shame that always drive their choice of language acquisition or use, but a pragmatic one. Willinsky (1998), in his book *Learning to Divide the World: Education at Empire's End*, argues, “Languages are not lost by accident or unwillingly forsaken. They give way to other desires, desires to join and be heard in other conversations, which left us happy enough to leave behind the accent and inflection of our former history and geography” (p. 190). Thus, learning to sound like a native speaker of English was not seen as a threat to their racial identity nor should it be. It may be the case that these participants and I would never ‘sound’ like a native speaker of English nor do we need to. There is a range of intelligible pronunciations in that as long as you are close enough to the ‘ideal’ pronunciation and intelligible to the general speakers of the language, it is good enough. A few researchers (Braine, 1999; Cook, 1999) have argued “that the goal of nativeness or even native-like proficiency was not only untenable for language learners, it was of dubious utility and desirability” (Motha, 2014, p. 42). In

other words, second language speakers of English may not need to ‘pass’ off completely as a native speaker like that demanded of Eliza Doolittle, in order to do well academically and economically (except if you’re a BBC¹ presenter). In my own interpretation, making the effort to sound like a native speaker is simply pragmatic, but to form judgments, attach meanings to various accents and labeling a particular accent as ‘sophisticated,’ ‘aggressive,’ ‘educated,’ ‘uneducated,’ and ‘posh’ involve another layer of value judgment. The pertinent question is how do we form such judgments? I had found Mignolo and Vanquez’s (2013) ‘coloniality’ as a dominant movement to control not only “the economy, the political, and knowledge, but also control over the senses and perception” helped to explain these very subtle constructions of our sensibility. I had posited that the participants’ discussion on the hierarchical constructions of accents could be more sufficiently explained by utilizing Mignolo and Vanquez’s conception of ‘decolonial aesthetics.’ I had chosen to include this theme in my writing, even though only three of the participants made conscious mentions of it while for the other participants, it may be unconscious or it did not figure so prominently in their consciousness in relation to the interpretations of their English education experiences, because when doing my own reflexive writing, I had discovered how my perception of accents was shaped by the films I had watched like *The Sound of Music* and *My Fair Lady*. While I was only examining one aspect of this colonial aesthetics i.e. accents, it speaks to other subtle forms ‘coloniality’ could take shape. How often do we go about our daily life without questioning these underlying assumptions or worse still view them as a ‘natural’ progression of an education?

I also examined the use of the *hijab* and what meanings the participants, the Muslim and non-Muslim community had attached to it. I had found third world women

¹The BBC has been a role model of Received Pronunciation and indirectly sanction the accepted ‘sounds of English’.

feminism theoretical framework to be valuable because as a Muslim woman, I have oftentimes read and heard narratives that had positioned Muslim women, in particular to their wearing of the *hijab*, as oppressive and contradictory to the values of ‘equality’ and ‘freedom’ as espoused by ‘western’ feminists. Such beliefs have led to the banning of the *hijab* in France (Scott, 2007) and it being labeled as an archaic practice contradictory to our ‘modern’ lives. Muslim women have fought against such misrepresentations and chose to reinterpret the wearing of the *hijab* as in line with feminist values as they have found that it frees and empowers them to accomplish pursuits instead of being sexually objectified. It must be said that the issue of the *hijab* is debated not only in non-Islamic countries but also in predominantly Islamic countries and within the Muslim community in non-Islamic countries like in the U.S. There has never been a consensus as to the ruling on the wearing of the *hijab*. Based on my own experience, I have to acknowledge how I too have subconsciously internalized the values attached to the many forms of the *hijab* and became more comfortable with one form as opposed to another such as the *niqab*. Third world women feminism helped me to examine one of the identities of the participants in this research as Muslim women in one of the Western countries, whereby their religious identity may or may not be accepted or understood and how these participants have chosen to reinterpret and assent to the readings they have felt imposing on them.

