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COMPUTER USE AS A SOCIAL ACTIVITY: A STUDY INVOLVING LIBYAN WOMEN LIVING AWAY FROM THEIR HOME COUNTRY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate displacement and the migrant experience, particularly in relation to the under-researched area of middle class migration, and the role of the computer in sustaining relationships at a distance. The participants were a group of elite Libyan women who lived with their husbands and children in North Manchester were the focus of the study. The focus of the study was centred on showing how these Libyan women used home computing and the internet as a social tool.

A qualitative research methodology was utilised in this study. The data consisted of exploratory semi-structured interviews with a Libyan mother and her daughter, and a series of group discussions collected from *Al Lamma* gatherings (women's social gatherings) which were attended by Libyan women of different backgrounds. The use of *Al Lamma* gatherings provided a culturally appropriate setting in which the women were able to express their views more freely than might have been the case in more traditional research settings such as group interviews or focus groups. The women's group discussion transcripts were translated from spoken Libyan Arabic into English. Participant-observation field notes, reflective extracts and diary notes were also part of the research data.

The analysis of the interviews and the women's group discussions revealed important issues as a result of using home computing and the internet as a social activity. Home computing was used as a vehicle for informal learning and self-development. However the women found it necessary to overcome various barriers and obstacles to their access to

home computing. For instance, conflict and power relations in Libyan families in North Manchester were reflected in members' access to and use of home computers, prompting strategies such as passive resistance by the women in order to secure access to home computing and the social and leisure goods that it offers. As a result, it is suggested, home computing contributed to the empowerment of the Libyan women participants. Culture and religion also had influences on family structures, and therefore upon practices around home computing and internet use. Further issues discussed in the study included the role of home computing in sustaining real and 'imagined' community, and the significance of engaging with virtual realities for children's development. The thesis also addressed issues related to the role of the English language in creating hierarchies of knowledge and power among researchers.

The thesis identifies a need for educators and policy makers to recognize the existence of middle class migrants who have diversity of needs and identities. It is suggested that the engagement with home computing by such migrant groups could have implications for classroom teaching or designing effective courses online. The thesis identifies a need for further research on education, employment and empowerment in relation to middle class immigrant women from under-represented groups in the United Kingdom. The experience of children of immigrant families or transnational families is also identified as a topic for future research. Finally, the thesis recommends enhancing an appreciation of differences by teaching about different social arrangements and cultures in the English education system.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. The aim of the study

This thesis is concerned with displacement and the migrant experience, particularly in relation to the under-researched area of middle class migration, and the role of home computers in sustaining relationships at a distance. The case study which forms the core of the thesis focuses on the experiences of a group of elite Libyan women who were living with their husbands and children in North Manchester. The study investigates the ways in which these Libyan women used computers and the internet, and explores the significance of culture, family and religion upon practices and attitudes to computers in the home.

1.2. Background to the study

> The transactions of body, space, mind, and feeling in life are the things we need to be concerned about with when we want to understand how people make sense of/practice the world. (Davidson, 2005:205-206)

Displacement and the migrant experience, particularly in relation to the under-researched area of middle class migration, as well as the role of computers in sustaining relationships at a distance, were the initial reasons for conducting the present study. Data was collected from Libyan women's discussions during their social *Al Lamma* gatherings (for an explanation of these *Al Lamma* gatherings see section 2.3.3). Using this data, this study focuses on domestic features of these women's experiences with home computing, in a cultural context which places great importance upon family duties and obligations. Such context creates the potential for conflict. Therefore power relations in these Libyan families in Manchester, as reflected in access to and use of home computing, are

investigated and addressed from the participants' perspectives. In addition, this research points to issues of power, culture and religion as key influences on family structures, and therefore upon practices around home computing and internet use.

The potential contribution of home computing to the empowerment of Libyan women has been an important factor for this study. Home computing as a vehicle for informal learning and self-development, as well as barriers and obstacles to Libyan women's access to home computing, are explored and compared to the findings of other studies. In so doing, this study attends to women's deployment of 'passive resistance' in order to secure access to home computing and the social and leisure goods that it offers.

The acquisition of feminist ideas within an Islamic framework is apparent in this study due to the researcher's and the participants' values and beliefs. In my role as researcher I have aimed to present Muslim women as 'subjects' to the gaze of Western researchers and readers, alongside a consideration of the literature where Muslim women have been addressed from different perspectives, in order to explore some of the ways Western society sees Islam (Buijs, 1993). Furthermore, such an approach enables attending to these marginalized groups of Muslim women from a feminist perspective but within an Islamic framework. As a researcher, such an approach supports my argument and investigation, and also facilitates the understanding of culture and religion as influences on the participants' accounts and daily practices.

This study explores the role of home computing in sustaining real and 'imagined' community (adopted from Anderson, 2006), for Libyan immigrant women and their families. Technologies have enabled immigrant Libyan women to maintain their

transnational ties through regular and affordable communications for emotional support, through such things as: regular phone calls, live video calling, exchanging photos via the internet, internet chatting, and sending emails to members of their families in Libya. As a result, as I discuss in the thesis, Libyan women have established social networks between home and local communities, as well as within their transnational community, which has provided moral support against isolation.

The study also explores the significance of engaging with virtual realties for children's development, in this case Libyan children. There is a discussion of various arguments on the negative effects of using computers and the internet, especially around such activities as playing games online, live video calls and online chatting. The discussion refers to psychological studies on children's development. Reflecting on these arguments, this thesis also shows how the participants had different opinions and expectations concerning the effects of online activities on their children.

1.2.1. Libyan women in North Manchester

All the participants of this study were immigrant Libyan women who were living in North Manchester with their families between 2000 and 2009. Some of the participants have since gone back to live in Libya, while others still live in North Manchester. These women belong to an Islamic patriarchal society whose members come from different backgrounds. For example, members of Libyan society can be of Bedouin, Berber, Sharif, Black African, Turkish, Maltese or Italian background (Malcolm and Losleben, 2003) (see Chapter 2).

The participants were a group of professional and housewife, mothers and grandmothers. Some were professional and others were housewives. They knew and met each another

either during women's social gatherings, in school premises (Libyan supplementary schools and British mainstream schools), in shopping centres, or in their neighbourhoods. This gives an idea of the context of these women's lives that coloured their personal experiences in North Manchester, and thus their accounts during the *Al Lamma* gatherings, which took place between 2005 and 2009.

Most of the participants already attended *Al Lamma* social gatherings that I have hosted in my house since arriving in North Manchester in 2000. However, there were other participants who I invited to the *Al Lamma* gatherings of this study, after meeting them in British primary schools or who were invited along by other participants.

Issues of anonymity and confidentiality were important ethical considerations and all the participants were given pseudonymous. However the study does refer to the participants' ethnic origins, religion, nationality and language, due to the significance and relevance of these aspects for this type of research (Savage, 2009). Likewise the location of this study was situated, North Manchester, is mentioned in order to explore the effects of living in a cosmopolitan city on immigrant women from Libya. However names of cites, schools, addresses, and streets in Libya or in the United Kingdom mentioned during *Al Lamma* gatherings were not used in the thesis. Additionally, the term 'Libyan schools in North Manchester' was used as a general term to refer to more than one Libyan school in North Manchester, which are described in more detail later in this chapter.

1.2.2. Language spoken

The participants spoke different Libyan Arabic dialects such as *Al Garbaawya* (West part of Libya), *Al Badiya* (Bedouin), *Al Sharkaawya* (East part of Libya), and *Almanteka*

Alwasta (Middle province). These spoken Libyan dialects meant the *Al Lamma* transcripts contained different words with similar meanings and this was taken account of during the transcription process. The transcripts of *Al Lamma* discussions were written down as spoken in the Libyan dialects. Then formal, written Arabic, known as the 'white Arabic' mostly used in newspapers and magazines, was used to re-write the transcripts of *Al Lamma* discussions, before finally translating them into written English. However, the participants also used English words during *Al Lamma* gatherings as discussed in Chapter 3.

Benjamin (2004:83) argues that 'to some degree all great texts contain their virtual translation between the lines'. The *virtual* could be the hidden reality which has the ability to take different forms, one that is not necessarily abstracted and represented into words, but which requires understanding and acknowledgment of the cultural and social context of that text. Reflecting on this argument, issues around working across languages, as well as to do with transcribing and translation; brought up demanding practical questions, as well as issues of major theoretical significance for myself as a qualitative researcher. As a result, a section is devoted in this study for discussing problems of translation and interpretation, that I encountered when transcribing and translating *Al Lamma* discussions (see Chapter 3).

1.2.3. Libyan schools

The participants of this study, while living in Manchester, registered their children in both local British schools as well as Libyan schools, all in the Manchester area. One of the main factors in Libyan parents choosing to live in certain cities in the United Kingdom is the availability of Libyan schools. During the 2009/2010 school year, there were 17 Libyan

schools in Britain and Ireland that were registered with the Libyan School Council. In Manchester, there are three Libyan schools: Manchester Libyan School for Basic and Intermediate Education, North Manchester School for Basic Education and Manchester Arabic School for Basic Education. Basic Education includes Year 1 to Year 9, and Intermediate Education includes Year 10 to Year 12, or Year 13 for Specialised Education (where students gain certificates in specialised subjects such as petroleum engineering or Islamic studies).

Children start Libyan school at the age of six. The school year is divided into two terms, the first semester and the second semester. At the end of each semester all pupils and students take end of semester examinations. They must pass both examinations to progress to the following school year. There are three national examinations that Libyan schools in Britain and Ireland provide for their students. They are: Certificate of Completing Basic Education taken in Year 9, the General Certificate of Secondary Education taken in Year 12, and the General Certificate of Specialised Secondary Education taken in Year 13.

1.3. Computer literacy

As noted, this study explores how Libyan women living in Manchester communicate via the internet with others from their communities in the United Kingdom and in Libya. Investigated, is the use of computers and the internet as a new literacy practice that has particular significance for marginalised groups. As a result, the study also contributes to knowledge of literacy practices as an important way in which marginalised communities define themselves.

1.4. Usage of Arabic terms

There are a number of Arabic words which I have used in this thesis, whose meaning needs explaining. I also need to justify my reason for including such words in their Arabic form. The thesis refers to a number of words used by Libyan women and their community in general, with some of these Arabic terms also appearing in Arabic literature and the Holy book of the Quran. The Arabic words used in this thesis are presented by using alterations of the English alphabet. Most of these Arabic words do not have equivalent words in English because they describe objects or events that are specific to Libyan or Muslim communities. One key example is the social gathering known as *Al Lamma* in Libya. I had to decide to call the women's social gatherings conducted for this study as either; 'women's gatherings' or keep the term '*Al Lamma',* and finally the phrase '*Al Lamma* gatherings' was chosen. The reasons for making this decision related to keeping certain terms that represent the Libyan identity such as *Al Lamma*, and at the same time adding descriptive vocabulary to facilitate understanding of the term's meaning, in this instance 'gatherings'.

1.5. Methodology

The overall approach of this research project is that of an ethnographic case study, conducted and presented by a participant-observer-researcher. The use of qualitative data and analysis in this study has its own specific methodological features and implications as described in detail in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. The thesis explores the way grounded theory has been applied, from an early exploratory study, to its use in the final version, applied to the data as a whole.

The thesis also highlights the implications of implementing reflexivity by a Muslim

feminist researcher. While referring to the contribution made to this study by feminist theory, there was also an attempt to discuss Libyan women's daily practices and accounts of feelings within an Islamic framework. The analysis and interpretations conducted in the process of this research, revealed the researcher's need to relate to cultural and religious issues that influenced the participants and their families.

1.6. Organisation of the thesis

Chapter 1 has served as an introduction to the thesis. Issues related to the background of the study, the participants, languages used, the aim of the study and a brief overview of Libyan schools in the United Kingdom were discussed, to give the reader the specific information needed for understanding the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 explores methodological issues relating to the conceptualisation, design and conduct of the research. It describes the 'case' used in this study, setting its boundaries and assessing its strengths and weaknesses. Following this, the significance of ethnographic principles for the case study is provided, to show the main reasons behind choosing ethnography as a method for researching Libyan women's spaces. My position as a participant observer and as a Muslim feminist are described and critically read in order to highlight the significance of the researcher's position and identity in this study. The methodological framework deals with the key aims of the study and the main research questions. This chapter also introduces the *Al Lamma* gatherings and the translation process, (which are explored in more detail in Chapter 3), as the areas that contained the main strengths and challenges of this study. Following this the analytic framework is presented, including a discussion of, and critical reflection upon, the preliminary study that was undertaken, with particular reference to grounded theory methods. Finally, the method

followed for generating analytic categories from *Al Lamma* discussions is reflected upon. More specifically, this relates to issues regarding reflexivity by a Muslim feminist researcher, researching/non-researching men's spaces, and researching women's emotional spaces. Such aspects are included in this chapter, not least to show the difficulties of being an 'insider' researcher.

Chapter 3 provides an exploration of the importance and the implications of using *Al Lamma* gathering as a focus group method for collecting qualitative data for this study, as well as explaining the reasons for researching Libyan women and not Libyan men. It analyses how the researcher implemented existing social practices, specifically the all-women *Al Lamma* gatherings, to research and analyse her own community. The aim of this chapter is to provide a detailed description of *Al Lamma* gatherings*, which as an embedded part of Libyan community experience, offered a practical and sensitive framework for carrying out this research. This points to how choosing *Al Lamma* gatherings as a focus group method enabled the researcher to build a distinctive methodological framework for this study. In this respect, this chapter discusses gender and the space of the participants' everyday practices, by entering and describing the domestic spaces they occupy while living in a Western country, and more specifically North Manchester. Key to this discussion is an analysis of the researcher's position as an 'insider', who has a doubled identity persona as a Muslim immigrant Libyan woman and as an academic professional researcher. Some examples are presented of explicit analysis done during the process of translating the women's accounts, which aimed to transform the analysis into a culturally mediated translation. Finally, the chapter clarifies how the researcher generated and then analysed the *Al Lamma* discussions. The discussion focuses on the women's talk and different styles of interaction using the researcher's own notes taken during *Al Lamma*

gatherings and when listening back to the recorded discussions. Such reflection demonstrates how different themes began to emerge from *Al Lamma* discussions to form a chapter in this study.

Chapter 4 discusses computer use and computer literacy as a home activity. It explores examples of computer literacy as practiced by professional and housewife Libyan Muslim women, within the domesticated spaces of their homes. Additionally, this chapter shows how computers and the internet provided new enriched spaces for communication and information exchange with their home communities, but also the different types of constraints and difficulties they encountered due to their limited English, lack of computer skills or their lack of financial resources and time. Moreover, it highlights how these women performed a variety of similar strategies in order to overcome these difficulties, through developing informal styles of learning. Power relationships and gender issues greatly coloured the computer activities practiced by these women and their children, aspects that are explored in order to understand the challenges that these women had to overcome. These related to keeping their positions as Muslim mothers and at the same time dealing with their feelings and emotions relating to home computing and internet use; feelings such as 'fear' or 'jealousy', and extending also to feelings of 'equality'.

Chapter 5 discusses academic literature relating to family theories, social studies of childhood, adult-child relationships and home computing, and gender and technology in the home. In particular, questions such as the following are posed: What is the role of Libyan parents in their domestic space? What forms do adult-child relationships take in these Libyan families? How are the relationships between these parents and their children changing with home computing and internet usage? Examples from my analysis of field

work are used alongside a discussion of family conflict theory and its relation to gender issues, as well as Piagetian theory on child development and its implications for children using 'virtual' online communications. Social isolation and child-relationships with others, the world and one's self, are also explored in relation to home computing. Finally, feelings and actions related to 'fear' of computers among members of the participants' families are discussed, to explore how support is offered to each other to reduce their 'techno-phobia'.

In chapter 6, I reflect on my own readings of the literature on migration studies from a broad range of areas, including: gender and migration in geography, the sociology of migration, international and transnational migration literature, and media studies. The intention is to show how most of these studies refer to socially and economically disadvantaged populations, and to migrant women as followers of their husbands or families, in contrast to the research in this thesis. The chapter then explores the different strategies that the immigrant Libyan women applied on a daily basis to negotiate cultural conflict in North Manchester, while living within a local Muslim community mostly from Pakistan. The Libyan women's distinctive social, cultural and economic situations are described and the implications of these aspects on immigrant Libyan women's daily life in North Manchester are considered. Features of integration, accommodation or resistance that these immigrant women practiced in order to keep their identities as Libyan Muslim mothers/grandmothers are emphasised, as is how they were recognised as modernised women after starting to use computers and the internet at home. These women's accounts of feelings of guilt, feeling visible/invisible, and feelings of isolation are discussed with reference to examples that they narrated during *Al Lamma* gatherings. Finally, three examples from these women's accounts, (Nadia, Faheema and Norrya), are presented with the intention to explicitly show how Libyan Muslim women who belong to the same

collective community can have distinctive identities from each other when looked at as individuals who value being members of their collective community.

Chapter 7 provides a summary of this study, a reflection on its methodological and practical implications, and a consideration of how this research might be further developed.

CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter I give details of the design and conduct of my empirical study, and discuss and justify my theoretical and methodological approach. This chapter has three main sections: 'The overall approach of the study', 'Methodological framework' and 'Analytic framework'.

In the section; 'An ethnographic case study approach', I consider some of the key literature discussing the use of case studies and ethnography, in order to apply this to an exploration of the use and significance of home computers in a community of Libyan women. The aim is to capture the meanings and cultural significance of the aspects under research, from the perspective of participants who are from that culture, by using ethnographic methods such as interview and observation. I describe my own role/position in the research as that of 'participant observer'. My dual position as a member of the culture that I was researching and as a participant in the *Al Lamma* gatherings which provided the occasion for generating the 'data' for this study, is explored in this section.

In 'Methodological framework', I discuss the details of how I planned the study in a way that would allow for answering my research questions. The *Al Lamma* gatherings, as an instance of a 'culturally appropriate method', is addressed in this section, and discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. Finally, issues relating to language and translation, and their implications for analysis and for cross-cultural understandings in research contexts, are discussed.

In the 'Analytic framework' section, I justify the use of grounded theory, and give examples of how themes were derived from the data collected. I show how analytic categories were generated from the whole interview corpus, and then collected together into broader categories. I discuss the contribution made to this thesis by feminist theory and migration studies. My own positioning as a Muslim feminist researcher and how this may have influenced the design and the conduct of the study, in both positive and negative ways, is described at the end of this section.

2.2. An ethnographic case study approach

The approach adopted in the thesis can be described as that of a case study informed by ethnographic principles. The 'case' under exploration in this study is; the use and significance of home computers in a community of Libyan women who have accompanied their husbands to the United Kingdom. In the following sub-sections, I begin by presenting 'case study' approaches as defined in the relevant academic literature. I then explore the importance of using ethnographic methods in understanding participants' accounts within a culture, and conclude by pointing to the need for applying feminist ethnographic principles.

2.2.1 Exploring the nature of the 'case'

Definitions of case study vary (Ragin and Becker, 1992). Stake (2000:435) states that some researchers 'emphasize the name "case study" because it draws attention to the [epistemological] question of what can be learned from the single case'. As a result, 'a case study' could be described as being 'specific', 'engaging', 'educational', 'special',

'purposive' and 'systematic' in that 'the real business of case study is particularization, and not generalization' (Stake, 1995:8). In addition, 'a case study is both, a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry' (Stake, 2000:436).

According to Stark and Torrance (2005:33), case study is 'an approach to research which has been fed by many different theoretical tributaries', to explore the existence of a simple phenomenon or selected for what it represents in a given context. As a result, it can build and consolidate analytical categories or theories, and reveal how reality is constructed (Wieviorka, 1992:161). Case studies are preferred when "how" and "when" questions are being posed (Yin, 1994), 'when researchers address descriptive or exploratory questions and aim to produce a firsthand understanding of people and events' (Yin, 2006:112).

Categorically, a case study, according to Stake, may be 'intrinsic' or 'instrumental'. Intrinsic case studies are used to learn in detail about a particular case, while instrumental case studies are used to help researchers understand something else (Stake, 1995:3-4). Under this definition, the case study in the present research is an intrinsic one. Moreover, according to Yin, case study designs can be single, when they critically test existing theory or unique events, or multiple, when replicating more than one case in order to support a given theory. Case studies' units of analysis, which are the actual source of information, may be individual, organisational, documents or artefacts. They can follow a holistic approach by focusing on a single unit of analysis to study the overall nature of phenomenon, or an embedded approach with multiple units of analysis that searches for consistent patterns of evidence across units of analysis within a case. As a result, case studies can fit into one of these four categories; holistic single-case, embedded single-case, holistic multiple-case or embedded multiple-case (Yin, 1994 and 2006).

According to the descriptions of case study by Yin and Stake, the case study represented in this thesis is therefore intrinsic and holistic single-case. This is because firstly, my case study has more features of an intrinsic case study than an instrumental case study, in that it was used in this study to explore and to learn about the particularity of a specific case; the use and significance of home computers among a community of Libyan women. Secondly, this case study followed a holistic approach by focusing on a single unit of analysis with the aim of understanding and exploring the nature of home computing in a specific context. Third, the design of my case study is single, because it critically explores and represents an existing unique social activity practiced by a group of Libyan immigrant women while living in North Manchester. However, as with all case studies, the boundaries around this case study are not absolutely fixed, as I discuss in the next section.