The *hijab* has become an identity marker for Muslim women and it is also a point of contention outside as well as inside the Muslim community. Not only are the styles and colors of the *hijab* as varied as fashion, but the idea of modesty varies greatly in predominantly Muslim countries and in countries where Muslims are minorities. Thus, it entails that its treatment too ranges from it being legally obligatory on women to it being seen as a choice a woman decides for herself to it being banned altogether in France. I had interpreted themes related to how I heard and saw the participants discuss their relationship to the *hijab*; how they had negotiated being practicing Muslims in the U.S.;

how they had interpreted the U.S. and perhaps world-wide media perpetuated negative perceptions of Muslims; if and how they had countered prejudice and ignorance; and how they had perceived aspects of being Muslims that were suspected and rejected by the larger public.

As Muslims, the participants were aware of how their practices, such as fasting during Ramadan or wearing the *hijab*, may have been viewed as being ‘different’ because they would sometimes be asked questions about it. In particular, some people may view these practices as being harsh or oppressive and as contradicting Western lifestyles. These participants, from my point of view, seemed to have developed a double consciousness in that they were aware that there were aspects to their Muslimness that would be suspected, scrutinized and even rejected.

We discussed the media’s role in portraying Muslim women negatively. However, this negative perception could be countered by acts of kindness by Muslims, and convince people that we were not a threat to the public. It was crucial for Muslims to interact with non-Muslims in order to counter the negative perception portrayed in the media. Thus, the importance of Muslims to be full part of the community was important, we had all agreed, because isolating yourself would only be counterproductive. In this study, as the concept, opinions, meanings and treatment of the *hijab* varied greatly in society, the participants demonstrated levels of awareness of the *hijab*’s acceptance in their daily interaction, not just amongst the non-Muslims but also within the Muslim community itself. The *hijab* served as an identity and religious marker, a code of conduct, a threat, an education, and a form of respect for these participants.

I wanted to include the *hijab* in this research because I felt it was one of the most visible and symbolic piece of clothing for Muslim women and its use has provided one of the most contentious argument between third world women and western feminists in general, which is linked to gender, religion, politics, and culture. It also spoke to the poststructuralist conception of agency, in examining to what extent these Muslim women

would accept, reject or acquiesce to the internal and external meanings constructed by their own, the Muslim community and Western perception and interpretations of the *hijab*. As Scott (2007) had succinctly argued in her book *The Politics of the Veil*, we cannot examine the issues relating to the *hijab* without linking it to postcolonialism, racism, secularism and nationalism.

When discussing about their identity as American, I had found that identity constructions are influenced by interpretations of internal and external narratives. How these participants saw themselves, and how they had interpreted and responded to the subtle and unsubtle messages about who they were would in turn help construct their identity. Most of the participants identified themselves as being both American and Pakistani/Bangladeshi/Egyptian. Leyla, however, had demarcated her identity into American and non-American. She had an image in her mind as to what an American would eat and wear. Her own Bangladeshi culture like her language, food and clothing was seen as un-American. I would venture further to say that her being a Muslim and wearing the *hijab* would thus be categorized as un-American. One could infer from Leyla's narrative that her image of an American was probably someone who is white, Christian, eats lots of burgers, drink sodas and only speak American English. Farah, on the other hand, had completely rejected her American identity (although this may be seen more as an ongoing fluctuating process or not) and she even saw herself as being a "Black African" distinguishing herself from African American probably because she had the unfortunate experience of being bullied and alienated due to the values and standards she had upheld that had helped her to excel academically. There is a false imaginary representation in the mind of some immigrants like Leyla and Farah of an 'American' person and the closer one was in terms of your physical attributes, values and culture to this imaginary construct, the closer he or she is to being an American. Unlike Standard British English i.e. Received Pronunciation that is sanctioned, regulated and perpetuated by the British royalty, the BBC, the Oxford dictionary, and the British Council, the U.S.

as a land of immigrants cannot sanction what ‘group’ of people is considered as ‘American’ and even if such decree is made, the original American would be the Native American.