The 'case' explored in this study is; the use and significance of home computers in a community of Libyan women who have accompanied their husbands to the United Kingdom. When I started writing my Ph D proposal it was logical for me to think about researching my own community. It was, moreover, necessary to locate the research in a women's community because I could not enter Libyan men's spaces. This is due to cultural and Islamic factors and regulations, embedded in Libyan society, where women's and men's social spaces are separated (see Chapter 3). This decision led me to start an early exploratory study with a Libyan mother and her teenage daughter, who came to live in North Manchester with their nuclear family in the year 2001. After individually interviewing the mother and her daughter, I noticed certain limitations in the interview format and encountered difficulties in opening up a richer and full discussion of the interviewees' concerns. Stark and Torrance state that 'the case study seeks to engage with and report the complexity of social activity in order to represent the meanings that

individual social actors bring to those settings and manufacture in them' (Stark and Torrance, 2005:33), and it was clear that I had not yet been able to access such complexity in my own data.

I began to explore other research methods such as focus groups, which employed group interviews and interactions (Wilkinson, 1998, and Barbour and Schostak, 2005). This led me to think about our women-only social gatherings, where women gather and celebrate their social privacy within the domesticated spaces of their homes. These gatherings, known as *Al Lamma* gatherings*,* offered appropriate and practical spaces for conducting and representing my 'case' (for more detail on *Al Lamma* gatherings see 2.3.3 and Chapter 3)*.*

2.2.2. Setting the boundaries around the case

Setting the boundaries around the case is a major issue in case study research. Stark and Torrance (2005:34), explain that the boundaries set around a case study are not only physical, but instead there are other boundaries related to the social and historical context of the participants' actions and the action itself. Yin (2003:4) adds another dimension to these boundaries by including the temporal context of the case, in that there is a 'complex interaction between a phenomenon and its temporal context'. In this study, the temporal and spatial contexts were significant factors in colouring the participants' actions when using computers in their domestic spaces as transnational immigrants in North Manchester (for more detail, see Chapter 3). The participants of the study, as temporary residences in United Kingdom, travelled back to their home country Libya for various reasons, relating to family visits or to attend family occasions, such as bereavements and weddings. And with the availability of cheap transportation facilities, such as budget airlines, the

participants travelled back home more frequently. In addition, the increased use of technological devices, such as mobiles and the internet, made the participants what I will call 'transnational' immigrants-residents, who seemed to be connected to both their home and the host country. Other reasons for moving away from North Manchester related to either relocating to other cities in the United Kingdom or in order to leave the United Kingdom permanently. As a result, the participation in *Al Lamma* gatherings changed constantly, because, while some of the participants left Manchester permanently, there were other new participants who would join these gatherings.

With these factors in mind, I defined the boundaries of my case, determining what could be included and what should be excluded from the study. I decided I particularly needed to pay attention to the social context, the cultural context and the religious context of my case study. First, I selected which accounts would form part of the case study and started establishing the social and religious boundaries needed around my research. Socially and religiously, there are both traditional and Islamic rules and values, which Libyan communities respect and follow, regarding the public discussion of private lives or directly speaking about taboo topics. For this reason, when writing the present study, some issues relating to private, personal and taboo topics were excluded when presenting or interpreting the discussions of *Al Lamma* gatherings, including within my own observations and notes.

Men's social spaces were not included, although they appeared in the participants' accounts, where these referred to religious and cultural values embedded within Libyan society. As a result, the case study was limited to focusing only on Libyan women and excluding Libyan men. Being a Muslim woman, it was more practical and convenient for

me to select women who lived in my neighbourhood as the 'potential candidates' (Yin, 2003:3) for my case study. This was due to Islamic regulations and Libyan customs, which would have stopped me from travelling on my own to and from other neighbourhoods at night. (All *Al Lamma* gatherings conducted in this research took place approximately between 6:00 pm and 11:00 pm). However, for reasons of sample size, I did not include all the Libyan women in my neighbourhood and therefore I further delimited the case by focusing only on the participants in the *Al Lamma* gatherings.

At this point, it is important to discuss the methodological challenges relating to setting the boundaries of the case study. According to Yin (2003:4), defining the boundaries of the case study and the inclusion of its context may involve technical challenges. For example, there can be more variables than data points, and the case study cannot rely on a single data collection method, resulting in applying distinctive strategies for research design and analysis using multiple sources of evidence. In addition, it 'involves critical decisions informed by different ways and different disciplinary assumptions' (Stark and Torrance, 2005:34), something that was experienced when conducting this case study. There are no easy solutions to these challenges, but it has been suggested, 'long-term immersion in the field', interviewing participants and conducting informal conversations, can help researchers interpret their observations and represent the other (Stark and Torrance, 2005:34).

This study's main method of investigation was recording women's open discussions during *Al Lamma* gatherings. As I discuss further below, these gatherings share some common features with focus group methods. Stark and Torrance argue that 'relying on interviewing alone, can result in an overly empiricist analysis – locked into the 'here-and-now' of

participants' perceptions' (Stark and Torrance, 2005:35). According to Yin (1994), evidence can come from six sources: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artefacts. Therefore, I presented and analysed different types of evidence in order to descriptively represent my case within a specific time and place. This evidence included; quotations from transcriptions of discussions at *Al Lamma* gatherings, my reflective commentary on the process of presenting-translating these transcripts, extracts from my research diary, my descriptive and interpretative notes of *Al Lamma* gatherings, and my critical notes on the research process. Grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) was applied to analyse the transcribed, translated and recorded discussions as well as my field notes, and is discussed in section 4 of this chapter.

As part of my analysis, I compared my participants' accounts and experiences of home computing to other studies that appear in related research, which were important for formulating and theorising my own interpretations, as well as the placing of my case study within an appropriate body of research literature (Yin, 2003:3). This added an element of comparison and attention to relevant literature, as well as exploring the different methods employed in these studies (Starke and Torrance, 2005:35). In addition, I explored relevant theories to understand the significance of home computing for communities of Libyan women living as immigrants in the United Kingdom. The key theoretical areas that I draw upon in my study include; post-colonial theories, educational and learning theories, theories of communication technology and social change, family theory, theory of child development, theory of social gatherings, migration theory, feminist theory, theory of translation and interpretation, and theories from migration and Diaspora cultural studies, as well as Islamic studies. These theoretical approaches are not all dealt with in detail in the

thesis, as some emerged as more significant than the others. Nevertheless, they formed part of the background to my developing understanding of the case that was at the centre of my research.

2.2.3. Strengths and weaknesses of case study research

Case study research has its strengths and weaknesses. To start with, the main strength of a case study is that it captures complexity; it provides in-depth, contextual understandings of participants and their practices, and can incorporate different perspectives. Stark and Torrance (2005:33) state that the strength of the case study approach is due to the use of multiple methods and data sources, which provide a 'rich description of a phenomenon', and enable the presenting of the phenomenon from the participants' perspective, in order to 'tell-it-like-it-is'. In all, these strengths can be used to describe case study as being 'particular, descriptive, inductive and ultimately heuristic- it seeks to illuminate the researcher's understanding of an issue' (Stark and Torrance, 2005:33).

On the other hand, the weaknesses of a case study approach according to critics, relates primarily to the inability to generalise from case data, as it is not possible to extrapolate statistically research from one case or more, to whole populations (Stark and Torrance, 2005:33). However Stake (1995:86) introduces the notion of 'naturalistic generalisation', as opposed to the kind of generalisation that is based on statistically relevant samples. For example, readers make comparisons and inferences with respect to their own situations, based on the insights generated by the particular case. As a result, 'readers recognize aspects of their own experiences in the case and intuitively generalize from the case' (Stark and Torrance, 2005:34). According to Kemmis (1980:120), researchers argue the nature of the case and the formation of their interpretations from their observations, in order to

justify the truth of their findings, which is necessarily limited by the conditions of the study. Yin (1994) adds that generalising from a case study is a matter of theoretical proposition rather than that of applying a statistical sample to larger populations. In other words, there are two types of generalising: analytic (theoretical) generalisations and statistical generalisations. According to Yin analytic generalisation is the appropriate type for case study research because 'analytic generalisations depend on using a study's theoretical framework to establish a logic that might be applicable to other situations' (Yin, 2011:18).

My particular aim in choosing a case study approach is to allow readers to consider the issues that I have identified in relation to their own situation, and in relation to their existing understandings and beliefs. I therefore hope to support a form of 'naturalistic generalisation'. I am not speaking for all Libyan women or all Libyan women in North Manchester, and certainly not speaking for all Muslim women. Nevertheless, I would hope that the case I will represent here will help readers to reflect on their own situation and contribute to a richer understanding of issues, such as gender and family structures in Muslim homes, the experience of displacement, and the impact of new technologies.

2.2.4. The significance of ethnographic principles for the case study

In this sub-section, I describe how I decided to choose ethnography as the main research method for conducting my study. I begin by referring to the definition of ethnography in the literature. I then look at different examples of ethnographic studies, focusing on their relevance to my research; and in particular, pointing to the importance of ethnographic studies on investigating social practices of computer literacies.

Historically, 'ethnography' has often been used to generate classifications and knowledge about 'others' (Skeggs, 2001), and ethnography was looked at either as a specific method or a school of thought (Goldbart and Hustler, 2005:16). This has resulted in considerable 'ethnographic diversity' (Atkinson et al, 2001) in that each ethnographic genre of study may involve different styles, different theories and different audiences (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:191). More specifically, doing ethnography can be described as writing about people and culture, with the 'emphasis on understanding how people interpret their worlds, and the need to understand the particular cultural worlds in which people live and which they both construct and utilize' (Goldbart and Hustler, 2005:16). However, the researcher brings in his or her own cultural interpretations; and the values and orientation of the researcher, as well as the context of interpretation, influence the type of ethnography that is produced (Skeggs, 2001:426). As a result, during an ethnographic study theory emerges from the processes of data gathering and data analysis (Goldbart and Hustler, 2005:17). In this respect, ethnography is described as 'a theory of the research process – an idea about how we should do research' (Skeggs, 2001:426).

Describing this process, Skeggs (2001:426) states that doing ethnographic studies involves: fieldwork, research techniques, the settings of the participants, understanding how context informs actions, participation and observation of the researcher, accounts of the development of the relationship between the researcher and those researched, and how experience and practice are themselves part of wider practices. To sum up, using 'ethnography through participant observation of social and cultural worlds, opens out the possibility of an understanding of reality which no other method can realize' (David Walsh cited in Seale, 1998:232). During the ethnographic process of analysis and writing, researchers may organise and categorise concepts found in the data collected using;

'thematic arrangement' or 'chronological arrangement', which are arranged in a 'thematic line' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:199). In this research, the thematic categorising was taken from the data collected from field observations and participants' discussions, and so is a mix of observer-participant perspectives.

There are a number of methodological challenges and ethical issues involved in conducting an ethnographic study. One challenge is negotiating entrance and gaining access to the field of study (Goldbart and Hustler, 2005). Stake (1995:4) advised researchers to ask which case will lead to more understanding, and will be easiest to access, with participants who are most willing to comment. This problem becomes even more difficult if the researcher is conducting an ethnographic study on a group of people as an 'outsider'. However, being an 'insider', I found no difficulties in asking Libyan women, who were friends or neighbours, to participate in my study, and to agree for our *Al Lamma* gatherings to become a place for generating data for this study. Secondly, disrupting the power of the researcher (or the researched) and making participants' voices heard, has important implications for the ethics of research (Meis, 1983, and Stacey, 1988). Giving women participants a say in how they are studied as well as encouraging their feedback may reduce the ethical issues that arise during data collection and analysis (Skeggs, 2001:426).

For this thesis, I conducted an ethnographic case study in North Manchester to investigate how the Libyan women involved engaged with new technologies such as computers and the internet in a Western cosmopolitan context. One of the main concerns of the study was to investigate the ways in which relationships based on unequal power shaped the use of computers and knowledge of computer literacy. The intention was to find out who was included and who was excluded from acquiring and using computer literacy skills, as well

as how this type of literacy was learned and practiced in home as a social activity and the implications of this for these Libyan women and their families. Therefore, I needed to explore women's practices of computer literacies in their social context - i.e. in their own homes.

In this respect, Baynham (1995) suggests that literacy in its social context can be explored through sociolinguistics and/or ethnography. Additionally, he states that studying social literacy can be improved by applying a range of research methods such as fieldwork, participant observation, gathering autobiographical accounts of literacy practices and analysing literacy texts. Due to the fact I belong to the community of Libyan women in North Manchester and that I was able to enter Libyan women's domestic spaces, not least by hosting women's social *Al Lamma* gatherings, my ethnographic fieldwork and my position as an 'insider' is reflected in the data collection and data analysis.

2.2.5. My position as a 'participant observer'

The nature of the 'participant observer' role is discussed in the literature with reference to a range of factors. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) state that the role of the participant-observer shifts the position of the researcher between being the 'self' and becoming the 'other', from the 'observer' to the 'observed'. According to Schostak (2006:91), the positioning of the listener (the observer), or the speaker (the participant), on one side or another during an interview reflects the power dynamics in the interaction. He explains further, how one is positioned by adopting attitudes towards others' actions and ways of thinking, in the process of writing about them as 'the other'. Jones and Somekh (2005:140) argue that 'participant observers gain unique insight into the behaviour and activities of those they observe because they participate in their activities and, to some extent, are

absorbed into the culture of the group'.

However, there are disadvantages in occupying the role of 'participant observer' during data collection and analysis. First, as *participant*-observers, researchers might be distracted from their research when engaged in other tasks. It may become difficult to carry out important activities like note taking at the same time as the observation (Jones and Somekh, 2005:140). Secondly, as participants, researchers may find it difficult to analyse the transcripts without the influence of their own preconceptions. In other words, the cultural, religious and social background of the researcher will be represented in the research product (Hammersley, and Atkinson, 2007).

My own role/position as a 'participant observer' was apparent in this study. First, I was a member of the culture that I was researching. Second, I was a participant in the *Al Lamma* social gatherings that provided the occasion for generating my 'data'. My own experiences, language, and cultural background therefore necessarily influenced my ethnographic analysis and writing. For example, my own experiences were included amongst the participants' accounts and discussions in my role as a participant, but at the same time I was also an observer. My position thus shifted between being the 'self' and becoming the 'other', from the 'observer' to the 'observed', in this new role as 'participant observer' (Hammersley, and Atkinson, 2007).

One important question to be considered is how I acted in order to disconnect from the position of being a participant, when presenting and analysing the data. This is a particular problem when doing feminist ethnographic studies because the researcher as a woman, and the primary medium of research being oral, typically uses empathy, connection and

expression of concern, to relate to and represent her subjects (Stacey, 1988). Relating this to my own position as a participant-observer, I attempted to maintain a 'doubled identity persona'; as a Muslim Libyan woman participant, and as an observing feminist researcher (Chaudhry, 1997:447).

When presenting and making observation notes on the *Al Lamma* gatherings' discussions, I often tended to highlight the participants' own speech in an effort to dislocate myself from the transcripts in order to facilitate my readings. However, when analysing the data subsequently, I frequently located myself as one of them; a Muslim Libyan woman using home computing. In trying to negotiate the boundaries, with myself as both a researcher and participant, I moved between two different strategies. First, I tried to distance myself and focus on the participants' speech. Then, following this I returned to the data to locate myself within it, as one of the participants. Thus the analysis necessarily moves between an 'insider' and 'outsider' perspective. For example, one of the *Al Lamma* gatherings' transcripts referred to a participant's description of her husband while he was using a laptop in their bedroom. My observational note taken during this narration recorded her comment as: 'The laptop in our bed as another wife!' So as an outsider/observer, I distanced myself and focused on the participant's speech resulting in making the participant's description of her husband interesting and significant. Then, I returned to the data to locate myself as one of the participants/an insider during the analysis process. I needed to apply my own cultural knowledge of Islamic regulations in order to explain the reasons that made this participant describe the laptop like another wife in her husband's hands while lying on their bed. The fact that Muslim men are allowed to have four wives at the same time, positioned the participant's description of her husband's laptop as another wife and not as a mistress. The participant kept her husband's position within the *halal*

accepted practices and away from the *haram* forbidden practices of Muslim communities. This analysis required me to position myself as a Muslim woman who is researching her own community. (For examples of such analysis see Chapter 3).

However, there were also difficulties in disconnecting from this 'insider' position, which conflicted with the need to be reflexive about my position as a participant-observer. For instance, I was concerned to represent the participants' social and cultural situation in a way that reflected my emotions as a Muslim Libyan woman who belonged to the participants' community (see 2.4.2 below). However, it was difficult for me to disconnect from the participant position to the observer position, when analysing the data or writing about the participants. As I discuss below, taking the role of a feminist ethnographer helped me with overcoming some of these difficulties.

2.2.6. A feminist ethnographic case study

Feminist researchers have employed a variety of ethnographic methods to address women's lives (Travers, 2001:139), and 'to gain quality understanding of relations with people who participated in the research' (Reinharz, 1983:185). This is because ethnographic methods are capable of highlighting issues that feminist researchers consider important, such as the significance of feeling, belief and knowledge. Stacey (1988) outlines some methodological elements in ethnography that are significant for feminist researchers. First, 'ethnography emphasizes the experiential. Its approach to knowledge is contextual and interpersonal, attentive like most women, therefore, to the concrete realm of everyday reality and human agency' (Stacey, 1988:22). Ethnographic method that contains intensive participant-observation is, she argues, suitable for feminist research. Intensive participant-observation may provide more space for reflecting on and relating to the participants'

emotions, beliefs and knowledge. Finally, ethnographic studies attempt to grant power to the subjects of study, who then become collaborators during the process of feminist research. As a result, feminist researchers aim to conduct research involving women without the 'hierarchical, exploitative relations of conventional research' by applying 'reciprocity and inter-subjectivity', during the research process (Stacey, 1988:22) (See also Mies, 1983, Reinharz, 1983, and Oakley, 1981).

However, certain problems and contradictions may arise between ethnographic methods and feminist principles, during the process or in the product of ethnographic studies. For example, 'conflicts of interest and emotion between the ethnographer as authentic, related person (i.e. participant) and as exploiting researcher (i.e. observer) are also an inescapable feature of ethnographic methods' according to Stacey (1988:23) and which may appear in the products of ethnographic research. In the present study, the information and the experience that the participants shared during *Al Lamma* gatherings were recognised as data. My position as both researcher and participant required me to be attentive and careful in selecting which information and experiences I could or should not include in my data. For instance, transcripts of *Al Lamma* gatherings contained information relating to topics which are regarded as unsuitable or unacceptable for open or public discussions within the Libyan community. As a result, this information was excluded from my data. However, although I decided to exclude this information, I did use it as background information to interpret and understand some of the participants' accounts of feelings or behaviours, related to their computer and internet use at home. This decision was taken to respect my participants' privacy in relation to personal and religious issues. This also reveals how I applied my subjectivity during the research process as a Libyan Muslim woman and as someone who had friendships with her participants. I tried to escape the 'feminist

ethnographic paradox' (Stacey, 1988:24) by following feminist ethical principles and Islamic values in order to protect the participants' identities from exploitation, even if this meant that the whole ethnographic 'truth' was not revealed. For instance, any discussions related to taboo issues from a personal perspective were excluded from the data, but I drew upon such information to explain why some participants insisted that only young men access certain internet sites, and why other participants stopped their children, especially girls, from using the internet. In fact, some participants said that they preferred their sons to sit in front of the computer rather than going outside their homes, suggesting that the home, even with the perceived uses of the internet, was safer than outside.

'Gender' rather than 'social class' was one of the main categories explored in the study. The social class of the participants was not highlighted, partly because they all lived in the same neighbourhood in North Manchester and as a Libyan community. In this community, issues related to the social class of each individual were rendered relatively unimportant compared to the invisible, yet greater emphasis on culture and religion. Moreover, the women lived in houses that were similar to each other, which tended to dissolve signs of class that might otherwise be present. The only noticeable feature was the language of the participants that reflected each woman's home city or town, her urban or rural location, as well as her educational and professional background.

Therefore even in my role as a researcher, I spoke my normal day-to-day language; that of spoken Libyan Arabic (*Al Garbaawya* dialect - West part of Libya), used in informal and social settings, such as during *Al Lamma* gatherings. I tried to limit any academic or English vocabulary in my speech, in an attempt to break any language hierarchies between me and the participants, which could have resulted in giving me more power and control

over my participants' speech by positioning me in a superior stance. But in practice, I found it difficult to stop using formal vocabulary or English words, when talking to the participants. I accepted that the language I used had to contain some formal and English words. Instead, I started looking at the *Al Lamma* 'speech community as a grouping of people who share a language variety, and who have rules in common about how it is used, recognizing that any single individual will necessarily belong to more than one community' (Finch, 2003:113). My belonging to an academic community and using academic language did not appear to stop the participants' informal language from being apparent in *Al Lamma* gatherings' transcripts. I would argue therefore that this did not significantly affect my role as a participant-observer.

2.3. Research design

In this section, I present the details of how I planned the study in a way that would allow me to answer my research questions. First, after outlining what these main research questions were, I explain the process of selecting and contacting the participants of this study, as well as the different kinds of research methods that I initially planned, and finally adopted for this study. Second, I describe *Al Lamma* social gatherings as embedded in Libyan society, and the factors that led me to choose *Al Lamma* gatherings as a method for collecting data. I then discuss the strengths and limitations of using *Al Lamma* gatherings as a research method, and refer to some similarities and differences between *Al Lamma* gatherings and focus group methods. Finally, I discuss the language and translation issues that arose during transcribing and analysing the *Al Lamma* gatherings' discussions, and the implications for cross-cultural understandings in the context of this research.