The media’s misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims are troublesome since it reduces the issues relating to terrorism to simplistic sound bites, conflates the madness of Muslim terrorists with more than a billion Muslims, and instills the belief that Islam is inherently violent. There are consequences to interpretations and representations. It has led to the surveillance of the Muslim community, biases, prejudiced and hate crimes against Muslims. The issue of surveillance did not figure prominently in my participants’ consciousness as it was done very discreetly. While most of the participants in this study may not have encountered too many Islamophobic interactions and witnessed the rise of hate crimes against us following Muslim terrorist attacks, it would be prudent for us to make mental notes of these tragic and horrific crimes as well as cases of prejudice and hate crimes against us. Nathan Lean (2012), in his book *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Fear of Muslims*, argues that there is a concerted effort by the rights groups to create and instill fear amongst American about Muslim and Islam. While some fear like Muslim terrorists’ attacks may be justified but much is exaggerated. One of the things these right wing groups does is to mark and position Muslim Americans as an outsider to the country, with religious values that are deemed to be contradictory and a threat to the American values, and whose sole aim is to take over the country.

While I was interested in interrogating Muslim immigrants’ interpretations of their English Education, I had not expected issues of Muslim surveillance or Islamophobia to figure so prominently in my consciousness. And yet coming to the end of my study, at a time of great uncertainty particularly when it comes to the roles of Muslims and Islam in a globalized world, I am more convinced of the relevance and pertinence in examining the political social cultural aspects of learning English and its cultural discourses for Muslim Americans. As Muslims we may go about our daily lives most of the time

unaffected by these competing narratives but like that blue paper pasted behind the door of AAANY I had seen four years ago, it is a doubt, fear, or uncertainty tucked somewhere in our consciousness and emerging when we encounter another event that calls into question our beliefs and belonging.

Many times, and especially throughout this research study, I had wondered, though, how neutral English is? Does it create certain biases and expectations particularly in relation to knowledge and experiences from other cultures written in English? Also can it ever be truly representative of different cultural values and worldviews? Are there not things lost in translation? I felt it was important to not treat English as a ‘natural and neutral’ international language but to examine its history, present and future trajectory so as we may reinterpret and rewrite its usages and meanings to affect its speakers who speak it as a first, second or third language. Indeed, the U.S., with its history of immigration, is a fascinating place to examine how minorities are empowered through the democratic process to rewrite and reinterpret constructions of knowledges. I believe, especially as one “result” of this study, that it is this process that could be emulated by less powerful countries in the world. But I also have to wonder about the extent the minorities efforts to reinscribe ‘realities’ – by this, I mean the power of dominant discourses to shape and frame -- at national and international stages, has had and continues to have various levels of “success and failure.” Small countries like Malaysia are constantly having to balance and make the decisions between acquiescing, accepting and rejecting the cultural discourses, power structures and knowledge constructions propagated by more dominant countries like the U.S and the U.K., particularly when these power structures and systems and knowledge constructions are geared in favor of them and are based on unequal power distributions and susceptible to abuses (think 2008 financial crisis). By way of its economic, political and cultural expansions in the world, the U.S. is in a position to affect and influence what happens to other countries. So I feel that the U.S. has moral, ethical and social responsibilities to examine its treatments of

minorities by way of gauging its treatments and relationships to communities around the world. I feel at this point in time, how the U.S. treats its Muslim population is being closely watched by many because that would define its relationship to Muslims and Muslim countries like my own around the world.