2.3.1. The research aims and questions

The main aims of the research were as follows:

- To explore how Libyan women living in Manchester communicate via the internet with others from their communities, in the United Kingdom and in Libya.

- To investigate the use of computers and the Internet as a new literacy practice with particular significance for marginalised groups.

- To contribute to knowledge of literacy practices as an important way in which communities define themselves.

These aims refer to communication as an important social daily activity, practiced by Libyan women who live far away from home in order to relate to others from their community. As noted earlier, the focus is on a group of Libyan women who lived temporarily in Manchester, where there is a small Libyan community within a larger multicultural local community. I will argue in the thesis that the experience of being immigrant women in an unfamiliar society helped them develop a new skill - computer literacy - in order to communicate with friends at home in Libya, and also with one another in Manchester. For instance, the women sent, received and 'forwarded' a variety of emailed texts – often stories or anecdotes with a religious or moral flavour- as well as talking online, to relatives who lived in Libya. The precise nature and significance of these communications for a group of women such as this, has not been researched until now. One question for exploration is what needs this new practice fulfils; social, emotional, personal, leisure or religious. Computers appear to present new opportunities, in particular, providing access to new technologies, and maintaining connections among dispersed communities. It seemed to me, in designing this study, that computers might offer women

greater freedom, flexibility and choice. I also anticipated that they might also confirm Libyan women's restricted place within the home.

Therefore, the design of the study reflects feminist principles in relation to the analysis of power relationships in Libyan and British society, (e.g. family structures, culture, and patriarchy), and the internal and external constraints that these impose. As described in a later chapter (Chapter 6), this analysis takes account of postcolonial theory, to understand these women's status as people who are 'caught between' two different cultures. Therefore, from the perspective of a Libyan woman and a researcher, I focus on women's concerns and issues relating to Libyan women using the internet to communicate with each other and their home country. This thesis thus explores the way these Libyan women use the internet as a device of social communication, as well as to uncover power relationships between family members in these Libyan communities.

As a result, the more specific research questions explored in this study addresses Libyan women's practices of computer literacies in their social context, - i.e. in their own homes. These more specific questions are:

1. How do the participants, Libyan women, who came with their husbands to live in North Manchester, engage with new technologies like computers and the internet in a Western cosmopolitan context?

2. How is this type of literacy learned and practiced in the home as a social activity?

3. Who is included and who is excluded from acquiring and using computer literacy skills at home?

4. What feelings are associated with using computers and the internet, by

this group of Libyan immigrant women?

5. What needs (e.g. social, educational, etc) are met by these new practices?

6. How do relationships based on unequal power shape computer use and computer literacy?

7. How does this group of Libyan women negotiate cultural conflict while living as immigrants in North Manchester?

As discussed above, finding answers to these questions implied using ethnographic methodologies during which I, as the researcher, observed and interpreted the everyday lives of a group of Libyan women with the emphasis on interpersonal relations and culture. My intention was not to test theory but to explore and describe these social lives and, at the same time, to take into account my own interpretations of these lives when gathering and analysing the research data.

2.3.2. Design of the study

In this sub-section, I address questions relating to the selection of participants, how I went about contacting them, what kind of methods I initially planned, and how this changed in the course of the research.

2.3.2.1. The participants

There was a range of different issues that affected the participants' social and political lives in Libya as well as in North Manchester. All the participants of this study were immigrant Libyan women who had been living in North Manchester with their families between 2000

and 2009. Such women belong to an Islamic patriarchal society whose members come from different backgrounds. For example, members of Libyan society can be of Bedouin, Berber, Sharif, Black African, Turkish, Maltese or Italian background (Malcolm and Losleben, 2003). In addition, the participants have all witnessed the introduction of the women's right to vote in 1963, and legislation introduced to give women equal rights to education and employment in 1970. The participants were a group of professional and non-professional women who already knew one another and met together during social gatherings, in school premises (Libyan supplementary schools and British main stream schools), in shopping centres or in their neighbourhoods. Such aspects provide a sense of the context of the participants' personal experiences in North Manchester, and thus of their accounts in the present study.

Being from this Libyan community in North Manchester, I found no difficulties in contacting the participants to attend *Al Lamma* gatherings and participate in my study. Most of the participants were already attendees of *Al Lamma* gatherings that I had hosted in my house since arriving in North Manchester in 2000. There were also further participants who I invited to *Al Lamma* gatherings for this study, after meeting them in British primary schools. For example, two participants were parents of children who I supported in class while working as a learning mentor in a local primary school. Another participant, who told other women how *Al Lamma* gatherings of this study were conducted to discuss the participants' experiences of internet and home computing, also invited along one woman. As a result, that woman attended *Al Lamma* gatherings and agreed to participate in the study.

Anonymity and confidentiality were important ethical elements that shaped this study. I verbally assured all the participants beforehand, and repeated at the beginning of each *Al Lamma* gathering, that their names and identities would be kept anonymous in the study. Therefore, all the participants were given pseudonyms together with their husbands and children's names. The study did refer to specific issues related to the participants and named certain locations due to their significance and importance for this research as discussed previously in Chapter 1. For example, I did refer to 'Libyan schools in North Manchester' in general, because there is more than one Libyan school in North Manchester and thus anonymity would not be threatened by such a phrase. At the same time, confidentiality with respect to sensitive topics was assured to the participants. Moreover, the trust between me and the participants led me to be very careful not to discuss in public any information relating to personal or taboos topics mentioned during the *Al Lamma* gatherings.

2.3.2.2. Research methods

The research methods that I initially planned to use were interviews and focus group methods. To start with, I conducted an exploratory study by interviewing two Libyan women to gain some practical experience of interview techniques, and learn how to make the interview process a successful and meaningful activity. In addition, I wanted to investigate how grounded theory (Strauss, and Corbin, 1998) could be applied to derive themes from the data. I contacted a friend who was a Libyan mother to arrange for an interview with her, and also another interview with her teenage daughter. As a result, two separate semi-structured interviews were conducted and then analysed using grounded theory. I describe these interviews and reflect on this exploratory process in more detail in section 2.4. However, the difficulties I found in getting the interviewees to talk directed me

to think about using other methods for collecting data for my study. These difficulties particularly related to some of the interviewee's answers that were very short, not clear, and too general or included irrelevant information. For example, the interviewee's answer about how her identity as a young Muslim woman was affected after using the internet and computers was vague and very limited. She refused to talk about the different web sites which she accessed from home, and refused to discuss the idea that the internet and computer use could have influenced her identity. My position as the interviewer and as a close friend of the interviewee's mother might have made the process of asking and answering some of these questions difficult, for both interviewer and interviewee. As a result, I started to explore other interview methods that focus on group discussions.

One method that interested me was that of the focus group (Wilkinson, 1998; Barbour and Schostak, 2005) where participants are encouraged to discuss issues as a group. This method has been said (Wilkinson, 1998; Barbour and Schostak, 2005) to provide more space to talk and express ideas resulting in generating more data for the study. According to Madriz (2003:364) the 'focus group can be an important element in the advancement of an agenda of social justice for women, because they can serve to expose and validate women's everyday experiences of subjugation and their individual and collective survival and resistance strategies'. Starting to decide on how to conduct focus group meetings with a group of Libyan women, I thought about the difficulties of bringing a group of women together in one place to discuss their experiences of home computing. First, I felt it was necessary that the women who might attend my focus group should know each other in order for them to actively interact and engage with each other. As a result, I anticipated that this would mean they would be able to talk more freely about their personal experiences. Secondly, and more importantly, I felt they needed to trust me before even

agreeing to participate in my intended focus group meetings. Thirdly, I needed to choose a place for conducting these meetings that would be culturally appropriate for private social meetings and accepted by all women attendees, as well as their husbands. Finally, and with attention to ethical issues, I looked for a meeting space where women's accounts might contain rich, intense and real experiences that could provide valuable data for my study.

Consequently, I began to think about other ways of conducting focus group meetings for this study such as using *Al Lamma* gatherings, or parents' meetings in school. Finally, I decided to use the *Al Lamma* gatherings that my friends and I hosted while living in North Manchester. As a result, I talked to my friends about my research and asked them to support, attend and consent to my decision to use our *Al Lamma* gatherings as a place for collecting my data. They all agreed to this, giving me verbal consent once I had explained to them my data collection process; such as storing our recorded speech in my computer, how their names and identities would be kept anonymous, and how they would be able to read the transcripts of discussions from the *Al Lamma* gatherings and comment on these before I could refer to them in my thesis. Moreover, as noted above, they were informed that local places would be kept anonymous and any information or discussion relating to private or taboo topics would be excluded from the study.

Conducting the case study field work began in July 2005 and ended in August 2009. In addition to the two exploratory interviews with a mother and her daughter, four main *Al Lamma* gatherings were conducted for this case study. However, during other *Al Lamma* gatherings outside of these research focused meetings, my participants discussed computer issues, asked about my research, or gave me feedback and commented on our previous discussions. These discussions are occasionally referred to in this study to support or

broaden the scope of the analysis.

The length and nature of the four *Al Lamma* gatherings all differed. This was dependent on how many women were present during each gathering, how long it took a whole gathering to be completed, and on which month of the year a gathering took place. For example, the first *Al Lamma* gathering lasted for nearly two hours, with an audio recording of the participants' discussions lasting 30 minutes, and with only three women able to attend. Whereas the second *Al Lamma* gathering lasted more than three hours, with one hour of discussions audio recorded. Moreover, the *Al Lamma* gatherings which took place during winter were short, due to the fact that daylight was very short, and the participants wanted to be getting back home as soon as possible. Based on my experiences I think the ideal *Al Lamma* gathering interview should include a group of five to seven participants, should last for two or three hours, and should take place in the middle of the summer.

2.3.3. *Al Lamma* gatherings process

Al Lamma is defined in Arabic dictionaries as a term referring to a group of people; a group of three to ten friends; friends in a travel; or accommodators. *Al Lamma* is also a social gathering that brings a group of people together in domestic spaces; usually in their homes. Such gatherings take place in many countries in North Africa and the Middle East. A group of people who attend *Al Lamma* gatherings are related to each other, in that they can be family members, relatives, friends, neighbours or colleagues. They use *Al Lamma* gatherings both to communicate with each other and to celebrate special events. For Libyan women, one type of *Al Lamma* gathering is organised regularly in the morning or afternoon as a daily, a weekly or a monthly gathering. One of the women attendees hosts the *Al Lamma* gathering and invites other women to come to her house for a cup of tea and

to talk with each other. This type of *Al Lamma* gathering is similar to the *Al Lamma* gatherings of this study. Another type of *Al Lamma* gathering usually takes place at the night to celebrate certain events, for example, the arrival of a new baby, moving to a new house, *Hajj* or *Umrah* (visiting holy places in Saudi Arabia), or the graduation of a son or a daughter. In these instances, men can be invited to the gathering but they have to meet in a separate room or in another house. In other words, *Al Lamma* as a social gathering is a single gendered event, because men's and women's social spaces are separated within the Muslim Libyan community.

Although the attendees of *Al Lamma* gatherings had all come to Manchester to accompany their husbands who came to study or to work, each individual woman had her own preconceptions and experiences of the westernised way of life in the United Kingdom. As a result, *Al Lamma* gatherings of this study were a socialised space containing interactions and dialogue between the participant's different perspectives, even though the participants belonged to a Muslim, collective community. For example, they had individual ideas and motives for using computers and the internet as a home activity; ranging from reciting the Quran or calling family members, to playing games online, as discussed in later chapters.

In this respect, the *Al Lamma* gatherings conducted for this study provided a domesticated space that supported participants to encounter and try new ideas relating to computers and the internet by:

- giving the participants solidarity and a sense of belonging

- providing security and privacy

- supporting the transfer of experiences, knowledge and information

- helping with the learning of computer skills

- discussing different strategies and solutions to computer related problems

- motivating and increasing the participants' confidence to become computer literate

Stacey (1988) states that fieldwork and case study research may offer emotional and practical support to the participants. The *Al Lamma* gatherings of this study aimed to give the participants, as immigrant Muslim Libyan women, a space to express their feelings and concerns regarding computer and internet use in their homes. The participants, including the researcher, supported each other by addressing their own experiences and knowledge related to home computing and family life while living in a county far from their home country. I will suggest that as a result, they learned practical skills from these experiences, for example; how to start using the internet, how their children can help them, how to have parental control over computer use, how to sign in to use e-mail. As discussed in later chapters, the women also shared and developed cultural practices such as how to use computers secretly – i.e. without their husbands' knowledge. Moreover, *Al Lamma* gatherings were a place where the participants gained knowledge about relevant topics related to Islamic, cultural, educational, medical and entertainment issues (for more details see Chapter 3).

The nature of the participation and engagement was one of the main strengths of using *Al Lamma* gatherings as the format for generating data for this study. Other strengths of *Al Lamma* gatherings were its accessibility, suitability and convenience for the participants as well as the researcher. First, any attendee/participant could access and attend the *Al Lamma* gatherings of this study, if they were a women and Libyan. (In general, the attendees of

other women's only gatherings in North Manchester were usually Libyan, but could also include women from other nationalities who were Muslim and spoke Arabic in their daily communication). Secondly, *Al Lamma* gatherings took place in my own house, which was a suitable place for the other women to attend. Thirdly, the time of *Al Lamma* gatherings was convenient for the attendees, in that it was during the evenings when their older children were attending Libyan school, or their husbands were home to baby sit their younger children.

However, there were also limitations in using *Al Lamma* gatherings as a method for data collection. First, all the participants had to be Libyan women, resulting in the exclusion of Libyan men, who, for reasons discussed earlier, cannot attend women's social gatherings such as the *Al Lamma* gatherings used in this study. Secondly, as a Libyan woman, *Al Lamma* gatherings were very familiar to me. Therefore, when I took the role of the researcher, there was a danger that I might provide a partial, one-sided and subjective reading and presentation of *Al Lamma* gatherings. Thirdly, following the ethical principles of a Muslim feminist researcher, (see sub-section 4.2. on reflexivity by a feminist researcher in this chapter), limited the type of information used for this study. As a Muslim feminist, I needed to be selective about the type of information that I could or could not refer to in this study, especially when the participants talked about their private or secret experiences. Fourthly, controlling the flow of the speech was difficult in that not every participant was equally active in the *Al Lamma* gatherings' discussions. As a result, some voices were silent and not represented in subsequent transcripts. For these silent voices to be noticed and thus represented, I started questioning these silences as well as focusing on the performance of these participants (Mazzei, 2009; see Chapter 3).

Finally, it is worth considering the similarities and differences between *Al Lamma* gatherings used for this study and conventional focus group methods (Wilkinson, 1998). Both focus groups and *Al Lamma* gatherings generate their data from the attendees' discussions, agree on certain times to meet, and have a certain place for conducting their group meetings. However, *Al Lamma* gatherings included participants who were socially and culturally related to each other, even though they also had differences in their backgrounds.

The key concepts for conducting interviews and focus group discussions, as defined by Barbour and Schostak (2005:42) are; power, social position, value, trust, meaning, interpretation and uncertainty. They argue that researchers should look for strategies that take account of these concepts so that data collected from interviews and focus group discussions may be seen as accurate and real representations of the participants' experiences, as far as this is possible. However I would suggest *Al Lamma* gatherings had certain advantages over focus groups. These can be summarised as follows:

- Selecting and contacting *Al Lamma* gatherings participants was easy, as *Al Lamma* participants knew each other (as friends and neighbours).

- Giving voice to marginalised women as well as to each individual was achievable.

- *Al Lamma* gatherings were not artificial or novel to the participants.

- The location of the *Al Lamma* gatherings was appropriate, comfortable and acceptable (a sitting room in the researcher's home).

- The organiser and host of the *Al Lamma* gatherings was one of the participants as well as the researcher, providing access to sub-cultural

meanings and perspectives that might not emerge during encounters between participants who do not know each other well, as is often the situation within focus groups.

- Setting the time of *Al Lamma* gatherings was easy, agreeable and negotiable.

- Participants' levels of interactions and engagements during these gatherings were generally high.

- Participants took an active role by providing their own evaluation and feedback.

- *Al Lamma* gatherings were interconnected and formed more than one social network.

- The research focused on *Al Lamma* gatherings as a holistic and meaningful social activity, and could therefore claim high validity.

2.3.4. Language usage

There were a number of issues relating to language that arose during the conduct of this study. As a result, the implications this had for analysis and for cross-cultural understandings in research contexts, has to be addressed in order to facilitate understanding by readers who are non-Arabic speakers. To start with, the kind of language used by the participants during discussions at *Al Lamma* gatherings had certain features that influenced the translation process as well as the analysis of these discussions. First, the participants spoke different Libyan Arabic dialects such as *Al Garbaawya* (West part of Libya), *Al Badiya* (Bedouin), *Al Sharkaawya* (East part of Libya), and *Almanteka Alwasta* (Middle province). As a result of these Libyan dialects, different words with similar meanings

appeared at times in the transcripts, which I had to take account of during the transcription process. When transcribing discussions from the *Al Lamma* gatherings, I first wrote down every word as it was said. Then I moved from different Libyan dialects to formal written Arabic (known as 'white Arabic' which is mostly used in newspapers and magazines). This facilitated the translation of this data into written English. However, such a translation process removes some of the idiomatic and spontaneous features of speech. Although this happens with all attempts to write down spoken language, the translation process heightens this characteristic. For example, the following short section from my transcript does not look like everyday speech.

Nagat: During school year, can the girls go to the café net [internet café] after school?
Amel: When they go home from school during winter, it will be dark [and girls cannot stay out in the night]. The daylight is short. [But during winter the daytime is short where women and girls, especially in rural areas, are not supposed to stay out after sunset].The café net stays open from 8.00 in the morning until 4.00 of the next morning. In Ramadan [The month when Muslims fast], they go to the café net until the sunset when it will close for opening their fast and it opens again after finishing praying [Al Taraweh which is a praying done in the month of Ramadan and it takes nearly an hour and a half to be completed].

Moreover, during discussions at the *Al Lamma* gatherings, the participants at times used English instead of Arabic, especially when referring to technological or educational words. For instance, they said "computer" and not "*alhaasowb*", "web site" and not "*almawga*", "save" and not "*takzeyn*", and "high school" but not "*almadrasa altanawya*". Other examples of English words used during *Al Lamma* gatherings discussions included; lunch time, e-mail, mouse, online, virus, camera, television, radio and mobile. It is important to discuss issues related to the presence of English words for technology, in that there are social and cultural implications here, relating to the dominance of the English language. In

Chapter 6, I discuss this issue in terms of cultural imperialism, and the attempt to resist it through language practices of 'arabicisation'.

Moreover, there were taboo topics that the participants referred to only indirectly during the *Al Lamma* gatherings' discussions, because these topics could not be discussed or mentioned explicitly. Instead, the participants discussed these topics using other words. According to Qaddu`r (1999:328-329), there are internal reasons related to social, historical, cultural and psychological factors that result in 'meaning changing' (semantic change). In this study, the psychological factors had an important role in producing semantic change when the participants started using either synonyms or antonymous to refer to taboo topics. For example, the participants used the phrase 'young men's sites' instead of mentioning the exact word for such sexually explicit web sites.

Therefore, translating word to word from Arabic to English was not sufficient in keeping the meaning clear and understandable. I was concerned to try to preserve the meaning without losing the cultural significance of the participants' speech. Therefore, I started to explore theories of translation and interpretation that could solve this problem. In effect, I was able to find some contemporary theories of translation which focus on transferring meaning but without ignoring its cultural context (Hall, 1983, Halliday, and Hasan, 1989, Bennett, 1993, Qaddu`r, 1999, Katan, 2003, and Kamal, 2008). Qaddu`r (1999:300) argues that translators need to be aware of the cultural context of the translated text to enable them to transform meaning to another language using parallel words that take account of the context. He further states that we should not only rely on dictionaries when translating words or texts that convey *Madahp* (religious ideas) or political views, as this could be misleading for translators, especially when the cultural context of marginalised meanings

are not included during the translation process. These issues are discussed further in Chapter 3 where different examples of translating *Al Lamma* gatherings' transcripts are analysed, with reference to Bennett's (1993) translation theory; the Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS).

2.4. Analytic framework

The use of qualitative data and analysis in this study has its own specific methodological features and implications. This section starts by exploring the way grounded theory was applied in this study at an early exploratory stage. Following this, the implications of implementing reflexivity as a Muslim feminist researcher are discussed with reference to the contribution made to this thesis from feminist theory and migration studies.

2.4.1. Grounded theory methods: a discussion based on a preliminary study

The rationale for grounded theory is to develop theory that is grounded in qualitative data through the identification and coding of concepts (Strauss, and Corbin, 1998). The use of grounded theory is justified here with examples of how I derived themes from my data. In order to explain my personal experiences with grounded theory, I include and critically review the work I did for an early exploratory study. Then, this critical reading is extended to show how analytic categories were generated over the whole data corpus, and then collected together into broader categories, which are reflected in the main chapter headings of this thesis.