When we continue to teach English in ahistorical manner and utilizing a technical rational curriculum, which excludes the autobiography of the students and the political, historical, cultural and social contexts the learning takes place in, we are ignoring and choosing to be oblivious to the possibilities of the past affecting the present. I would concede that there is so much in how we view the world, which has become so subconscious, and part of an automated response that we do not realize they are part of the colonial past. The act of decolonization involved more than gaining autonomy to include a decolonization of the mind and imagination. Reading Willinsky (1998), he drew my attention to how we are still steeped in imperialistic mind when we continue to compare, contrast, divide the world, construct images of the ‘other’ and exclude certain narratives and histories. When you are in a privilege position, you may potentially expect the world to bend to your will and support the comfort of your existence. Why is examining the teaching of English from a postcolonial perspective important then for the Muslim American participants in this study? It is about opening up spaces for discussion on the possibilities of the discursive discourse associated with second language teaching and learning of English being constituted and reconstituted in our English Education experiences.

This research also serves to trouble the narrative that I have lived with since I was young, growing up watching movies like the *Sound of Music* and *My Fair Lady*, that access to English and English discourses entail acceptance. No, transforming an ‘ugly duckling’ into a swan much like what Professor Higgins did with Eliza Doolittle did not ensure her acceptance into a ‘higher society.’ If that is the price one has to pay to get into the ‘club’ then perhaps one could decide it is not worth paying for like the protagonist in

The Reluctant Fundamentalist, who was disillusioned with the American Dream and chose in the end to return 'home' to Pakistan. Perhaps there is another alternative, one that does not require a complete acceptance or rejection of either world. I believe most of us live in between the best of many worlds; where every day we get to decide how to carve out our little spaces; where the cultural lines are more blurred; and identities are more fluid and not fixed. No doubt being a Muslim had played a crucial role in the construction of my participants' multiple identities. It is a source of strength and ethical guidance in how they behave in the world, differentiates them from other groups, and affects how they are treated. They are also Americans whose feelings of belonging and identification to that identity is also a fluid and ongoing process.

Chapter XII

THE LAST CHAPTER

My Stream of Consciousness

I will not write a conclusion here. There is none. Whether I will be successful or not in not writing a conclusion, we will see as I have not written it, whatever it will turn out to be. But then I'm not sure how to write a non-conclusion. So here goes. It has been a long journey completing this thesis and it has been a long thesis too. I apologize to my participants for what this study cannot be, for my overt and covert consciousness in constructing this long piece of writing, for not being able to surpass the very neurosis we have been educated in, that I am not as 'enlightened' as I wish I could be. I would have liked instead to write a different narrative, where we were accepted, where we didn't feel scrutinized. There are moments in our lives though where we do feel accepted too. Those moments are punctuated between incidents of terrorist attacks, and when we don't read the news. I can't shake off this 'academic' voice either. It adheres too closely to the surface, particularly when the stress intensifies and the deadline looms. But I would like to one day. Find and construct a different voice. A voice that is less 'authoritative' as if it didn't have to convince someone it was worth listening to. A more relaxed voice like this one. This is my tired voice actually. I want us to not accept those narratives we hear from politicians, media and keyboard warriors on social media that blames all of us and our religion for disrupting their sense of comfort and safety as if we were not disrupted too, that we go about our daily lives, reading, writing, teaching, driving, eating without ever

feeling as they would like us to feel that we were somehow complicit in disturbing their well-being, and not to acquiesce to their demand that we do something about it, that we have to speak out more and shout and stop the terrorists. We don't need to convince them that we are safe, we do no harm. We can read the *Quran* in public and utter '*Allahuakhar*' and they would not bat an eye nor have us thrown off airplanes because a passenger or an air steward was fearful of our look or our language. We can wear the *hijab* and people are in awe with our intelligence, strength, compassion or kindness. We can wear the *hijab* and swear. I want us to learn English and discover 'worlds' beautiful, enchanting, and disturbing. I want us to read books out of joy and not because we wanted to convince others how cultured and well educated we are. I'm sorry imperialism hasn't ended, that it takes on other forms and shapes, when I find my students pronunciation jarring to my ears, when I wish for them to speak with Received Pronunciation and sound like the Queen of England. I'm sorry I feel we are small sometimes, that we need to be wary of dominating discourse and forces that compel us to do as they will, for deceiving us into thinking learning English is good because how could it not be, for making us fearful we would be excluded from accessing power and knowledge we so much desire if we don't. This is my tired voice. It is a voice that is spent from spending 6 years of my life trying to get a doctoral degree, a voice that feels it has to push against other forces, a voice that attempts to inscribe and re-inscribe my subjectivities, interpret and represent events and people, at times articulate, uncertain, falters, and fails. A voice that had the courage to write and continue to write and rewrite. A voice that fails to see. It was not always comfortable. I still feel I have shown too much of myself, that I want to take cover, withdraw and press delete. I want you my participants to know that you belong, you ARE American, that being American does not mean being white and somebody who eats burgers a lot. You are Nigerian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi too. There is no resolution here. Look elsewhere my dear readers. There are theories and authors that have suggested the way. They tell us this and that. This is how it is and what you should do it