The transcripts of the two semi-structured interviews were analysed by using the grounded theory approach, that is, 'theory development based on actual data gathered through

qualitative research' (Corbin, and Holt, 2005:49). In this respect, I accept the idea that theory is constructed out of data and thus researchers can apply different analytical tools for interpreting their data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). A grounded theory approach as advanced by Corbin and Strauss (1990) (cited in Creswell, 1998:150), involves first 'open coding', then 'axial coding' and finally 'selective coding'. The researcher starts by identifying and discovering 'concepts' through this process of 'open coding' from the collected data. These concepts are identified from actions, interactions, events or emotions, which can be derived from multiple sources of qualitative data (Corbin and Holt, 2005). This data may include not only the participants' interviews but also the researchers' observations such as field notes and diaries. The researcher's emphasis is on the words of the participants and on moving from one element of data to another, critically comparing each interview to previous ones. This is intended to aid the identification of different concepts and at the same time prevent their unnecessary repetition. The next step involves grouping concepts into categories, known as 'axial coding'. At this stage, there will be larger, main categories containing many subcategories, which need to be reduced under a more abstract core category, according to a process known as 'selective coding'. This core category 'is an integrative concept but detailed in the sense that it is explained through all of the information contained under the individual category and their properties and dimensions' (Corbin and Holt, 2005:51).

2.4.1.1 Critical reflection on an exploratory study

Two semi-structured interviews were used as a qualitative method of data collection to be subjected to grounded theory analysis. I used the same open-ended questions to interview on separate occasions a Libyan mother and then her teenage daughter. I intended to follow some elements of open-ended interview research methods, which according to Reinharz

(1992:18) 'explores people's views of reality and allows the researcher to generate theory'. Open-ended interviewing is designed to encourage communication in a comfortable and familiar setting; here, the mothers' house. Cohen et al (2003:270) explain that researchers might use open-ended, unstructured interviews when they need 'personalized information about how individuals view the world'.

The Libyan mother and daughter who participated in the two semi-structured interviews had been living in Manchester for nearly three years. They came to Manchester with the father, who had enrolled in the university to study for a Ph D degree. The family consisted of the mother, the father, two daughters and three sons. The eldest son had not come with them to the United Kingdom, instead staying in Libya to finish his studies at university there. The mother was a Year One teacher in a Libyan school in Manchester. Her daughter, who was 17 years old, was in her first year in Sixth Form College.

The topic of the interviews was internet use in the home. The mother was interviewed first. She agreed to be interviewed at my home one evening, when all our children were at the Libyan school, but she herself was not teaching there. I interviewed her daughter when I was visiting the family on another evening. I tried to write down everything that was said while the interviewees were answering my questions. We used spoken Libyan Arabic during these interviews. The interview questions were written down in my notebook in English. As a result, I translated both interviewees' answers from Libyan Arabic into English instantly. Subsequently, the hand written notes of each interview were transcribed as word-processed documents. After this, I then discussed the transcripts with the mother and her daughter to incorporate their comments and to put in any missing information. Translating the speech from spoken Libyan Arabic into written English was a key issue in

making me think about possible implications for the resulting data. Arksey and Knight (1999:141) have claimed that the setting, context, body language and feelings are important elements for interpreting the interview. Therefore, I tried to keep a research diary to record my personal observations related to these important elements. The transcripts were then analysed according to the grounded theory approach.

I started my analysis of the transcripts of the two interviews by identifying some provisional concepts. In this process of 'open coding', codes were given to phenomena or actions by either using words from the data, called 'in-vivo' codes, or by attaching codes to concepts. At the end of this process, sixty-five 'in-vivo' codes were found. Next, 'axial coding' was conducted during which concepts that share common characteristics were grouped into categories, followed by further 'open coding' to identify subcategories. Finally, categories were refined into four core categories in the process known as 'selective coding'.

The conditions of the internet use by the mother and her daughter as a home activity resulted in these following four core categories: (1) power relationships, (2) internet communication, (3) internet intelligence, and (4) identity and feminism. In constructing the analysis, I identified four types of causal conditions, and six intervening conditions of internet use at home. The causal conditions were: (a) communicating with family abroad, (b) chatting with friends, (c) studying, and (d) looking for information online. The intervening conditions consisted of (a) availability, (b) affordability, (c) comfort ability, (d) feeling alive, (e) freedom, and (f) secrecy. In addition, there was a range of negative feelings of neglect, worthlessness, inequality, illiteracy and homesickness that the mother and her daughter felt before they started using the internet. Moreover, there were a number

of strategies the mother and her daughter employed in their use of the internet. These were; (a) resistance, (b) rejecting control, (c) taking risks, (d) supporting each other, (e) collaborating, (f) being accepted (g) finding excuses, (h) taking the initiative and (i) finding suitable times to go online. These strategies used by the mother and her daughter appeared to have some significant consequences such as empowerment, recognition, planning, equality, and satisfaction.

Although limited by its size and scope, this exploratory study provided useful preparation for the main study. For example, it provided an experimental learning space for rehearsing interview technique, and allowed the identifying of themes to be explored later in the main study. However, there were limitations with this exploratory study, including; its small size, the difficulty in getting interviewees to talk, and problems with translating spoken data. These limitations were constructive in helping me understand more about my role as a participant-observer and how I must be critical of my own practices, as described above.

2.4.1.2 Generating analytic categories from discussions at *Al Lamma* gatherings

The main study employed two common qualitative methods of data collection; participant field observations and in-depth group interviews/discussions during women's social meetings; the *Al Lamma* gatherings. The data, which included transcripts of *Al Lamma* gatherings' discussions, plus the field observations, was analysed following the inductive coding technique described by Strauss and Corbin (1990), as discussed above.

These coded observations and discussions were cross-referenced for any similarities or discrepancies, and then they were examined for each of the *Al Lamma* gatherings. These codes were sorted and organised in thematic categories. All the thematic categories were

taken from the data collected from field observations and from the participants' discussions. As a result, a number of different subordinate themes emerged from the data and were arranged and grouped under three main themes. These three main themes formed the three main chapters in this thesis: Chapter 4: 'Computer Literacies', Chapter 5: 'Power and Family Relations', and Chapter 6: 'Women Negotiating Cultural Conflict'. These three main chapters contain specific sections, which discuss each relevant subordinate theme separately. Chapter 4 discusses the following subordinate themes: (1) 'Computer family literacy', (2) 'The computer as a domestic tool', (3) 'Online community', (4) 'Informal learning styles', (5) 'Emotional feelings', (6) 'Gender and computer literacy at home', and (7) 'Professional and non-professional women's vision of computer use'. Chapter 5 contains the following themes: (1) 'Power and family space', (2) 'Computer-related family conflict', (3) 'Conflict and gender issues', (4) 'Computer and child development', (5) 'Reality and virtual activities', (6) 'Social isolation', (7) 'The child's relationship with the computer', and (8) 'Computer fear and social support'. Finally, Chapter 6 explores the following subordinate themes: (1) 'Women as distant active communicators', (2) 'Women's accounts of feeling visible/invisible, feeling guilty and feeling isolated', (3) 'Mutual social support', and (4) 'Traditional and modernised identities'.

2.4.2. Reflexivity as a Muslim feminist researcher

The biographical similarities between the participants of this study and myself helped me to deploy subjectivity in a way that assisted my presentation and analysis (Hollway, and Jefferson, 2000). The notion of reflexivity has been defined in the research literature in different ways. For example, Travers (2001:137) argues that 'reflexivity' involves being reflective about the research process, and that the emphasis is on the researcher as well as on the researched. Additionally, reflexivity may be used 'politically to promote female

cultural values in an academy which is still dominated by 'objective' or positivist styles of analysis' (Travers, 2001:137-138). Reflexivity also involves reflecting on emotional and ethical issues experienced when conducting interviews or doing fieldwork. This process of being reflective is also referred to as 'self reflective' methodology (Oakley, 1981-1984), or as deploying subjectivity (Chaudhry, 1997; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). For Field et al (2005), analysing people's stories with 'narrative analysis' involves exploring sense of self and sense of agency, which provides a reflexive dimension for analysing the discussion, even when spoken in another mother tongue language. As a result, Field et al argue, the analysis will be presented without forgetting any personal or cultural aspects that are involved in colouring these presentations.

Katan (2003) suggests that translations become an act of mediating cultures. Thus the act of translating the participants' discussions needs to represent the personal or cultural aspects of the participants in a reflexive way. Practically, and as done in this study, translated discussions can be reflexively analysed by describing and referring to cultural and social issues embedded in the participants' community and reflected in their accounts. In the present study, mediated translation was aimed at helping 'others' understand not only the direct meanings of *Al Lamma* gatherings' discussions, but also any cultural or religious meanings hidden in these presentations (see Chapter 3).

The design and the conduct of the study were influenced by my own position as a Muslim feminist researcher in positive and negative ways. The intention was to employ feminist methodologies, focusing on specific features that would help to direct my research towards change in an emancipatory or liberatory direction. The aim was to analyse not only individuals but also their relationships, by thinking and using the spatial, temporal, social,

political and cultural factors that affected the participants' everyday lives. The use of this reflexive process resulted in the recognition of issues of silence, both when reading data and during the *Al Lamma* gatherings themselves (Mazzei, 2009). Moreover, writing reflexive notes while listening to the recorded *Al Lamma* gatherings' discussions provided an extra space for deconstructing listening in a way that clarified meanings and made understanding the participant's experiences possible. Reflexivity and a gendered stance were also evident in my use of the feminine pronoun (In Libyan Arabic language there are three feminine pronouns; single, double, and plural.) when referring to all the participants taking part in this study. Chris Weedon (2003) argues that the main place for analysing power is the language which people use to present their subjectivity and thus their own identity.

A feminist methodology also requires that participants play an active part in the research process. This was the case in the present study in that they gave feedback on the data and findings. In addition, my role in this research was explicitly subjective by already being an 'insider' and later becoming even a 'participant observer' (Hammersley, and Atkinson, 2007) as discussed above. In all, my work tried to use 'feminist research as self-reflective, collaborative, attuned to process, oriented to social change, and designed to be for women rather than only of women' (Reinharz, 1992:269).

This research has been informed by the work of feminist researchers who have written about the internet and computer use. In particular; Wajcman's (2004) discussion of women's uses of computers online, Hyne's (2004) exploration of the different resources and feelings associated with women's use of ICT, and Faulkner's (2004) description of problems faced by women when using computers (see Chapter 4). Such feminist research

suggested that an ethnographic approach was essential for understanding how culture both shaped, and was reproduced by the social relations of the participants. For example, how the division of everyday time is influenced by religious cultural assumptions and practices such as praying times. In addition, men's and women's social spaces, occupations and operations are strongly influenced by gender divisions. As the aim of this study was to explore how women can be supported to develop strategies for change, accounts of feelings expressed by the participants, as well as the researcher, were explored in a domestic space where, women's feelings, experiences, ideas, needs and interests could be validated. Consequently, the discussions in this study greatly related to gender issues and power relations that surround computer and internet use at home. In addition, the process and descriptions of my personal research experiences were included in the data, and were analysed and critically evaluated in the process of writing this study.

2.4.2.1 Researching/not researching men's spaces

As a Muslim Libyan woman, it would have been difficult and inappropriate for me to enter Muslim male's spaces, in a cultural context where male and female social spaces are separated from each other (Abu-Lughod, 1992; Ridd, 1994). The decision to only collect data from women's social *Al Lamma* gatherings was therefore appropriate and practical for me as a female researcher and for my participants, as well as for our husbands.

However, stories relating to men, as husbands, sons, fathers and uncles, often featured in *Al Lamma* gatherings' discussions. For example, participants referred to how their husbands' control over computers and internet use in their homes stopped them from using computers independently. These references directed me to ask questions as to how power over technologies is controlled and used within domestic spaces occupied by Muslim

families, how the power of technology is challenging the behaviour of these families, and how independent resources and finances can become important elements for empowering women's positions by enabling them to possess their own personal computer at home.

My participants had to gain permission from their husbands to take part in my study and thus attend our *Al Lamma* gatherings. This permission provided some free space for me and my participants to attend to and discuss our personal and our family experiences relating to computer and internet use as a home activity. My intention was not to disvalue or ignore the Libyan men's experiences of home computing but to value and recognise the different experiences of home computing by Libyan women. As a result, the study explored the power relationships between the participants and their husbands, as well as between the participants and the researcher. This form of exploration supported me in moving towards a women-centred approach by empowering the women who participated in this research and giving them a voice. The participants were helped and supported to participate in their own development or to improve their own conditions; for instance after attending *Al Lamma* gatherings, Norrya started switching the computer on and off on her own, and Mona used the internet for the first time to call her daughter in Libya online (see Chapter 4).

2.4.2.2. Researching women's emotional spaces

As a Muslim feminist researcher, there were certain factors that affected my emotional commitment during the process of this study, as well as my participants' accounts of emotions/feelings relating to their use of home computing as immigrant Muslim women. I therefore explore here some of the main factors that coloured and moved my emotions as a Muslim feminist researcher before describing Libyan women's accounts of

emotions/feelings discussed and expressed during *Al Lamma* gatherings (for more detail see Chapter 4 and Chapter 6).

To begin with, it may be argued that the 'truth' is out there waiting for us to think about it, investigate its reality, or prove it through scientific experiments (Al Najar, 2010). However, for me, the important aim of this research study was not to reveal the 'truth' but instead to recognise that 'all accounts are partial and partisan and are used rhetorically at the same time as they purport to be accurate representation of what has taken place' (Barbour and Schostak, 2005:46). My aim was to represent to 'others', social and cultural meanings and knowledge about a marginalised group of women. The approach that I have developed, attempts to give recognition to the emotional dimension of women's everyday life and in particular how the migrant experience of the women in my study had emotional significance **(s**ee Chapter 6). However, I myself was located in this emotional world as a Muslim researcher. For example, the representation of my case was conducted in a way that showed my emotions as a Muslim feminist researcher who is feeling homesick, and who belongs to a marginalised community of Muslim immigrant women, and who is learning to adapt to new surroundings and changes in her new home in North Manchester. Bell Hooks (2009:220), describing the power of a culture of belonging, states that 'to fully belong anywhere one must fully understand the ground of one's being'. Furthermore as the researcher and the participant observer, I also needed to describe the ground of my being in order to represent the participants' feelings after migrating to North Manchester.

According to Al Odah (2010), movement and the need for certain things are the main reasons that people make changes such as using new technology. Al Odah also points to how Al-Shafii (767 – 820C.E.) argued that travelling and movement help people change

and transform their life. In this respect I, like my participants, adopted these new changes, such as the availability of computers and internet in our homes, without losing our connectivity and our sense of belonging to a collective Muslim community.

As a result, after using home computing to connect with my home country of Libya, I started to feel and express my individual motives and power to improve and develop my identity, but without moving away from our regular social gatherings, the *Al Lamma*. All these different emotions of belonging, feeling proud and feeling connected, helped me notice my participants' feelings, as well as developing my interpretation and representation of my participants' accounts of feelings in my research. These accounts of feelings by my participants related mostly to their daily lives in North Manchester as immigrant Muslim women, and included these practices around home computing and internet usage. Consequently, I needed to find out why women who participated in this study expressed accounts of feelings of being visible/invisible, feelings of guilt and feeling isolated (see Chapter 6), and how home computing may have helped them to get through different emotions such as fear, feeling jealous and feeling proud (see Chapter 4).

2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the methodological framework of the present study and showed the significance of culture and language during the process of data collection and analysis. An ethnographic case study approach was selected to explore the use and significance of home computers in a community of Libyan women who have accompanied their husbands to the United Kingdom. However, as Stacey (1988:26) argues, this approach has risks, and 'rigorous self-awareness of the ethical pitfalls in the method enables one to monitor and then mitigate some of the dangers to which ethnographers

expose their informants'.

In the following chapter, I describe how women's social gatherings, the *Al Lamma,* were used in this study as a focus group method, as well as discussing the methodological implications of this on data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER 3 *AL LAMMA*: METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE LIBYAN WOMEN'S SOCIAL GATHERING

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I explain how women's social gatherings within extended Libyan social communities in North Manchester became 'domesticated research spaces' for my research. I refer to these social gatherings as '*Al Lamma* gatherings' and the forms of talk and language produced during these gatherings as '*Al Lamma* gatherings' discussions'. I describe and analyse these *Al Lamma* gatherings as domestic research spaces used for observing group dynamics, interviewing women, writing notes, and recording discussions that were later translated and transcribed.

The first section in this chapter centres on exploring the social and culture aspects of *Al Lamma* gatherings in the North Manchester setting. By applying an ethnographic descriptive approach within a qualitative feminist framework, I discuss the group settings, the seating arrangements, cultural norms of hospitality and food, and the environment in which the discussions took place. However, I need to call attention to the fact that my own language used for describing the nature of *Al Lamma* gatherings and the discussions that took place there, is shaped and coloured by my position as a Muslim feminist researcher (not least since I am translating their accounts into English).

In the second section, I evaluate the *Al Lamma* gatherings as a significant research setting in which to explore Libyan women's experiences of home computing. This approach is important in assessing my attempt to look at my participants' accounts as representations

of what has taken place at a specific time and space. I then evaluate the similarities and differences between *Al Lamma* gatherings and focus group methods.

In the third section, I show how my research notes and observations are used as a place to record data, reflections and interpretations. This process supports my intention to 'interpret the cultural meanings inherent in verbal and non-verbal behaviour' (Somekh, 2005: 139) during the *Al Lamma* gatherings. First, the composition of each of the four *Al Lamma* gatherings is presented to give the reader some sense of the uniqueness of each one of these gatherings. In addition, I discuss two distinctive types of field notes that I took during the *Al Lamma* discussions. The first type was notes taken during the actual *Al Lamma* discussions (Thematic notes 1) and the second consisted of composed notes taken while listening to the recorded *Al Lamma* discussions (Thematic notes 2).

In section four, I use extracts from my research diary to illustrate the difficulties I encountered during the translation process. In this respect, I argue that the translation process is more than giving the direct meaning of words or texts. Instead, it is an act of translating and communicating meaning between cultures. In doing this I present examples from *Al Lamma* discussion transcripts after they have been translated into English. I also explore three different styles of discussion that were identified in the *Al Lamma* discussion transcripts; the question/answer style, the dialogic style and the thematic style.

Following this a reflective commentary on the process of reading the transcripts of *Al Lamma* discussions is discussed in this section. I explore the existence of two levels of power during these discussions, which appeared very clearly from my analysis and were present when each woman talked about her own experience of using the internet at home.

Finally, I address significant research methodologies located in *Al Lamma* gatherings and consider their implications on the collection and analysis of data in my research. I discuss my claims of why and how sociable activities like *Al Lamma* gatherings were used for the purpose of research, and without changing their primary rationale.

3.2. Libyan women's domestic spaces

The temporary nature of these Libyan women's location in North Manchester makes them similar in some way to 'guest workers' in different countries; i.e. people who fulfil an economic function for the 'host' country, but who are not accorded status as full citizens. However, the situation here is rather different, since most of the women are here because of their husbands' studies or work. Therefore, I will describe the significance of temporary location/place and belonging, in Libyan women's everyday lives within their 'domestic spaces'. I refer to the meaning of domestic space within Islamic culture, as well as within research on contemporary Western domestic spaces.

'Domestic space' in Islamic cultures is often regarded as the female space of the private home, where men's mobility is restricted. The only men allowed into a private women's area within the house are close relatives such as sons, brothers, fathers, grandfathers, uncles and nephews, amongst whom the women can be unveiled (Wynn, 2007). Other men may be allowed into the house in the presence of a woman's close male relative, but in a special guests room, which is usually located near the main entrance. However, in Libya it is more complex, in that the domestic space in the home is defined by male and female powers and presence. To start with, the domestic space for Libyan women is a space within the home that is separated from Libyan men's space, such restrictions reflecting the separation of male and female spaces in Muslim communities in general (Ridd, 1994:90).

This separation provides a private place/space and time for Libyan women to enjoy their autonomy and fulfilment within their own homes, and includes; the kitchen, the family rooms, the guest room for women, and bedrooms. In contemporary Western domestic spaces, housewives do not claim a room for their own, although they may create their own privacy within a given space and time (Massey, 1994; Massey and Jess, 1995; Massey, 2005; Munro and Madigan, 2006).

In addition, Libyan houses mirror the formal social behaviour of Libyan society in general (Rosselin, 2006). For example, in these private homes, men may only host their male guests in the formal sitting room, which is located near the main entrance. Nevertheless, Libyan women may hold social gatherings for other women in the same formal sitting room, besides using the guest room reserved only for women, but only when no men are present. By informing any male in their household about their plans for using the formal sitting room for their social gatherings, women's behaviour sets another social border in their domestic space. As a result, women's movement within their domestic space becomes more spacious and freer than when men are around them. As Rosemary Ridd (1994) states, cultural events become a gender-divided space where women meet with other women during Islamic or social celebrations. In addition, Libyan women 'establish close networks of practice and emotional support with female friends and neighbours, which consolidate their position at the core of the family and militate against their isolation' (Watson, 1994:35).

However, the tension between 'space' as a fixed location and 'place' as a meaningful territory (Savage, et al 2005: 79) became very tense when Libyan women moved to live in North Manchester with their families. As a result, the 'domestic sociability' among

immigrant neighbours who were Muslim and mostly Libyan was very high. In other words, Libyan immigrants' choice of place, North Manchester, in order to live among Muslim and Libyan communities was an 'elective belonging', as well as an act of survival (Savage, et al 2005: 85). Libyan women in these communities met each other in the streets, in the local shops, in the local community schools and in the Libyan supplementary school. As neighbours, they were involved in visits to each other and eventually some relationships changed into friendships. These relationships extended and developed during regular social meetings consisting of a group of women, mainly Libyan, who met together in their homes to discuss their everyday problems and experiences. Savage, et al (2005: 86), makes the critique that 'rendering of neighbourliness and friendliness means also that one can ignore immediate neighbours for day to day practical reasons, leading to social exclusiveness as one deals with one's local friends rather than one's neighbours'. However I would argue that if neighbours, especially women, do not share the same language or culture socialising becomes difficult if not impossible, which explains why Libyan women searched for and choose to live in Muslim or Libyan neighbourhoods. This gave them the sense of 'belonging' that they needed as immigrant women living in a Western society. Describing a culture of belonging, bell Hooks (2009: 220) states that 'to fully belong anywhere, one must understand the ground of one's being'.

 As a result, the 'degree of mutual assistance and co-operation within the migrant community in general, and among women in particular' is high (Watson, 1994:35). This is evident within Libyan migrant communities in North Manchester, in that women kept their social gatherings as a means of expressing their solidarity, belonging and identity, even when their homes were very different from those in their home country; becoming a place for TV sets, computers, laptops and mobile phones. These technical devices encouraged

almost every one of them to learn how to use computers, either independently or with support from their children and female friends (see Chapter 4).

3.3. *Al Lamma* gatherings in the North Manchester setting

> Not only do they [groups] variously make it easier for us to do our job, they provide companionship, support and even a sense of identity.
> (Hargie and Dickson, 2004:401)

The Libyan women in this study belong to an extended social community that looks for direct social contact whenever possible. They tend to seek social involvement with other women by getting together daily, weekly or monthly in *Al Lamma* social gatherings. *Al Lamma* gatherings are an old tradition in Libyan society. They consist of a stable group of women who live in one space either as neighbours, friends or belong to the same extended family. This being together in one space, such as living in the same building, street, and neighbourhood, is an important factor in helping Libyan women in North Manchester to continue attending *Al Lamma* gatherings. These women get together most often with other women living near their homes, as it is easy, practical, convenient, and safe for them to do so. For example, they walk to each other's homes faster and feel safer if they live near each others' homes. In addition, they can quickly get back to their homes to prepare meals, send children to school, and be there for their husbands. However, there are also wider cultural factors that lead them to maintain the custom of *Al Lamma* gatherings. Indeed, being physically separated from their home country may have prompted them to struggle even more to gather together, even in a setting that differs considerably from their home in Libya. In the following section I will explore the physical setting and seating arrangements of *Al Lamma* gatherings in North Manchester. I will refer to *Al Lamma* gatherings in North

Manchester as 'Mancunian *Al Lamma* gatherings' because they have their own distinctive elements compared with the original *Al Lamma* gatherings in Libya.

3.3.1. Physical characteristics of the 'Mancunian *Al Lamma* gatherings'

> Physical settings are often said to have… atmosphere, for they can create a distinctive cognitive and emotional reaction in people who occupy these spaces. (Forsyth, 2006:490)

There is a close connection between individuals or groups and the physical setting and environment that they inhabit. The effects of this connection are in one way or another reflected during their social meetings and whenever they gather in one place. According to Barker (cited in Forsyth, 2006:449) in his theory of 'ecological psychology', the behaviour settings (physical location) is a physically and temporally bounded space that determines the actions of the individuals in the setting. The setting or physical location influences or determines the behaviour of people. In this respect, the close connection between behaviour and home setting for Libyan women was disrupted when they first came to live in Manchester, which, compared to their own home environment, was totally new and different for them.

To be specific, when these Libyan women arrived in Manchester they started to live and conduct their social gatherings in a physical setting that presented some difficulties. Adjusting to life in Victorian houses was hard, if not dramatic for some of these women. Victorian houses are different from Libyan houses in their exterior and interior design. Spaces and rooms in Victorian terraced houses differ from Libyan houses in terms of size,

number, function and name. In this respect, answers to questions such as what the sitting room looks like, who uses it, and whether it is usually the women's 'territory', or is it also used by men, needs to be clarified. For example, the sitting rooms (reception room, lounge, or living room) in these Victorian houses, which Libyan women use for their social gatherings, are not comparable to sitting rooms known as *Al Dar Al Arabia* in Libya. *Al Dar Al Arabia* has its own cultural and traditional environment, reflected in every aspect from the type of furniture, the seating arrangements, the type of food provided by Libyan women, to the capacity of the room in general.

First, the traditional Libyan seating arrangements, called *Al Jailsa Al Arabia*, which are usually adopted by women during *Al Lamma* gatherings, are based on sitting near the floor on low, foam-filled seats with big cushions, where people face each other in a circle around the whole sitting room. The woman who hosts the gathering uses a low tea table placed in the middle of the sitting room for presenting tea, coffee, traditional sweets, and biscuits to the other women. Typically, the room will be full with musk and amber incense coming from the *Bokur* plate, which is used for burning these different types of incenses. Compared with sofas and armchairs in English houses, *Al Jailsa Al Arabia* seats have the capacity to accommodate more women, with no boundaries between the low seats.

Some Libyan women who now live in North Manchester have tried to make their foreign sitting rooms look as much like *Al Dar Al Arabia* rooms as possible, either by changing some of the furniture or adding some traditional pieces of *Al Jailsa Al Arabia* to give these rooms a bit of a 'back home' look and feel, as well as a sense of identity. Stanton (2004: 109) states that physical settings have an effect on the way groups interact and perform, and that the location of the meeting and facilities such as seating arrangements can be

significant in that they help to develop the group identity. By incorporating some features of these Libyan living arrangements into their new houses in Manchester, Libyan women attempt to strengthen their connection with their home environment and maintain their cultural identity.

3.3.2. Seating arrangements for 'Mancunian *Al Lamma* gatherings'

Sommer (1967; cited in Forsyth, 2006:459) suggests that 'seating arrangements play a large role in creating a group's ecology' and that sitting patterns influence interaction, communication and leadership in groups. These patterns affect the group's behavioural and social interaction by heightening eye contact, encouraging verbal communication and facilitating the development of intimacy (Stanton, 2004). The seating arrangements and customs of *Al Jailsa Al Arabia*, described previously, affected the women's behavioural and social interaction with each other in particular ways. For instance, participants' support for each other during grief or celebrations was achieved through intense eye contact, verbal communication and intimacy (in the privacy of a women only space).

Al Jailsa Al Arabia provided a 'safe social space' that Libyan women occupied to talk and express their feelings around their everyday lives. They inhabited a 'location which allows one to speak or not to speak, to be affirmed in one's speech or rejected, to be heard or censored', as described by Davies (1994: 153). Liz Bondi (2005: 233) states that 'face-to-face contact with real people generates much more feelings than numbers and reflecting on these emotions or feelings could be reframed in a more inclusive way'. These remarks point to the potential significance of using *Al Lamma* gatherings as a research space for exploring Libyan women's accounts of feelings and experiences that they and their families encountered while living in North Manchester as Muslim migrant communities.

As I have already suggested in Chapter 2, this gives *Al Lamma* gatherings certain advantages over conventional focus group methods. I now turn to a fuller comparison of *Al Lamma* gatherings and focus groups.

3.4. *Al Lamma* gatherings and focus group method

Al Lamma gatherings could be said to share features of focus groups. I will begin by describing in what way *Al Lamma* gatherings were like and unlike focus group methods, and then explore research methodologies that might be relevant to or located within these gatherings. As already described, the women's *Al Lamma* gatherings that I arranged in North Manchester for my research study were socially oriented, informal, local, identity-focused, and long-lived gatherings. There was a strong connection between the participants, as a result of their nationality and circumstances as immigrant women who had left their home environment and come to live in a Western city. So the women's *Al Lamma* gatherings were like a mirror with two sides; one side that reflected the experiences that the women were having while living as Muslim immigrants in North Manchester, and the other side that reflected these women's identity, as represented in their language, dress, food, patterns of behaviour and performances during these gatherings.

In general, there are some ethical issues associated with studying individual Libyan women, due to religious practices and customs embedded in Libyan culture. For example, it is generally felt that talk about personal lives should be kept private and that people can express themselves openly only during discussions with friends or relatives. This problem was solved when I investigated groups of Libyan women by participating in, and focusing on, their existing *Al Lamma* gatherings. This contrasts with focus groups, which usually comprise participants who do not know one another. *Al Lamma* gatherings consisted of

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women who were relatives, friends or neighbours as well as sharing the same culture and values. Such gatherings generated 'ethnographic material, which gave an insight into women's roles as, perceived by the society itself, often in symbolic form e.g. weddings where the rich detail provides the researcher with much valuable data' (Dragadze, 1994:154) (See also Bracewell, Dragadze, and Smith 1993). My aim was to deal with *Al Lamma* gatherings' transcripts as texts, in a critical way, and acknowledge that these texts were socially constructed (Atkinson, 1997; Wilkinson, 1998; Barbour and Schostak, 2005).

In addition, my holistic approach to understanding the individuals' accounts represented in *Al Lamma* gatherings' transcripts, (which involved attending to issues related to the cultural and temporal location of my case), revealed many things which Libyan women's narratives both conveyed and hid. The question to be asked in this respect is; what kind of information did Libyan women produce and exchange during *Al Lamma* gatherings? Two answers immediately arise. By looking at the source of the information given, four types of knowledge were recognised; personal, transferred, borrowed, and historical. When referring to the topics expressed, their exchanged information could be cultural, economical, educational, psychological, technical or scientific. (These different types of information are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4).   I classified this information into groups in order to accomplish two things. First, it enabled me to study Libyan women's interests in relation to their home computing usage. Second, I could analyse the different channels of communication that women used during *Al Lamma* gatherings to transfer information between them, as individuals and as a collective group. However, *Al Lamma* gatherings also carried with them some significant challenges that I tried to overcome. Time of the meetings, for instance, needed to be practical and convenient to the participants. Furthermore the group dynamics during *Al Lamma* gatherings presented

dominant speakers or intimidated ones, as well as others who were reluctant to contribute. My attempts to handle dominant and intimidated speakers took different forms such as directing questions to less active speakers by name, changing the topic being discussed, and providing drinks or sweets to interrupt or even stop the participants' discussions.

There are other obvious questions about my role and involvement. How were my subjective feelings reflected in my reading of *Al Lamma* gatherings and how disjunctive did it feel to my own experience? Did I project on the participants my own feelings about computer use at home? Did I provide only the negative aspects during discussions with Libyan women or did such negative feelings predominate? The Libyan women's scenarios about computer use at home were certainly very familiar to me. Therefore it is possible that biographical similarities between these Libyan women and myself, while assisting my observation and analysis, might also have skewed my findings and interpretations. I address these methodological issues below.

Firstly, this exploration employed feminist methodologies by focusing on specific features that helped direct my research towards change, as well as exploring issues of power and power relations (Reinharz, 1992; Oakely, 1998). Secondly, I attempted to ensure that the participants played an active part throughout the research processes, by eliciting feedback from them on the data and findings. Their comments informed the analysis. Finally, my role in this research was explicitly subjective. Already being an 'insider' and later becoming a 'participant observer', I was someone who might therefore 'gain unique insights into the behaviour and activities of those they observe because they participate in their activities and, to some extent, are absorbed into the culture of the group' (Somekh and Jones, 2005:140). Nevertheless, subjectivity will always have entered into the process

of interpretation. Indeed this is inevitable in all forms of enquiry. It was therefore necessary to be continuously reflexive about my own biases, as described in Chapter 2 above.

In all, my work tried to use feminist research as a self-reflective and collaborative process. This connects to the following section that describes how *Al Lamma* gatherings as a women's social space has the potential for becoming a place for applying focus group methods while including its own distinctive methodologies. To do this I first present a description of the composition of all four gatherings, so that readers can get sense of who was involved.

3.5. Composition of the four *Al Lamma* gatherings

Each *Al Lamma* gathering that I organised for my research had its own distinctive features, relating to the time of gatherings, women's participation, women's interactions/group dynamics, the focus of my observations, and decisions made when transcribing discussions and then translating/interpreting them. To make these clear, a brief description follows regarding the composition of each gathering. I also make brief reference to my own background feelings and thoughts at the time of each gathering, taken from my field notes. I arranged four *Al Lamma* gatherings, which form the main source of data for my research. For these gatherings, I invited some Libyan women to have a meeting in my house in order for me to encourage communication in a comfortable and familiar setting. These Libyan women already knew me and most of them had visited me in my house before, or had met me at other women's social meetings. All the participants lived with their families in a large Libyan community within a wider multi ethnic Muslim community, as described earlier. Some of these women worked as primary or secondary school teachers in Libyan

schools in Manchester. They agreed to come to my home during the evenings when all our children were at Libyan school, but they themselves were not at that time teaching. The changes in participation over the four *Al Lamma* gatherings was unfortunate in terms of sustained involvement, but probably inevitable given the shifting nature of participation in genuine *Al Lamma* gatherings. Nevertheless, these four meetings provided a rich source of data for my study.

3.5.1. The first *Al Lamma* gathering on 8th July 2005

Time: from 9.00 pm until 10.30 pm

Place: Sitting room in the researcher's house number 5 in North Manchester

Participants: Nagat, Amel, Sara, Nadia, Mona, and Amal (names are pseudonyms)

This was the first meeting used, and was made up of Libyan women who lived in North Manchester with their families. Five Libyan mothers participated in this first group discussion and one of them brought her baby boy with her. They had been living in Manchester for nearly 3 years. All these Libyan women came to Manchester with their husbands who were enrolled in different universities to study for Masters or Ph D degrees. The discussion was audio-recorded for subsequent transcription. The audio-recorded speech, which lasted for about thirty-five minutes, was in the Libyan Arabic language. The first transcript consisted of approximately the first fifteen minutes of the audio-recorded speech. I then translated a section of this Libyan Arabic transcript into English. I did my first translation immediately after writing the transcript. However, I had to stop during this translation process because I started to feel constrained by linguistic and cultural factors embedded in texts translated from Arabic to English (see the section on translation in Chapter 3). I began to realise that my translation could not fully reflect what the women

were saying during the discussions, which included many gestures, signs and metaphors in a culture that uses hands and facial expressions more often than in English culture.

3.5.2. The second *Al Lamma* gathering on 15th February 2008

Time: from 7.00 pm until 9.00 pm

Place: Sitting room in the researcher's house number 16 in North Manchester

Participants: Nagat, Nafeesa, Faheema, Nour, Aneesa, Nadia, and Norrya (names are pseudonyms)

I invited six Libyan women to my house to talk about using computers and the internet, while living here in Manchester or when they used to live in Libya. All of the women I invited came to the group discussion meeting. Only one of these women, Nadia, had attended the previous group discussion, and she was also the mother who I had previously interviewed in 2005 with her daughter (See Chapter 2 above). Nadia and another woman had come to the United Kingdom in 2002 with their families because their husbands had come to study in Manchester. Two of the other four women had left Manchester in 2004 after their husbands finished their masters' studies, but had then returned to Manchester in 2006 so that their husbands could get a Ph D degree from the United Kingdom. The two other women had been in Manchester for less than a year. They came to live in the United Kingdom with their husbands who also wanted to study for a Ph D degree. These Libyan women are all mothers of four, five or six daughters and sons with an age range from three to 23 years old at the time of the gathering. In all, seven Libyan women (including myself) with different social and educational backgrounds attended the second group meeting. The discussions were in a Libyan spoken language and I used an MP3 player to record the women's talk. After it had finished I listened to the whole recording and wrote up a small

section as a transcript in Arabic. I then translated this transcript into English. My intention was to try a different method of translation that would make the translation process quicker and easier.

3.5.3. The third *Al Lamma* gathering on 31st October 2008

Time: from 9.00 pm until 10.00 pm

Place: Sitting room in the researcher's house number 16 in North Manchester

Participants: Nagat, Norrya and Howdah (names are pseudonyms)

Although six women were invited to the third *Al Lamma* gathering, only two women participated due to different reasons that I describe below. One woman had participated in a previous gathering (the second *Al Lamma* gathering), while the other woman was new to the group. Both these particular participants were housewives. In all then, two women plus my self were present during this gathering. Three other women were supposed to attend but for different health and family reasons, they did not turn up. One woman was not feeling well and another woman was preparing herself to travel with her daughter who had to go back to Libya to study medicine. We waited for third woman, Nadia, to come but it seems that she did not get my invitation in time. I started recording at nine pm after we noticed that no one else was going to come to the gathering. In this gathering, I prepared a list of ten main themes that I had identified from the previous gatherings, to use as starting points for our discussion. I read these themes to them one by one in Arabic. After reading each topic area, we started our discussions by giving our opinions depending on our own experiences and knowledge.

3.5.4. The forth *Al Lamma* gathering on 21st May 2009

Time: from 7.30 pm until 9.00 pm

Place: Sitting room in the researcher's house number 16 in North Manchester

Participants: Nagat, Nadia, Norrya, Faheema, Howdah and Farah (names are pseudonyms)

Five women and myself attended the forth *Al Lamma* gathering. Four women had already participated in previous *Al Lamma* gatherings and one woman was participating for the first time. Farah, who was the new participant, brought her two children with her because she did not have any relatives or friends who could look after them especially when their father had to go to the university. Farah came to the United Kingdom with her family after her husband was offered a scholarship to study English language for one academic year. She had been living in Manchester for nearly seven months. Two of the participants were teachers in a Libyan school in North Manchester so the gathering took place when they had no classes to teach. As usual, the discussion, which was spoken in Libyan Arabic, was audio-recorded. However, the new participant, Farah, spoke to her children in Amazeg (Berber); a language spoken by most of the residents of the North Mountains in the North West of Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, (but this was not during the process of audio-recording any discussions). During the discussions the participants were given the opportunity to revisit the ten themes that I had presented in the third *Al Lamma* gathering. After listening to the recorded discussion, I started transcribing parts of the discussion in Arabic. Then I translated the transcribed text into English. The process of my translation became quicker, probably because I started to feel more confident that my translated transcripts were not the real presentation of *Al Lamma* discussions, but could only be another representation of these discussions.

In the following section, I explore my observations presented in terms of the two different types of field notes taken during the first *Al Lamma* discussion and when listening to the second *Al Lamma* discussion.

3.6. *Al Lamma* gatherings field notes

My own observations on *Al Lamma* discussions were written down as notes to show the sequence of the discussion (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999), and to show connections between participants' accounts and any emerging themes, using grounded theory as described in Chapter 2 (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Two different types of field notes were taken; one set comprised notes made during *Al Lamma* discussions (Thematic notes 1) and the other while listening to the recorded *Al Lamma* discussions (Thematic notes 2). In the 'Thematic notes 1' sub-section, I present the way I dealt with these notes as written texts that might be analysed as preliminary themes for future analysis, and to explore the flow of talking from one topic to another. In 'Thematic notes 2', I highlight words and some phrases to illustrate the different ways of interpreting data while listening to recorded speech, such as with this second *Al Lamma* discussion.

3.6.1. Thematic notes 1

Al Lamma discussions were recorded onto an MP3 player. The participants used spoken Libyan Arabic for asking and answering any questions during these discussions. At the same time during these *Al Lamma* discussions, I used written English to write down some interpretative notes that I felt were important, interesting, and sometimes unexpected. Examples from the hand-written field notes taken during the first *Al Lamma* discussion include the following:

What do you get from Internet use?

Computer shops specially for women for one day each week

Four shops in … as a café net!

Internet is educational but it is used mostly during summer and weekends

Using emails when she had a woman who came from Libya to Manchester to have a health check because she was ill

Focusing on negative issues when computers were first used in Libya

Religious sites for advice

Using sites useful for me as how can you choose the sex of your child by eating certain food?

Using the Internet for booking flights and buying tickets

One of the women has never used the internet

My husband helped me to use the internet

Then I showed my neighbour how to use the internet (Chain of instruction)

When he stopped using the internet at home, I was happy

I was happy to get the internet stopped and I felt jealous

The laptop in our bed as another wife!

Now the internet is closed (Hurray)

I used the internet for planning my lesson

I got more information on my subject

Looking in the internet is like visiting someone and talking with them

Computers in bedrooms

I feel proud about myself especially when I go back to Libya

Feminism

Computer vocabulary (English)

Looking for information in e. journals and doing quizzes

Why not get a degree by using e. learning

They have no idea about e. learning

These notes formed 'first order' characterisations of the data, made in 'real time' as each discussion unfolded. The notes retain many of the actual words used, when in translation.

These notes, which remain 'close' to the speech itself, formed the basis for the second form of thematic notes described in the following section.