to resolve the problem. There is only lived experiences, interpreted and reinterpreted, inscribed and re-inscribed with discourses that structure, limit and assign meanings. Then there are lived experiences that challenge, refused and fight. Go back to the previous chapter with its neat summarization and reread it if it pleases you more. Pretend this chapter doesn't exist. This will not be a conclusion and this is not the end.¹

¹ There will not even be a full stop here nor in this footnote

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Appendix A

Interview Invitation (via email)

Assalamualaikum,

I am writing to you personally to invite you to participate in my research, which focuses on examining how Muslim American immigrant female youths are interpreting their educational experiences as second language speakers of English within U.S contexts, where provisions for immigrant education vary considerably from one state/region/school to the next. The participants I have in mind for this research will be Muslim female immigrants who:

- have migrated to the U.S. when they were very young;
- who have gone through the U.S. education system up to High School level;
- and who now may or may not be enrolled in college.

If you happen to fulfill the criteria above, then this is an invitation for you to share space with me in discussing how you have experienced the provision (or lack thereof) for English Education for immigrant population. You will be involved in a series of interviews. You have the option to choose to participate in EITHER individual OR group interviews, within two to three months' duration. The interviews will be: i) (between one to two) of one to two hours interviews in individual format (two to four hours altogether). OR ii) (between two to three) of two to three hours in focused group formats (four to nine hours altogether). There will be a follow up interview after one to two months, if necessary between one to two hours for individual interview; OR two to three hours for focus group interview. The interviews could be conducted either in Teachers College or if it is more convenient for you I am willing to meet up with you at your college as long as we could find a quiet room to record our interview. We also could meet up as a focus group. Let me know if you are interested or if you know of any of your other friends who

might be interested in participating in my research. It would be very helpful if you could spread the word around. Thank you. I look forward to hearing from you.

Azlina Abdul Aziz
Doctoral Candidate
Teachers College
Columbia University.

Appendix B

Interview Consent Form

Teachers College, Columbia University
 525 West 120th Street
 New York NY 10027
 212 678 3000
www.tc.edu

INFORMED CONSENT

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH: You are invited to participate in a research study on examining how Muslim American immigrant female youths are interpreting their English Education experiences, as second language speakers of English within U.S. contexts, where provisions for immigrant education vary considerably from one state/region/school to the next. The participants I have in mind for this research will be Muslim female immigrants who:

- have migrated to the U.S. when they were very young;
- who have gone through the U.S. education system up to High School level;
- and who now may or may not be enrolled in college.

If you happen to fulfill the criteria above, then this is an invitation for you to share space with me in discussing how you have experienced the provision (or lack thereof) for English Education for immigrant population. You will be involved in a series of EITHER individual OR group interviews, which could be conducted at Gottesman Library, Teachers College, or in a place of your own choosing, as long as we could find private space in which to audio-record our interviews. You will be asked to share your experiences in relation to English Education in U.S. schools, through two individual OR three focused group interviews, which will be audio recorded. Overall, the interviews will be EITHER between: i) two to four hours in individual format OR ii) four to nine hours in group format. In addition, you will also be invited to share your experiences in

narrative written form as supplement; however, this is not a requirement for participation. The recordings will then be transcribed, analyzed and reported in my doctoral dissertation. This research will be conducted by the principal researcher, Azlina Abdul Aziz.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: The risks associated with this study are you may feel some discomfort in revealing any sensitive experiences; you might feel uncomfortable with some of the probing questions about your status as an immigrant Muslim woman who is an English-as-a-second-language speaker and writer and the implications they may have for you at present and future times. In a focused group interviews, fellow participants will know who is participating and what is being said. Thus, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in the case that participants are to share this information with others.

However, I will remind all participants involved in focus group interviews that you are asked to keep the conversation and identity of focus group participants private. There are no direct benefits to you. If you choose to withdraw from the participating in this research, there will NOT be any repercussions. Your contributing data will be completely deleted from the study.

PAYMENTS: As part of your participation, you will receive \$20 worth of MTA card.

DATA STORAGE TO PROTECT CONFIDENTIALITY: The data I will collect will be stored in my computer, which is password protected and I am the sole person who has access to it. If I were to print out any of the data transcripts, they will be kept in my private room, which only I have the key to. The printed out data transcripts will later be shredded to ensure nobody will gain access to it.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: You have the option to choose to participate in EITHER individual OR group interviews, within two to three month's duration. The interviews will be EITHER:

i) (between one to two) of one to two hours interviews in individual format (two to four hours altogether). OR

ii) (between two to three) of two to three hours in focused group formats (four to nine hours altogether).

There will be a follow up interview after one to two months, if necessary between EITHER one to two hours for individual interview; OR two to three hours for focus group interview.

HOW WILL RESULTS BE USED: The results of the study will be published in my dissertation, journals and articles, and presented at conferences, meetings, or used for educational purposes).

Appendix C

Participant's Rights

Teachers College, Columbia University
 525 West 120th Street
 New York NY 10027
 212 678 3000
www.tc.edu

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

Principal Investigator: Azlina Abdul Aziz

Research Title: Female Muslim American Immigrant's English Education experiences in the U.S.

- I have read and discussed the Research Description with the researcher. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purposes and procedures regarding this study.
- My participation in research is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without jeopardy to future medical care, employment, student status or other entitlements.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his/her professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue to participate, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research project that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.

- If at any time I have any questions regarding the research or my participation, I can contact the investigator, who will answer my questions. The investigator's phone number is (347)4358688.
- If at any time I have comments, or concerns regarding the conduct of the research or questions about my rights as a research subject, I should contact the Teachers College, Columbia University Institutional Review Board /IRB. The phone number for the IRB is (212) 678-4105. Or, I can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY, 10027, Box 151.
- I should receive a copy of the Research Description and this Participant's Rights document.
- If video and/or audio taping is part of this research, I () consent to be audio/video taped. I () do NOT consent to being video/audio taped. The written, video and/or audio taped materials will be viewed only by the principal investigator of the research team.
- Written, video and/or audio taped materials () may be viewed in an educational setting outside the research () may NOT be viewed in an educational setting outside the research.
- My signature means that I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: ____/____/____

Name: _____

If necessary:

Guardian's Signature/consent: _____ Date: ____/____/____

Name: _____

Investigator's Verification of Explanation

I certify that I have carefully explained the purpose and nature of this research to _____ (participant's name) in age-appropriate language. He/She has had the opportunity to discuss it with me in detail. I have answered all his/her questions and he/she provided the affirmative agreement (i.e. assent) to participate in this research.

Investigator's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D

Semi-structured Interview Protocol (Focus group)

The interview protocol will elicit participants' interpretations of their English Education experiences in the U.S. You will be involved in a series of focused group formats, within two to three month's duration. The interviews will be between (two to three) of two to three hours in focused group format. In focused group interviews, fellow participants will know who is participating and what is being said. Thus, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in the case that participants are to share this information with others. However, I will remind all participants involved in focus group interviews that they are asked to keep the conversation and identity of focus group participants private. There will be a follow up interview after one to two months for if necessary between two to three hours.