3.6.2. Thematic notes 2

The second sets of thematic notes were taken while I listened to the recorded *Al Lamma* discussions. My intention was to highlight as many themes as possible so that they would become more visible, so as to allow for any clarifications as well as to make connections to existing theory. Because of this activity, I was able to use some of these highlighted themes as key points for analysing the translated *Al Lamma* transcripts. The following thematic notes were made while listening to the recording of the second *Al Lamma* discussion:

Conflict over **computer use** between all members off the **family**

Strong **wishes** to use the computer but can't

Learning how to use the computer **by myself**

My **husband** is **a border** between me and the computer

Computer is the **possession** of the husband

Personal **permission** from the husband before using the computer

Families cannot go to a **Café net**

Teenager boys go to **football** and **sex sites**

News from the **media** is true and real

Computers are **taught** to **children in schools**

Computer as a tool that needs **practical learning**

Learning English on the internet (but it is not free)

Financial constraints

Using correct **vocabulary** related to computer

Using **humour** when confronted by their husbands

Personal computer for the mother only

Using **domestic** housework as **a barrier** to computer use **at home**

Help me to **learn** how to use the computer

Personal **emails**

Professional course are/not needed for computer use

Controlling computer use by the husband

Husbands leave the **computer on** so that we cannot use it even after asking us not to use it

Interests to learn about computer and internet use

You cannot **touch** something that does not **belong** to you- the computer

Skills to use the computer as skills used for playing musical instruments

Husband **talks** to his **friends in Libya** on the internet

Watching her newborn **grandson** with his mum on the internet means, she will **witness** him growing etc step-by-step

Educated women can use the computer not **house wives** who have less **Knowledge** about the computer

Using the computer to **learn** new things and not to do **work** with it

Future vision on women who want to **stay home** and **get a degree**, **work, do shopping** etc

Working on computers from **home** after **retirement**

Commercial use of computers by **banks, companies** etc

Time and space became **unlimited** due to Internet

Feeling guilty from spending a lot of time in front of the computer (Psychological problems)

Daughters/sons use computer for **school revisions**

Home is **safer** than outside (my son on the computer at home near me is safer and better than him being outside and I don't know what he is doing there and then)

Do you want me to **stay home** and not to go out? I want to **go out** and use the **computer** for **educational** needs only

Internet **shopping** is for women who work and do not have **time** to go to the **market**. I am a housewife and I have a lot of time I want to go to the market

We are not **used to** it (Internet shopping)

Mobiles are used now in Libya even by older women

Our **generation** is not a computer one

Computers in **Libya** used only by educated women

Teenager girls will benefit more from computer and internet use when they become women

Terms used to refer to different women are not consistence (**educated, literate, illiterate, housewife, working woman, and qualified**)

Our **illiterate mums** used **TV** and **radio** to learn about new things

Internet can anyone use it?

Libyan women put themselves in one frame only (looking after their children, cooking, domestic housework, family visits)

Improving ones **identity** is by the women educating herself for **self improvement** and not for working with outside their homes as a **job**

This is the effect of how **girls** are **brought up** in the **Libyan society**

No one knows better than me the **surrounding** and the **environment** I live in

Men are aware of that most Libyan women do not seem to want to **improve** themselves by taking **courses** in computer and English and thus **insist in controlling** them

Courses are not **free**

 Libyan women use their own **money** to **buy gold**, new furniture etc but not on improving themselves by **enrolling** on different courses

Libyan women were **excluded** from using computers when their husbands or **children** came back home

Libyan husbands as **fathers** were already **controlling** their children and **wives**

The highlighted words relate to the 'first-order' notes made during *Al Lamma* gatherings, in addition to new insights that emerged when listening to the recorded discussions. This helped me to identify key themes and group them into core topics for building the main chapters of the thesis as described in Chapter 2. Each chapter was assigned to one core topic that I selected due to its relevance to my research questions. Most of the themes highlighted in the thematic notes are covered in the thesis.

3.7. Translating *Al Lamma* discussions into English

Transcription is not a mechanical process of putting tape-recorded talk into

written sentences. The talk needs to be 'tidied up' and edited a little to put it in a format on the written page that is understandable to the reader. (Denscombe, 2003: 184)

Translating speech from spoken Libyan Arabic into written English was a key issue in making me think about all the possible implications for analysing the transcribed data. Arksey and Knight (1999: 141) claim that the setting, context, body language and feelings are important elements for interpreting the interview, or as in my case a group discussion. Therefore, I tried to keep a research diary to record my personal observations related to these important elements. For example, in the following extract from my research diary I was reflecting on how I felt when I started translating my participants' speech after the first *Al Lamma* gathering:

I did the translation after writing down the transcript from the tape immediately. I think that helped me to do the translation more quickly in that I was actually thinking about that when I was writing the transcript. I was also starting to remember what the women were talking about during the discussion. It could be inappropriate in that I might be translating and deconstructing the women's speech at the same time. In addition, my own experiences of taking part during women's speech with my previous knowledge and experiences related to translation and language use have already influenced my translation/interpretation. I do not think that my translation in any way will reflect what the Libyan women were saying during the discussion in that their speech was full of signs and gestures especially for Libyan people when it is a culture thing to use hands, body movement, and face expressions more often when speaking than in other cultures. The translation is not transparent enough to show and represent a spoken speech in that a lot of information might be lost when moving from one language to another, which is here from spoken Libyan Arabic to English written language. I need to think about all of the things that have more likely effected and disadvantaged the translation process. I found it very difficult to do this translation so I felt something was missing from this translation. (Extract from my research diary on 3rd September 2005)

I was not sure I would facilitate understanding by only giving the direct translated meaning in English to each spoken Arabic word or phrase. Instead, I related these translations to my participants' cultural situations to try to make my translation or interpretation more meaningful and understandable to people from other cultures. In other words, unintentionally I was trying to become what David Katan (2004: 3) describes as a 'visible agent' who translates cultures and not only language, thus presenting *Al Lamma* discussions as a 'cultural interpreter' or a 'mediator'. Reflexive language clearly emerged as a distinctive feature that I used in writing the translated transcripts of the *Al Lamma* discussions, as was the use of feminine pronouns, (in Libyan Arabic language there are three feminine pronouns: single, double, and plural), when referring to all the participants and their talk. The Arabic transcripts that were then translated into English and the implications of these processes on the content and meaning of the data collected are discussed in the following two sub- sections.

3.7.1. Translation theories and transcript analysis

I would agree with the widely held view of translation as a communication of cultures and not only languages (Hall, 1983; Halliday and Hasan, 1989; Bennett, 1993; Qaddu`r, 1999; and Katan, 2004). My aim was to be able to convey the explicit and implicit meanings contained in the *Al Lamma* discussion transcripts in order to make understanding of the Libyan women's culture possible. Using English as the medium of communication, I was faced with some difficulties in differentiating between information that was already clear and information that needed more detailed explanations. The question to be asked was; what happens when there is a risk of misunderstandings during the process of communicating with members of another culture who do not share the same perception of

the context? In other words, during a cross-cultural communication, how can a translation from Arabic to English transmit the message through the text and the context? Hall's theory of 'Contexting' highlights the importance of communication through both 'stored information', (the context of situation and the context of culture, i.e. the beliefs and values that determine the behaviour to be interpreted, Katan, 2004: 245), and 'transmitted information' (the text), when conveying meaning within and between cultures.

Most problems of misunderstanding translated speech arise when the meanings are implicitly imbedded in the context of situation and culture. In this respect, there have been changes in theories of translation. In the past, the decoding-encoding models of translation, with an analysing and recording approach, put high priority on 'the text' and the source language words (an analytical thinking style). More recent models' emphasis has been on 'the context' and the relationship between the words in the text and other frames (a holistic thinking style: See Katan, 2004:257-260). This shift from the old approaches to the recent ones during the processes of translation or interpretation helps translators in becoming cultural interpreters and mediators. One key contemporary translation theory is the 'Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity' (DMIS) by Bennett (1993), which consists of six significant stages; denial, defence, minimization, acceptance, adaption, and integration. However, I am only going to focus on 'integration', as implicit in Bennett's list of skills. Therefore, I present a summary of the main points that translators/interpreters develop when getting to the sixth and final stage in Bennett's list; integration, and thus become cultural interpreters or cultural mediators. Such interpreters need to:

- analyse and evaluate situations from one or more cultural perspectives;

- mind shift between the source text (in my case Arabic) and the virtual target text (English);

- not be overtaken by cultural reality but to make individual decisions regarding all text;

- build trust and understanding between communities;

- not become a constructive translator who has no specific cultural identity;

- in addition, help negotiate other's cultural differences. (Katan, 2004: 337)

Some qualitative studies have explored the influences of translation techniques in research with non-English participants such as Esposito (2001). According to Esposito, a research translator can be used as an instrument, a group facilitator or a real time translator, when conducting focus group research in the participants' first language. She gives the example of a Spanish group facilitator, who was educated in America, and had a communication style that did not reflect the language of the participants who were educated in a Spanish speaking school system, resulting in some misunderstanding between both sides. Esposito (2001) relates some of the misunderstandings which accrued during the translation process to the Spanish group facilitator. Temple and Young (2004:168) argue that researchers, who can translate for themselves, and take the dual translator/researcher role are best able to represent people as; 'translating has many parallels with discussions by researchers in race and ethnicity and the racial matching of interviewers'. Such a role can offer a space for cross cultural meanings as well as highlighting the problems of meaning.

The effects of these theories of translation on my own translations of *Al Lamma* discussion transcripts, in addition to significant implications for the analysis of the translated transcripts, are discussed next. The discussion explores possible answers to questions such

as how the participants' messages were transmitted, and how much of this through 'the text' and how much through 'the context'.

3.7.2. Mediating Arabic transcripts: from translation to mediation

The discussion below presents examples from the transcript written in Arabic using yamli.com, which is based on transliteration- that is, using Latin characters to write Arabic phonetics by typing in English the phonetic iteration of the Arabic word, which the software then converts into Arabic text.

In this section, I explore how translations of *Al Lamma* discussion transcripts illustrated the challenges I had to face during the process of presenting the women's speech in English. These challenges were related to linguistic/lexical, semiotic and cultural differences between Arabic and English. To take one example; unlike English, verbs in Arabic carry gender and plurality with them. Translating one word such as; *Taftah* resulted into using two words 'she opens…', and the word *Yaftahin* became three words 'they as females open…' According to Derrida (1988: 155) such 'translation becomes an analytical explication' due to the fact that the pronouns: 'you', 'they' and 'them' are gendered in Arabic language.

A second example illustrates how word-to-word translation relying on the explicit meaning in 'the text' alone could be misleading. One of these translations ended with presenting a participant's answer as; *Algayet waget le rowhi* 'I found time for my soul'. By adding more implicit information the final translation was; 'I knew when to be free to do something for myself'.

There were also instances where an equivalent word could not be presented in the English language such as: 'internet for me was a *Gouwill*, it was horror for me'. This Arabic word means something like a ghost, a monster, or a witch, but is not exactly any of these. It relates to a frightening creature used in traditional and folklore stories especially in stories told to children.

In the following instance, religious words adapted from the Glorious Quran were presented in the transcripts and at the same time I provided implicit information to facilitate their understanding. Two of the phrases that participants used a lot during *Al Lamma* discussion were; *Insha Allah* and *Allah Allam*. The direct translation for the first phrase is; 'unless (it be) that *Allah* willeth' (Picktahll, 1981: 794) and for the second phrase is; '*Allah* knoweth all that' (Picktahll, 1981:724). However, the first phrase carries an extra message that could be understood as 'I hope, I wish or I want to', while the message in the second phrase could be 'I am not sure, I do not know or I can not say '.

The final example points to the relationship between the time of year and Libyan traditional custom/culture. As a result, the process of translation included some specific information about changes in the daytime length during winter and summer, and the custom in rural areas for women and girls to be backing home when the sun has set. I highlighted how Libyan weather and custom affected the attendance of high school girls and university female students at internet cafes in a rural village. The example in question was translated as follows, with the additional cultural information in square brackets: "Most of the girls, who go there, study in the university and high school. They use it more in the summer. They go to the café net in groups. [The daylight in summer is very long. Its holiday, there is no school]. When they go home from school during winter, it will be dark

[and girls cannot stay out in the night]. The daylight is short. [But during winter the daytime is short where women and girls, especially in rural areas, are not supposed to stay out after sunset]." In this respect, I tried to translate the actual content of *Al Lamma* discussions into English, 'but one could not translate the event which consists in grafting several tongues onto a single body' (Derrida, 1988: 99 cited in McDonald, 1988). Moreover, 'translation is merely not an act of transferring information, but a process of knowledge production' (Kamal, 2008:254). Furthermore, according to Katan, the dominant semantic style in Arabic is implicit, while English is well adapted to explication, but is less suitable for indicating pre-established social relationships (for more information see table in Katan, 2004:253). These broad semantic factors further complicate the process of translation from Arabic to English.

3.8. Presenting *Al Lamma* transcripts in English

For ethical reasons I was not satisfied when I translated the group discussions into English because I had to write the names of the Libyan women who participated in the discussions in English using the phonetic iteration of the Arabic word. I felt something was missing and that the Libyan women that I knew and talked with somehow started to disappear from the transcript. These women agreed to me using their real names but I told them that for research reasons I would never reveal their real names or identity so I had to give them other names that are familiar within Libyan culture. However, I found myself in a dilemma. The names that Libyan people give to their children and especially to girls change quite markedly from one generation to another, with the result that the real names of the women who participated in the meeting are rarely used nowadays. I was reluctant to give these women names that are inappropriate for their age so I was limited with my choices. To solve this problem I gave each woman a number when writing the translated

transcript of *Al Lamma* discussions, and kept out the names. However because I wanted to explore the power of individual voices and identities, I decided to give each woman another name that was widely used either in Arabic or Islamic countries such as 'Nafeesa' and 'Aneesa', or commonly used in most countries such as 'Nadia' and 'Sara'. Finally, each woman was given another name, which was then coded with a specific number for each *Al Lamma* discussion. Suddenly I noticed that what was important were the talking, the discussion, and the interaction between these women. The *Al Lamma* gatherings as a social activity that involves cultural and religious practices by a collective community, needed to be explored as an activity in its entirety, in order to present its significance to Libyan women's talk and identities. I knew then that I had to focus on the 'gathering' as an inherently social activity/event and not only as about individual women.

In the next sub-sections, I provide extracts from the translated transcripts of *Al Lamma* discussions to show how participants used different styles of interaction. These included; question-answer, dialogue and thematic styles. These different modes of communication affected the participants' group dynamics, which I came to identify and take into account when analysing *Al Lamma* transcripts. In addition, I would like to give the reader a flavour of the way these women took turns to talk to each other, when they chose to be visible or become invisible, and how all this was conveyed in the *Al Lamma* transcripts in the process of translating them into English.

3.8.1. Question - answer style

The first *Al Lamma* discussion on 8th July 2005

Participants: 1= Nagat 2= Amel 3= Sara 4= Nadia 5= Mona   6= Amal (pseudonyms)

Nagat: I want to do this in a different way so that you won't be limited in your discussions. I will ask a question and then you will start talking. **Do you use the internet to communicate with your home in Libya**? *[Home=family]*

Amel: We use it everyday. It's cheap. It has sound and picture. Sara: No, I don't use it everyday only once a week.

Nagat: **Do you have a computer at home? [Place where you live]**

Amel: Yes, we have a laptop in Manchester and we have a computer in our home village in Libya. There are shops specialised in internet. My cousin uses the internet to talk to us. There is a day for women once a week. My husband owns an Internet shop. There are four shops for internet in my town. Sara: You mean café net! [Internet cafe] Amel: Yes, there are café nets in my town. Nagat: In my town, someone took an old woman to the café net so that she can speak with her son living abroad via the internet. Sara: My uncle refused to take my father to the café net so he can communicate with us and see us alive but they didn't agree to do that. So, my father used only the phone to talk to us.

Nagat: **Café net, is it used for other things?**

 Amel: Mostly for communications. I have no idea. Most of the girls, who go there, study in the university and high school. They use it more in the summer. They go to the café net in groups [The daylight in summer is very long. Its holiday, there is no school].

Nagat: **During school year, can they go to the café net after school?**

Amel: When they go home from school during winter, it will be dark [and girls cannot stay out in the night]. The daylight is short [But during winter the daytime is short where women and girls, especially in rural areas, are not supposed to stay out after sunset].The café net stays open from 8.00 in the morning until 4.00 of the next morning. In Ramadan [The month when Muslims fast], they go to the café net until the sunset when it will close for opening their fast and it opens again after finishing praying [Al Taraweh which is a prayer done in the month of Ramadan and it takes nearly an hour and a half to be completed].

Nagat: **If you were in Libya and you did not come to live in Manchester, would you still have used the internet?**

Amel: Allah knows! [I do not know], but being in Manchester away from my home made me homesick so I used it more. Nadia: After going back to Libya, I will use the internet. We did not know there was internet when we were in Libya before coming here. Mona: When I was in Libya, I did not want to hear anything related to internet.

These examples consist of the women's answers to my questions. This type of style reflects 'asymmetrical' power relations, between me, as the person with the power and status to frame questions, leaving the women a more restricted role as respondents to topics controlled by me (see section 3.8 for more detail).

3.8.2. Dialogue style

The second *Al Lamma* discussion on 15TH February 2008

Participants: 1=Nagat 2=Nafeesa   3=Faheema 4= Nour 5=Aneesa 6= Nadia 7= Norrya (pseudonyms)

I -Do you use the computer or the Internet? 2- I have never used it…I leave it for my children and my husband they are already in conflict. I- When your children go to school you have no excuse…you are afraid from it? 2- My time is for my home…I am always running …I am not lying to you…only if my children had opened it. 7- I never touched it in my life. I-El Hajj [a name used for men who have done their pilgrimage by going to Makkah in Saudi Arabia, and I am referring to the women's husband] is not home and you want to talk to your children [Three of her children are living in Libya] what will you do? [I am speaking to Norrya] 6-You can use it…its useful for you. I- It has solved a problem for you…you must use it…it can be a starting point for you. 2- I wish I could but.

I- Can you switch it on by yourself… do you know how? 2- No I don't know…I wish I could. 3-No my husband didn't teach me how to use it…I learnt by myself…There are a lot of sites. There is a risk. I- If any thing happens I call my son to help me. 7-You have

the language [English] I-No there is no relation here.3-Arabic…there is Arabic.1- I didn't know how to use it in Libya…here I ask my son. If you use it more you wont be afraid from it any more even if you make mistakes noting will happen to it… if I make a mistake it will do no harm to it…use save…I am not getting afraid when something happens. 3- I have courage…The computer is not my possession…when my husband goes to pray for Fajer[a prayer that takes place in the early mornings before dawn]I go on the internet…I wish I can learn English but there are problems…security reasons[the site is not free to access] …I was afraid of it ..I couldn't.

[I am asking another woman] do you use the computer? 4-No my husband is always sitting in front of it. He uses it to talk to Libya and to go to some sites. 3-In Libya there are none. 2-No there are in Libya…in my town there are [a town in Libya which I deleted from this conversation]. 3-In our town [I deleted the name of the town] there are none. A family can go to a café net! The young men will use it to watch football, for … and games. 1-Who told you that, do you have proof? 3-They have shown it on a TV programme. If he is watching football or schooling there are no worries. 1-You can do a block on it and ask them to close these so you are relaxed. 3-No my children are still very young [they know noting about it … and thus do not need a block to our computer].2-My daughter uses it to talk to her friend in Libya.

1-[I am asking another woman] Did you use it when you where in Libya? 5-In the name of Allah [believe me] no.3-We don't have it…70% without internet…the new generation maybe will have it…but not us. Computers are in schools…so what do they give to them? 1-My brother's son is given the same thing…he is fed up…what will he do with it? 6-Here they use it to teach science or maths…they use it during the lesson. 1-Usages make them learn how to use the computers. 3-Children don't need to learn computer programming. 2-My daughter teaches some children how to use computers in that she supports the ones that don't know how to use it when she is in her school. 1-Computers are not the aim for learning like maths but it is a tool.

4- I go to Arabic kitchen and to 'Fatwa' [sites that provide guidance for Muslim people] 3- I want to learn English language but I didn't know how. 1- Are there any sites? 3- Yes, there are sites, not anybody can inter. You must pay for it and give a credit card number. 1- The husband is the one in control. 3-No he encourages me. 4-

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No, it is because of me, I am afraid of it. My husband was working on a site and when he left he didn't save it and I came and switched the computer on the page was lost. I tried to find it but I couldn't so I switched it off. When my husband came, he told me that I have lost the work he has done. 1- The mistake is not yours. He should have told you what to do or saved his work. 4- I am afraid of the computers.

3- A computer for your self. 2- I want somebody to set with me. 1- Is there someone who can help you? 2- How? All the mornings I am busy cleaning, I don't have any time left. 1- You are doing nothing. 2- I don't have any time. 1- It takes only an hour. 2- That is impossible. 1- Do a planning. 2- Now, I tell my children to show me how to enter. 3- No it's better to learn quickly by entering a course; I want an email for myself. 1- For a certificate you have to learn filing data and windows programmes, this is not a profession. 2- My children will teach me.

4- We have a desire but the husband wants to work on it; the period when he is out, he tells you to be careful but if he left it opened, I can't; it's his studies. 1- This is only an excuse. 4- They (my children) are fighting I will add to them! 6- The first year I didn't touch it; they are fighting but found time for my soul [I knew when to be free to do something for myself] after 'Salath Al Fajer'. But they don't teach you because they use the sites that they want. 3- I 'Alhamed Allah' [I thank god for what I have] know it; I know every thing I want an email. 1- Nadia do you have an email? 6- Yes I have.

3- Songs no; cooking; Koran, language. 4- 'Al Fatwa' we were illiterate in religion. 3- I don't have the resources; my resources are limited. 4- Buy used equipment.