Interview 1

- 1) What do you remember about your immigrant journey to the U.S?
- 2) When did you and your family members immigrate to the U.S.?
- 3) Why did you and your family immigrate to the U.S.?
- 4) How did you negotiate your transition from your home country to the U.S.?
- 5) What was your perception of the U.S when you first arrived?
- 6) What are your perceptions now of the U.S. ?

Interview 2

- 1) What do you remember about the ways in which you find U.S. schools to be different from schools in your home country?

- 2) What languages do you speak in different context like your home and at school?
- 3) What is your experience in people's perception towards second language speakers?
- 4) What were the provisions provided for you as second language speakers at the schools you had attended?
- 5) How was the curriculum structured in terms of content i.e. grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary?
- 6) What reading materials were part of your English Education curriculum?
- 7) Were these reading materials inclusive of minority cultural groups?
- 8) Do you consider yourself as a first or second language speaker of English?
- 9) If you consider yourself as a first language speaker of English, then when did that transition happen?
- 10) Do you associate being a native speaker of English with a particular race?
- 11) Does being in a transnational position enable you to examine multiple narratives within and outside the U.S?

Interview 3

- 1) How do you think others in your community/city perceive American Muslims?
- 2) How have you been impacted personally as an American Muslim in post 9/11?
- 3) Do you think that the events of 9/11 and those following impacted the lives of Muslim American?

If yes, how so?

If no, why not?

- 4) What have you noticed about people's response to you as a Muslim woman wearing the *hijab* or not?
- 5) When did you decide to wear or not the *hijab*? And why or why not?
- 6) How have you negotiated your relationship with other American Muslims, seeing that it is a heterogenous group?
- 7) What are your views on the public spaces available for American Muslim community?
- 8) What is your experience in how Muslim women are positioned within the Muslim American community?

Appendix E

Semi-structured Interview Protocol (Individual)

The interview protocol will elicit participants' interpretations of their English Education experiences in the U.S. You will be involved in a series of individual interview, within two to three month's duration. The interviews will be (between one to two) of one to two hour(s) interviews in individual format. There will be a follow up interview after one to two months for if necessary between one to two hours.

Interview 1

- 1) What do you remember about your immigrant journey to the U.S?
- 2) When did you and your family members immigrate to the U.S.?
- 3) Why did you and your family immigrate to the U.S.?
- 4) How did you negotiate your transition from your home country to the U.S.?
- 5) What was your perception of the U.S when you first arrived?
- 6) What are your perceptions now of the U.S. ?
- 7) What do you remember about the ways in which you find U.S. schools to be different from schools in your home country?
- 8) What languages do you speak in different context like your home and at school?
- 9) What is your experience in people's perception towards second language speakers?
- 10) What were the provisions provided for you as second language speakers at the schools you had attended?
- 11) Do you consider yourself as a first or second language speaker of English?

12) If you consider yourself as a first language speaker of English, then when did that transition happen?

13) Do you associate being a native speaker of English with a particular race?

Interview 2

1) How was the curriculum structured in terms of content i.e. grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary?

2) What reading materials were part of your English Education curriculum?

3) Were these reading materials inclusive of minority cultural groups?

4) Does being in a transnational position enable you to examine multiple narratives within and outside the U.S?

6) How do you think others in your community/city perceive American Muslims?

7) How have you been impacted personally as an American Muslim in post 9/11?

8) Do you think that the events of 9/11 and those following impacted the lives of Muslim American?

If yes, how so?

If no, why not?

9) What have you noticed about people's response to you as a Muslim woman wearing the *hijab* or not?

10) When did you decide to wear or not the *hijab*? And why or why not?

11) How have you negotiated your relationship with other American Muslims, seeing that it is a heterogenous group?

12) What are your views on the public spaces available for American Muslim community?

13) What is your experience in how Muslim women are positioned within the Muslim American community?