In contrast to the question-answer style, the participation seems more equally distributed in these interchanges. The women build on one another's' turns, and do not refer everything back to me.

3.8.3. Thematic style

The third *Al Lamma* discussion on 31ST October 2008

Participants: 1= Nagat   2= Norrya 3= Howdah (pseudonyms)

(Discussing the forth theme: Libyan women use money to buy gold and not for enrolling in courses for IT or English)

1- Women buy gold, use money to take a course in computer, English or Quran [The Holy book for Muslims]…but not for education.

3- I prefer education.

1- But what are the facts when we talked about how Faheema talked about not having the money to enrol on an English course online, and another one said that women have money but they buy gold with it.

3- She buys gold… prefer gold more [Libyan women tend to wear a lot of gold jewellery and teach their daughters from very young age to wear it/buy it].

1- What is the reason?

2- For somebody like me, I can't learn… I don't have any desire to education… I prefer to buy gold.

1- Who told you that you can't?

2- No one, it is from me I don't have any desire.

1- Do you dislike being with other people? Now, with the computer you can learn English, Quran online you can even take a qualification but you only need to learn how to use computer by yourself.

2- I wish that

1- You need to learn how to use the computer so you can do all of this at home.

2- If Allah permits [I hope so] if I learn it, I can use it.

1- Why don't you attend courses then?

2- How? [I don't have my own money]

1- You have been here more than three years, its free, you can.

2- There are other circumstances.

1- There is Learn Direct and there are other courses in May Road.

3- There are courses for English and sewing.

1- Language is not that important.

2- But language is a problem. How can I understand? There must be a language [That

I can understand].

1- Are there translators?

2- No, there are Pakistani ones.

1- They should have Arabians. There are Libyans, Egyptians, Syrians, and Moroccans.

2- Language is problem it distracts and doesn't let you understand.

1- In every place, there are Pakistanis.

2- There should be someone who is Arabic.

1- In the Newspaper there was about an Arabic woman in 'Advice Centre'.

2- I don't know.

1- There is an Arabic community here.

2- We need, as an Arabic community interpreters even in hospitals there are all the languages: Japanese, Pakistan [Urdu]… signs are in all languages except Arabic… there are people who don't know English.

1- Why don't the Libyan doctors in these hospitals talk about it?

2- Why us? Look at us… in Libya, they write things in English.

The forth *Al Lamma* discussion on 21st May 2009

Participants: 1= Nagat 2= Nadia 3=Norrya 4= Faheema 5= Howdah 6= Farah (pseudonyms)

(Discussing the eighth theme: Finance problems when using some sites online)

1-There are finance problems when using the internet. There are sites which ask for money so you can join them. Will you pay any money for these sites?

5- Depending on my financial situation, I have tried to enter to live sites for some sheiks (professionals who teach the correct way of reading and reciting the Quran) which needed a payment of money but I did find alternative sites that are free. .

1- Because there are free sites, why do we have to pay money?

4- You have to do the same thing with Quran sites.

1- If you have found free sites online you would have entered.

5- You wish there was a sheik who corrects your mistakes while you are reading the Quran live online but you have to pay for such sites which I found difficult and expensive.

1- Do you use other sites online?

5- Before, I used to enter cooking sites online but now I only use religious sites or sites for reciting the Quran.

2- There are sites online on the Libyan kitchen.

1- There are sites online for teaching traditional Libyan food and anyone can put their own recipes online.

3- I did not know about these sites.

5- I use the same sites online because reading the Quran is difficult. There are other sites online for teaching the correct pronunciation of letters online but I have not used them yet.

This style shows how I am deliberately leading the women to focus on a particular issue that has emerged from my data. Therefore, I am, again, exerting more power in the interaction, in keeping the others focused on my topic.

3.9. A Reflective commentary on the process

After reading the transcripts of the recordings of the women's discussions, I noticed many important issues relating to the style and structure of the interactions, which will now be considered in this section. Deborah Cameron (2001:172) states that 'focusing on what… [the participants] are doing when analysing what they say, will add value to the data'. This can be done, according to Cameron, by observing styles and patterns of interaction between the participants, as well as by exploring the discourse strategies they use. She describes how women's styles of interaction tend to be co-operative rather than competitive and how there are recurring patterns in the way women talk, for example about femininity or family relations. Cameron identifies three distinct forms of talk: 'spontaneous conversation', 'interactive talk' and 'asymmetrical talk'.

Some key features of asymmetrical talk, such as unequal distribution of speaking,

sequential regularities in talk and argumentative talk on topical subjects (Cameron, 2001: 162), were apparent during the first *Al Lamma* discussion (Question-answer style) and the third *Al Lamma* discussion (Thematic style). At the beginning of our conversation in the third *Al Lamma* gathering, I did not invite the participants to state their views. Instead, I started by presenting the participants' opinions on the ten topics/themes which were picked from analysing previous *Al Lamma* gatherings. As a result, their position as secondary speakers placed them in positions that limited their speech. In terms of the structure of the interaction, it was once again I who had the power, and this resulted in 'asymmetrical talk'. (However, the thematic style which was based on previous opinions, freed other women from the need to defend these opinions). The 'power' and 'control' of the argument was in my hands. Power and control were also in my hands during the first *Al Lamma* discussion (Question-answer style). My status as an academic researcher could also have influenced the patterns of interaction between the participants and me. My identity as a researcher emerged and attacked the participants with various questions in order to get enough data for my research. By contrast, I would argue that the 'spontaneous conversation' and 'interactive talk' styles of interaction were present during the second *Al Lamma* discussion (see the example of 'Dialogue style' above). There was a place for non-confrontational styles of discourse to develop, providing a less constrained space for the participants to express their feelings, opinions, and beliefs.

Second, the existence of power relations among family and relatives during the discussions was very clear, particularly when each woman talked about her own experience of using the internet at home. Weedon (2003) argues that language is a significant place for analysing power, since people use language to represent their subjectivity and thus their own identity. However, power 'is not only multi-functional, but also materializes in many

forms' according to Sadiqui (2003:7) who argues that researchers should consider the 'social' and the 'material' context, within which women's lives are expressed (Sadiqi, 2003:16) (see Chapter 6). In this respect, the power relations that emerged in *Al Lamma* discussions appeared to operate on two different levels: (1) a visible power relations and (2) an invisible power relations. The type of relationship between these women and their family members, including their husbands, influenced a visible level of power relations. For example, one woman talked about how her uncle used his power to stop her father from using the internet to communicate with her while living far away from home in Manchester, and also mentioned how she used to access the internet without letting her husband know about it.

Sara: My uncle refused to take my father to… internet shops so he can talk to us and watch us alive… but they didn't agree to that…now he only uses the phone to talk to us. For me, my daughters are not allowed to use the internet…My husband is afraid of any virus… and the laptop is not comfortable …children are not allowed to use it. Nagat: But you use the internet to play games and listen to music.
Sara: Yes, my husband doesn't know about that… I use it secretly…
(First Al Lamma gathering on 8th July 2005)

An invisible level of power relations relates to the degree of autonomy that each speaker has to shape the content and the process of speech. Barbour and Schostak (2005: 42) define it as 'the power of structures that are the context to the exchange taking place between interviewer and interviewee or within the focus group'. Considering this statement I will explore my own role in shaping and limiting these women's discussions, how using my own questions and opening the discussions with a short talk about the topic, dictated the way the conversation was likely to proceed. I made it clear to them that they were free to talk when they wanted to, and that we all had the same right to interrupt the conversation

as we normally did when we have our other social meetings together. However, by simply saying these words I positioned myself as having the power to decide and determine how the discussion would proceed. Thus the scenario in our usual social meetings as Libyan women had been disturbed by my own acts of controlling the discussion and taking on a leadership role. However, interestingly my position of control was occasionally distracted by the other women's speech.

Moreover, even if I share a great deal culturally with my participants, achieving a 'critical distance' proved difficult. In this respect, I may have become, in some ways, 'different' from the women participants, because of my double 'identity' as friend and as academic researcher (Abu-Lughod, 1992; Visweswaran, 1994; and Chaudry, 1997). These differences are, as I have suggested, reflected in the structure of the group interactions.

To show the complexity of positioning myself as a researcher and at the same time as a participant, I will recount some of my experiences of coming with my family to Manchester in 2000, to pursue my Masters studies. My first contact with the women who would become the participants in the present research, took place during women's social gatherings and casual meetings in local shops, or in schools. Subsequently my interaction with them developed into friendship and we met together during *Al Lamma* gatherings to celebrate *Eid*, newborns, graduations, and *Hajj* or to provide support during bereavements and illnesses. In Ramadan, our social interactions as a group of Muslim women took a spiritual dimension when we practiced our prayers in the *Masjid* (mosque). The greatest advantage of my relationship with my participants as a researcher, is that I did not intend explicitly or implicitly to describe them in relation to a Western society, and therefore avoided exerting what Robinson (1994: 208) describes as 'a measure of control over the

nature and activities of this other by relocating him/her in Western, Liberal values'. Instead, I focused my explorations on Libyan women's domestic spaces in North Manchester, and thus chose *Al Lamma* social gatherings as a space for my research where participants might interact and express their identities more freely.

Eventually, after settling into the role of an 'insider' researcher, I started to calm down and become a better listener who enjoyed talking to these Libyan women and who had things in common with them, which assisted my observations during these discussions (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999; Barbour and Schostak, 2005). This calming mode helped me to feel the existence of *'silence'* in my sitting room during the *Al Lamma* gatherings. This silence was embodied in a few women who I thought did not say anything during *Al Lamma* gatherings. Mazzei (2009) argues that we, as researchers, choose 'voices' that can be 'named, categorized, translated, understood and interpreted' instead of looking for the 'silent voices', which 'speak beyond the limit of our knowing' (Mazzei, 2009: 48-49). Nevertheless, to my surprise, I found that there *was* a little trace of the voices of women whom I had thought were silent, when I listened to the recordings of the *Al Lamma* discussions. As a participant observer, I had not noticed the presence of their brief remarks in the room. On occasion these women's presence was only apparent through recording their attendance. The important question to be asked in this respect is how voice is enacted and presented by participants in the field so that silent voices become readable in the context of a performance (Mazzei, 2009: 53).This silence is something that the other participants sometimes played a part in creating. For instance, the transcript of the first *Al Lamma* discussion made a voiced woman voiceless when other women started to talk about her as being an illiterate computer person after she left the meeting before it had finished. The voice of this woman was therefore broken by the voices of the other, non-

silenced women. At the same time, this woman had been silenced by the presence and power of the other women. This presence and power of these women's voices became even more definite as discussions came to their end, to the point that the presence of other voices disappeared. In this respect, feminist researchers may learn from voiced and voiceless women (Visweswaran, 1994).

3.10. Sociable but also researchable: implications for my research

Although the norms of *Al Lamma* gatherings changed when these women came to live in Manchester, they came to the *Al Lamma* gatherings I hosted because they belong to a strong extended community. Added to that was the trust that had been built between us, so I found no difficulty in engaging with them and inviting women to talk about their computer experiences, and then using the discussions during these gatherings as evidence for my research. In this respect, my gatherings were not only sociable but also researchable. Nevertheless, the two main questions that I constantly (and often unintentionally) asked myself were; whether sociable activities like *Al Lamma* gatherings can become researchable without changing their real cultural essence, and how self reflective methodology can assist the reading of women's identity through translated transcripts. While there is no simple direct answer to these questions, the following sections will explore these issues further.

The Libyan women, who were participants at the *Al Lamma* gatherings, came from different parts of Libya and thus provided for my research, a diversity of backgrounds and experiences that enriched my data. I focused specifically on the gathering, as a space where Libyan women came together to enact certain aspects of their home culture, rather than focusing in detail on the differences between them. Nevertheless, I must make it clear that

one thing that united these Libyan women was that they had come to North Manchester because their husbands were studying or had found work there. Hence, they were already an uncharacteristic group compared to equivalent settings in Libya. Moreover, *Al Lamma* gatherings consisted of individual women who, although they attended irregularly and so the group changed consistently, were similar to one another in terms of gender, ethnicity, religion and nationality. They gave me the chance to use these group gatherings differently, as a research method. My focus was not only on these women as individuals but also on the whole gatherings as social activities, which might assist me to understand specific practices experienced by the Libyan women community. Moreover, the biographical similarities between these Libyan women and myself was something that I felt was likely to assist my exploration and data analysis (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000).

In addition, these women, who have similar values and beliefs, came together with different attitudes that may have affected their participation and interaction in the group during *Al Lamma* gatherings. The separation of these women's connection with their home country may have influenced their lives in North Manchester, and may have been reflected in their interaction and performance during the *Al Lamma* gatherings. As a result, the collaborative research with these groups of women, (who came together to support each other and to learn from participating in *Al Lamma* gatherings), links to ethnographic studies of place and space, together with studies on migration. For example, the representations in their accounts of internet use provided some significant information regarding what led them to use the internet in the ways they did while living in Manchester (see Chapter 5).

Finally, these gatherings helped these Libyan women, (of which I as the researcher was

one), represent their group identity as Muslim, Libyan, mothers, wives, teachers, women, etc., in a more explicit way, which I analysed by applying self reflective methodology (Oakley, 1981 and 1984). Hollway and Jefferson (2000) state that interviewers deploying their own subjectivity to assist their analysis can guard against misguided interpretations and assist with the good ones. According to them, researchers need to take into account the following four core questions associated with analysing any qualitative data when doing their research:

- What do we notice?

- Why do we notice what we notice?

- How can we interpret what we notice?

- How can we know that our interpretation is the 'right' one?

These questions make it clear that there are problems with fragmenting qualitative data and analysing/ reading this data, because these activities are affected by our own 'subjective experiences'. In particular I would argue that the language of agency and identity and thus our translations and interpretations affect the analysis/reading of qualitative data. For example, during *Al Lamma* gatherings in North Manchester Libyan women used their language of agency and identity to discuss their everyday experiences with home computing and to tell personal stories about themselves and their families. In this respect, as Field et al (2005) state, analysing peoples' stories with narrative analysis involves exploring sense of self and sense of agency by asking questions such as:

- What people say about identity?

- How they say it?

- Why they say it?

These questions provide a reflexive dimension for analysing discussions spoken in another mother tongue language (Libyan dialect, Arabic), and then presenting them as transcripts translated into a foreign language (written English). This process allows researchers to present and thus translate their data and analysis into a non-mother tongue language without forgetting the cultural aspects involved in colouring these presentations or interpretations. In other words, applying translation as an act that mediates cultures (Katan, 2004). In this respect, the women's discussions from *Al Lamma* gatherings provided some valuable stories that were not taken only at face value, but were explored as texts that were socially constructed (Atkinson, 1997; Barbour, 2005).

3.11. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the importance and the implications of using *Al Lamma* gatherings as a group method for collecting qualitative data for my research. I outlined the ways in which I implemented existing social practices, like women's *Al Lamma* gatherings, to reflect on my own practice. I argue that the women's *Al Lamma* gatherings, embedded in the Libyan community, were more practical and sensitive for me to research, and thus helped me build a distinctive methodological framework. I discussed the ways in which being a Muslim Libyan immigrant woman and a feminist researcher, assisted my readings of Muslim Libyan immigrant women's experiences. These experiences had their own distinctive cultural and traditional features, which prevented me from researching Libyan men spaces. However, I was able to access some of the men's activities within the women's domestic space through their wives' accounts, as research participants.

I have described how my research attends to gender and space in these women's everyday practices. I have explored my own position as an 'insider' who had a doubled identity persona as a Muslim immigrant Libyan woman, and as an academic professional researcher. After highlighting some of the main advantages and disadvantages of researching my own community, I have discussed in more detail one of the main challenges I encountered when collecting and analysing women's discussions during *Al Lamma* gatherings; namely issues of translation and the role of the translator as mediator.

Finally, I clarified how I generated and then analysed *Al Lamma* discussions by focusing on the nature of the women's talk and the different styles of interaction. This form of analysis allowed me to demonstrate how different themes began to emerge from *Al Lamma* discussions. In the next chapter, I explore how these Libyan women used computers and the internet in their homes despite, in some cases, having limited or initially no knowledge at all regarding computer usage. I will illustrate how informal learning practiced by Libyan women helped them to use home computing for varied reasons and which particular sites they accessed, arguing that these practices were significant in developing their identity as Muslim women living in North Manchester.

CHAPTER 4 COMPUTER LITERACIES

4.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to investigate how Libyan women living in Manchester communicated via the internet with others from their communities, in the UK and in Libya. At the same time, I explore this use of computers and the internet as a new literacy practice with particular significance for marginalised groups. In addition, I discuss literacy practices as an important way in which communities define themselves.

I will show how these immigrant Libyan women incorporated new technologies such as the internet into their everyday activities, and discuss the implications for the development of their social relationships and identities as members of online communities.

Also investigated is the different ways in which relationships based on unequal power shaped the different uses of computer literacy. My focus will be on how gender relations in these women's families affected and were affected by home computing and internet use. In doing this I reflect on feminist principles in relation to the analysis of power relationships in Libyan and United Kingdom society (e.g. family structures, culture, patriarchy) and the internal and external constraints that these impose.

Furthermore I discuss the notion of informal learning in relation to computer use as a home activity by the women participants and their family members. I explore family learning as another way in which these women learned how to use computers with the support of their children and husbands. Practices of self learning and making self manuals for using

computers will be described as learning strategies that most participants, including myself, developed to be able to access the internet from their homes.

In the first section, I investigate the different computer related emotions that the participants expressed in their domestic space. Their accounts of emotions ranged from feelings of 'fear', feeling 'jealous', feeling 'guilty', to feelings of 'equality ' and being 'powerful'.

Following this, I analyse the relationship between computer literacy practices and gender relations in the participants' families. I particularly look into how gender relations affected the computer use of my participants. At the same time, I show how gender relations in these participants' families were affected by computer and internet use in different ways.

I also examine the different English terms that these women used when discussing their computer literacy practices. I refer to how computer use as a home activity revealed the way these women adapted some English words or phrases into their everyday language. I also describe how women who were computer illiterate at the start of this study used technological English words in their speech.

Finally, I review my participants' views on computer use from two different perspectives; as professionals and as housewives. I show how computer use as a home activity uncovered the differences and similarities between the professionals' and the housewives' computer literacy skills and knowledge.

4.2. Computer literacy as a family literacy

Communication was an important social daily activity, practiced by the participants who lived far away from their home country, and was used in order to relate to others from their community. It appeared that the experience of being immigrant women in an unfamiliar society helped them to develop a new skill - computer literacy - in order to communicate with friends at home in Libya and also with one another in Manchester. The precise nature and significance of these communications has not however, been researched in this context until now.

Research into community literacies has shown how literacy practices are important in maintaining links amongst members of communities. This study drew on such community literacy research, technology and computer research, and communication research, as well as feminist research on science and technology, in order to understand how home computing developed into a new form of community literacy amongst the expatriate Libyan women. Barton and Hamilton's research (1998) has shown that participation in groups can involve literacy practices which bind communities together. In their research, for example, they found that adults who have problems with reading and writing engaged in different sorts of literacy activities, from making networks of support, to knowing who to ask for help such as close family members or friends. Lankshear (1997) has suggested that internet communication is becoming a significant tool for empowering marginalised or dissident groups. Likewise, Wajcman (2004) has explored how the 'technoscientific culture' of our own environment influences our own subjectivity. Walther (1996:33) even suggests that Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) may extend the kind of communication available to us and also facilitates our choices of communication via technology.

Another area for exploration is what needs this new practice fulfils. Computers appear to present new opportunities for providing access to new technologies, and to a dispersed community of women. The internet and cyberspace are creating new forms of technical and social transformations, such as electronic networks that bring people closer from all over the globe (Castells, 1996; Negroponte, 1995). Moreover, Rheingold (1994) has explained how virtual communities use informal public space to socially connect and communicate with other people in cyberspace, because these elements of connectivity and community have been lost in their real world (Chayko, 2002 and 2008). This helps to explain why my participants used the internet to connect and communicate with their family members who live far away in Libya. However, this virtual interaction did not stop them from keeping and developing their face-to-face interaction during their informal social gatherings with other women. As a result, they built new friendships with other women who belong to their collective Muslim community, and thus re-formed (renewed and remade) webs of connectivity and community in real space. I would argue that the internet and the connectivity and community of cyberspace, dose not replace stable pre-existing social communication but rather it can accompany it, especially for immigrant women who live far away from their families and homes.

Barton and Hamilton (1998) suggest the internet and cyberspace may offer women greater freedom, flexibility and choice in that they are not forced to read or accept what they get online. In this respect, Castells (1996:46-47) has described how internet culture is based on the freedom to create knowledge and then to distribute this knowledge to whoever one wants, resulting in 'horizontal communications' and 'global free speech online'. However, there are spatial boundaries and a 'digital divide' in the access to and use of internet that

can stop different individuals, groups and even whole communities from experiencing the freedom of internet use (Wajcman, 2005:61). For example, the participants in my research discussed how they encountered some difficulties when accessing the internet due to their limited English and computer skills, or lack of financial recourses. Furthermore, their husbands' control of computer use, in addition to their children's constant fighting over the computer, reduced the participants' freedom to access the internet whenever they needed it. As a result, computer control and computer conflict in the participants' homes was mentioned and discussed during each of the *Al Lamma* gatherings. Examples from my field notes and *Al Lamma* discussions include the following:

The one who sits more controls it and controls web sites like when one said that she couldn't sign for an English course because she needed a credit card, and when another one said that she never used the computer because her husband is always sitting in front of it or her children will be using it. Even women from the first group gathering said that their husbands stopped their children from using it by saying 'no' to them 'a virus will enter it'. Is the husband controlling the computer or the house?
(Field notes, 5 March 2008)

Nagat: Reading our previous discussions, I found out that the husband or the father is the one who controls the computer.
Norrya: Because he brought the computer for his studies and in it there is his work but sometimes even the children did that.
Nagat: I mean he is the one who switches the computer on/off, and chooses which web sites to be accessed by everyone in the house.
Howdah: For me ... [her husband's name] uses the computer in the university most of the time. I use it more especially after attending the Quran course. When I sit near it my children don't ask me to leave it for them.
(Third Al Lamma discussion on 31st October 2008)

In addition, the internet provided a space for information exchange that women accessed and then forwarded to other women online or during their social gatherings. For example, during one *Al Lamma* gathering, a participant explained how she used a medical website to help her choose the preferred sex of her baby by following a specific diet during her pregnancy. Participants forwarded e-mails to each other in order to share information, especially during political crisis or religious events such as *Ramadan* and *Eid*. Finch (2003:80) describes 'electronic readers as information processors' who scan different kinds of 'multi-media texts' (pictures, words, and sound), that help them to become free from 'the fixity of conventional texts'. This idea of moving from conventional texts to multi-media texts appeared to be one of the reasons that encouraged the *Al Lamma* gatherings' participants of this study to look for information on the web. They were able to access information written in their own mother tongue, Arabic, when they wanted, and in the convenience of their own homes. Moreover, these women, as mothers, were able to see, talk and interact with their other children and family members online whenever they needed, as described in more detail in Chapter 5.

The participants' computer use involved reading different texts and articles either in English or Arabic. These texts included Islamic advice notes (*fatwa*), verses from the Quran, e-mails, cooking recipes, and catalogues. Abel (1993) argues that reading involves not only cognitive apprehension but is also socially grounded in the context of readers' lives. There is an effective involvement with active responses from the reader to the text. Reading also expands the possibility of dialogue about and across boundaries. This was apparent with the women's access to religious websites, as well as to games and music sites. For example, with the access to religious sites the participants were able to develop their Islamic knowledge from their homes in Manchester by practicing literary activities

such as reciting the Quran online, searching for Islamic information and news, or communicating with other Muslim women.

Feminist critics (e.g. Radway, 1984; Jacobus, 1986; and Abel, 1993) suggest that women's experiences of reading, and their reading practices, differ from those of men. As a result, women may find it difficult to identify with texts directed predominantly at male readers. Yet reading has also, historically, been important to women's sense of individuality, such as reading novels which have been described as within a 'female' genre (Juliet Mitchell, 1966). When these Libyan women started reading texts online, they encountered difficulties in relating to these texts because they were directed at English-speaking readers. They talked about how difficult it was for them to even start going online when every word is presented in English. However, a range of solutions were offered during *Al Lamma* gatherings such as changing the language of the computer into Arabic, searching the internet using the English alphabet as alliterations to Arabic words, or using Arabic keyboards. In the following section, I explore further the issue of computer literacy in the homes of my participants in North Manchester.

4.3. The computer as a domestic tool

Computer literacy was used in a distinct social context in the homes of these Libyan women, with its own cultural characteristics. This is what one might expect, given Jacobus' (1986) argument that reading always takes place within a situated context, and moreover, one that can never be univocal or fully represented. The women in this study referred to different types of computer uses within a range of contexts (Baynham, 1995) which included; home, school and work.

Material life and material changes such as the availability of computers, plus access to the internet from home for Libyan women living in Manchester, were significant in helping them to start home computing, (internet access was limited in Libya due to sanctions after the Lockerby bombing). Such material changes were also influenced by the market economy that these women experienced when they came to live in North Manchester. Computers were cheaper in Manchester than in Libya and they were essential for their husbands who were studying in Manchester. Hynes (2004) describes two kinds of resources that relate to women's use of ICT. First, there are material resources that include access to hardware, skills and knowledge of ICT. Second, there are symbolic resources that involve women's motivation, interests, reasons and the significance of ICT for their everyday practices. In addition to the material resources therefore, the focus also had to be on finding what these Libyan women wanted to do with computers; what were the uses and functions that made the computer or the internet significant to them.

4.4. Online community

The Libyan women who participated in this study reported that internet communication had some special features such as being cheap, practical and private, and that these made internet communication more usable and useful than the telephone. As a result, these women used the internet to communicate with their family members and friends abroad. There seemed to be many social, personal and family interactions happening during these internet communications. For example, the use of the internet by members of these women's families meant that the cooperation, support and discussions between them while they were using the internet, helped some women start using the internet independently. Also, it was clear that while the women's actions were more concerned with family circumstances and relations, their children were more occupied with their friends. In other

words, the women employed internet communication as a home activity to fulfil their social needs for family relationships with relatives, whereas their children focused on friendship (see Chapter 5).

The participants talked about the different informational and educational benefits they gained from internet use. These benefits included support with school homework, language learning, the acquisition of knowledge, and studying at home. For example, the internet gave these mothers the opportunity to enhance their own interests while being at home with their families.

> *Nadia: The information you get from the internet plus your own together form a nice frame for your own picture of your own knowledge and ideas. My interests are in sewing so I use the internet to look at catalogues on new sewing machines that are very easy to find.*
> *(First Al Lamma discussion on 8th July 2005)*

The mothers also mentioned that they had to learn English in order for them to be able to access the internet and take computer courses. Their children actually preferred searching for information on the internet rather than going to get it from books in a library. In addition, whereas some mothers focused all their efforts into becoming computer literate, their children were more worried about technical problems that accrued during their search for certain web sites. Of course this was in large part due to the fact that these children had become members of the computer literate generation or community since arriving in Manchester. However, living in Manchester for a long period offered a good chance for these mothers to start using computers and for children to improve their computer skills.

Forsyth, (2006:455) argues that physical distance has little impact on 'remote groups' (i.e.

groups established through online activity), although individuals communicating via computers respond differently when their interface includes facial information as well as verbal information. Members of a 'remote group' are physically separated within a 'remote zone'; this a personal space where online groups meet with lower levels of social presence. However they are able to communicate with each other verbally, (facial and other behavioural and nonverbal cues being unavailable), through activities such as telephone calls and electronic discussions (Hall's (1966) taxonomy of interpersonal zones). In this respect, I argue that the Libyan community, who live in North Manchester as immigrants and who communicate with their families and friends back home, might be looked at as a 'remote group', but whose physical proximity helped them transfer their 'remote zone' into a central one . In addition, culture influences how people interact in a 'remote zone', because people with different cultural backgrounds vary in how much emotion, personal information, and responsiveness to others they express when communicating via the internet (Reeder, et al 2004).

For my participants emotions were frequently expressed. During *Al Lamma* discussions, the women described how much their feelings of being homesick were reduced and how they felt relaxed and less stressed, just from talking and watching other family members online. This connection with home was facilitated by the availability of the internet in their homes, even with their husbands' control over computer and internet use.

Nagat: What is the benefit that you get from using online communication with your family in Libya?
Norrya: It has sound and picture. I felt relaxed because a problem was solved. I can be more assured about them there. You have to use it. Now I can't stop using it. You feel less stressed after using it. I can see them but they can't because the camera in our computer is not working but that doesn't matter as long as I can see them. We started

sending mobile photos to them by the net.

(Third Al Lamma discussion on 31st October 2008)

 The participants talked about different computer functions that they or their children used computers in their homes for. These functions included: reciting the Quran, looking for answers and explanations related to Islamic practices (Islamic *fatwa*), free calls with family in Libya, watching family members live online, sending/receiving photos online, sending/receiving e-mails, practicing computer typing, exploring Arabic cooking, chatting on the net, learning English, playing games, studying/revising school work, and watching football. Computer use by the children is described in more detail in Chapter 5, (see also Facer, et al 2003; Holloway and Valentine, 2003; and Wakerdine, 2007).

The participants also talked about the constraints that hindered or stopped their desire to use computers and the internet at home. These constraints were sorted into themes using grounded theory analysis (Strauss and Gorbin, 1998) as demonstrated in the following diagram (See Diagram: 1, below). Each of these themes collects together significant difficulties or barriers to computer use that were discussed by the participants during *Al Lamma* gatherings.

Diagram: 1

CONSTRAINTS

ICT skills	Power & Conflict	Psychological issues
Language	Time	Religion
Finance	Protection	Moral & values

Similar constraints and barriers to computer use have been identified in various studies on different ethnic groups with access to computers in their own community (Haddson, 1992; Fairlie, 2007; and Kontos, et al 2007). However, the participants in this study developed their own particular strategies for coping with these barriers, either by removing these constraints or by conceding to them. For example, the participants talked about how difficult it was for them to start switching on/off the computer, control the mouse, and understand English words on screen, sign up for an e-mail, or pay to access a website.

Faheema: Yes there are sites, not anybody can enter. You must pay for it and give a credit card number.

Nafeesa: I want somebody to sit with me... All the mornings I am busy cleaning. I don't have any time left.

Nagat: It takes only an hour.

Nafeesa: That is impossible!

Nagat: Do a planning.

Nafeesa: Now I tell my children to show me how to enter.

Faheema: No, it's better to learn quickly by entering a course. I want an email for myself.

Nafeesa: My children will teach me.

(Second Al Lamma discussion on 15th February 2008)

The social support between these women was an important factor for stimulating interest in the use of computers and the internet in the face of such constraints. For example, Nafeesa started going online to talk to her family in Libya using video calls. Providing support to each other during *Al Lamma* discussions helped them understand how to use the internet (Katz and Aspden, 1997), and thus get motivated to start going online independently. However, there were also psychological barriers which were mentioned by the women participants, such as 'fear', 'relevance' and 'self-concept' that weakened their motivation for learning computer skills (Stanley, 2003; Jones and O'shea, 2006).

Nour: No, it is because of me. I am afraid of it [computer and internet]. My husband was working on a site and when he left he didn't save it and I came and switched the computer on, the page was lost. I tried to find it but I couldn't so I switched it off. When my husband came, he told me that I have lost the work he has done.

Nagat: The mistake is not yours. He should have told you what to do or saved his work.

Nour: I am afraid of the computers.

(Second Al Lamma discussion on 15th February 2008)

Norrya: For somebody like me, I can't learn... I don't have desire for education.

Nagat: Now, with the computer you can learn English, Quran on line you can even take a qualification but you only need to learn how to use computer by yourself.

Norrya: I wish that.

(Third Al Lamma discussion on 31st October 2008)

Nadia: After going back to Libya, I will use the internet. We didn't know there was internet when we were in Libya before coming here [Manchester, United Kingdom].

Mona: When I was in Libya, I didn't want to hear anything related to the internet.

(First Al Lamma discussion on 8th July 2005)

In addition, power and conflict were present in the participants' discourse, as family barriers to computer literacy. They talked about different strategies that they, their children or their husbands took in order to access and use the internet. As a result, a new type of conflict related to home computing was experienced by their family members.

Nafeesa: I have never used it. I leave it for my children and my husband, they are already in conflict.

Nour: We have a desire but the husband wants to work on it. The period when he is out, he tells you to be careful. But if he left it opened, I can't. It's his studies. They [her children] are fighting. I will add to them.

Nadia: The first year I didn't touch it. They are fighting but found for my spirit a time

[found time for myself to use it].
(Second Al Lamma discussion on 15th February 2008)

In all, the Libyan women who participated in this study used the internet for communicational, social, religious, educational, and entertainment reasons. These different interactions with home computing appeared to make the women's feelings of homesickness disappear gradually. In addition, home computing helped them transfer information, learn English, recite the Quran, use video calls, and play games online. They did all of these activities online, even when they encountered some difficulties related to using computers in their homes. Finally, these participants' actions had some important implications relating to the barriers to computer use, and that helped them to transform themselves into computer literate women, developing informal styles for learning computer skills. The following section explores the different informal learning styles that the women applied to start using computers from their homes.

4.5. Informal learning styles

Informal learning is a return to the natural way people learn: through conversations with one another, trying things out, and listening to stories. Learning is how people adapt to changing conditions, and things are changing faster than ever before. (Cross, 2006:12)

The participants in this study learned how to use computers and the internet through family support (children and husbands), self learning (e.g. from manuals), social learning and learning conversations. They, as immigrant women, learned and interacted in non-educational contexts such as informal circumstances in their homes and during social

gatherings (Foley, 1999; and Cross, 2006). Mcitra and Shan (2007) suggest that immigrant women should come together, exchange information, and learn from each other if they want to develop their working skills. My participants used *Al Lamma* gatherings as a learning environment. Their interaction during these gatherings helped them learn from each others' stories related to using computers or accessing the internet at home. They transformed their group gatherings into a supportive and collaborative learning space, giving each other informal support and encouragement to start using computers and the internet. For example, a range of different solutions were reported when the participants discussed problems of finding time for using computers which were mostly used by their husbands or children. Their ideas ranged from using the computer when their husbands went to the *Masjid* for early morning prayers, while their children were still asleep, to switching the computer on when their children were in school and their husbands were at the university.

Faheema: I have courage...The computer is not my possession...when my husband goes to pray for Fajer [a prayer that takes place in the early mornings before dawn] I enter the internet...
(Second Al Lamma discussion on 15th February 2008)

Nadia: the first year, I didn't touch it, they are fighting but I found for my spirit [for myself] a time after 'Salath Al Fajer'. But they [her children] don't teach you because they use the sites that they want.
(Second Al Lamma discussion on 15th February 2008)

Howdah: In the name of Allah [believe me] I use it in the mornings when they [her children] are in school or before Al Mogreb [a prayer that takes place before sunset]. My husband uses the computer in the university from Al Asar until Al Eshah [times of praying from late afternoon until night].
(Third Al Lamma discussion on 31st October 2008)

Another problem that some of the participants expressed during *Al Lamma* gatherings, was their limited computer skills and knowledge that stopped them from using computers, and which resulted in low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence regarding the use of computers (Faulkner, 2004). However, the women participants shared different strategies that they took either individually or collectively to develop their computer skills. In the following example, the group offers a variety of suggestions to Norrya:

Nagat: You need to learn how to use the computer so you can do all of this at home.
Norrya: If Allah permits [I hope so]. If I learn it, I can use it."
Nagat: Why don't you attend courses then?
Norrya: How? [I don't have my own money]
Nagat: You have been here more than three years, its free, you can.
Norrya: But language is a problem. How can I understand? There must be a language [that I can understand].
Howdah: Change the language to Arabic.
 Norrya: It's difficult to control the mouse.
Nagat: Don't stop trying. It's like sewing skills.
Howdah: At the beginning I made a step by step manual.
(Third Al Lamma discussion on 31st October)

The participants also mentioned how some of them used formal contexts such as courses, schools, and the media to develop their computer skills. Therefore, formal and informal learning of computer skills assisted the participants' adaptation to a new environment that included computers and the internet. However, as noted above, they also had to overcome different kinds of feelings relating to home computing and internet use. These are discussed further in the next section.

4.6. Computer related emotions

During *Al Lamma* discussions, 'fear' was one of the main obstacles to using computers and the internet described by the participants. Using computers made some of them feel 'afraid', 'worried' and even 'horror-stricken'. Fear was a feeling that they got from just touching the computer itself. Hynes (2004) describes the range of different types of feelings that women may experience when using computers, from being terrified, scared, afraid, and worried, to feeling relaxed or easier because of anonymity.

For my participants, the first type of 'fear' arose from a technological object, which these participants were aware had highly sophisticated features. Some of the women participants initially treated the computer as a mysterious object that needed special skills and knowledge in order to use and eventually master it. Their feelings of fear appeared if they interacted with the computer or used the internet, including around issues such as; switching on/off the computer, controlling the mouse, moving from one page to another without losing it, saving work, signing in with websites, reading words presented in English, virus attacks, and many more concerns besides.

Norrya: I still haven't got the courage to try to open it. I have tried with the children's help but controlling the mouse is difficult. It needs practice and courage. Switching it on is easy but switching it off is hard because it is difficult to control the mouse. You become afraid from this.
(Third Al Lamma discussion on 31st October 2008)

Mona: For me the internet was a ghoul [a mythic creature like a monster that digs graves and lives on dead bodies], a horror for me...
(First Al Lamma discussion on 8th July 2005)

The second type of 'fear' was related to gender and power relationships in these participants' families, as discussed later in this chapter. They talked about 'fear' of home computing, but at the same time they were pointing indirectly to 'fear' of their husbands who were the owners and controllers of these computers. For example, one of the participants described how she became afraid of the internet when she wanted to sign up for an online English course. At the beginning, I and the other participants thought that the problem was a technical one, so we offered our support to help her resolve this problem and overcome her 'fear'. However, that was not the case. Later on, during our discussion, the participants started talking about the same problem of signing in for online sites when the same woman spoke again. She revealed to us that her 'fear' was from using her husband's credit card in order to sign in for the English course. She said that being a housewife made her personal finances limited (provided only by her husband), which stopped her from purchasing her own PC. This 'fear' arose from this woman's inability to tell her husband that she needed his credit card. However, I think that her 'fear' was also related to her inability to use her husband's credit card without him noticing what she had spent his money on. In other words, if she had been able to sign up for an online course for English without using a credit card, she would have done so without any 'fear' from the computer or her husband.

Nour: You can't touch anything at any time.
Nadia: Because he [the husband] is still at home.
Nour: This lady [Aneesa] her husband leaves from morning until night."
Nadia: That's correct; you have more chance [to use the computer].
Nagat: Or your children are still young.
Nadia: You can send e-mails. It costs you noting
Faheema: You can call free.
(Second Al Lamma discussion on 15th February 2008)

The other feeling that these women mentioned during *Al Lamma* discussions was being 'jealous' of the computer or the laptop, as well as of their husbands for using computers and surfing the web. For example, they talked about how the computer as an object was located in their own domestic space such as the sitting room or their bedrooms. Some felt that this intelligent machine was invading their private space with the permission of their husbands. They felt jealous about an intelligent object as if it was another person living in their homes. One woman even called a portable computer that her husband was holding with his arms while relaxing on their bed, a second wife.

> *Amel: My husband is afraid of any viruses and the lap top is not comfortable, my husband said, and my children are not allowed to use it... My husband takes it with him to bed. It is like he is holding another wife.*
> *(First Al Lamma discussion on 8th July 2005)*

Amel's husband's concerns about viruses from using the internet led her to go online secretly. She talked about going online when her husband and her children were not present. Her resistance to her husband's actions meant that she positioned herself at the same level as her husband – that is, if he could use the internet, she could too.

Nevertheless, their use of computers and the internet from home also caused some women to feel a sense of guilt that they were sitting in front of the computer instead of doing other things for their family members. One woman even described her act of staying a long time online as something harmful that could have psychological effects on women.

> *Nour: Psychologically it will be harmful. I am still feeling guilty when I notice the long time I was sitting [in front of the computer].*
> *(Second Al Lamma discussion on 15th February 2008)*

Finally, the women's interaction with computers and the internet in their homes revealed how these women started to build new identities and new ideas that could be described as feminist but, at the same time, kept their own distinctive collective identities as Muslim Libyan mothers.

Faheema: There should be a personal computer for the woman to use it only. She will be able to use it more and no one else will control her.
(Second Al Lamma discussion on 15th February 2008)

Nadia: I have an e-mail and I go a lot to women's sites which are wide-ranging and religious ones like Ahal Al Deker where you can ask an Imam any questions that can be answered and explained.
(First Al Lamma discussion on 8th July 2005)

Howdah: I was influenced by the course on learning and reciting the Holy book of Quran. I entered a new discipline that I was unaware of and told myself how I have missed all of these things so I used the computer to support me recite and learn the Quran. Before I used to go to sites for cooking but now I will not access any other site until I finish the whole Quran Insha Allah [I hope and I want to do that].
(Third Al Lamma discussion on 31st October 2008)

These comments show how the women concerned were enhancing their own skills and developing new interests, within a framework which continued to acknowledge religious and cultural beliefs.

The impact of internet use on these women's sensitivity towards feminism was clearly referred to during their *Al Lamma* discussions. Some of them expressed the way their feelings of being worthless were changed to feelings of equality and respect after they started using the internet from their homes. Internet use allowed them to find out that as

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Muslim women they were finally being looked at as being valuable women inside and outside their own community.

> *Nagat: As a conservative Muslim woman and with the existence of Libyan custom, you can still learn by using e-learning.*
> *Nadia: You can also work online from home, and after retirement you can start a family work from home using the internet.*
> *(Second Al Lamma discussion on 15th February 2008)*

This brings to the surface the possibility of these women feeling depressed at this situation and as a consequence of that, stopping their use of the internet at home, or alternatively, feeling deserving and thus able to encourage other Libyan women to access the internet. In the following section, the main uses of computers and the internet at home and their effect on the computer literacy of the women who participated in this study, will be discussed.

4.7. Main users of home computing

Harris (1999) states that girls are disadvantaged in terms of access to computers at home, and boys are more likely to have their own computer, or to be the main user of a shared computer. Furthermore, Libyan cultural traditions regard males as superior to females, and as a result the participants' sons were generally allowed to use computers more than their daughters. At the same time, the participants mentioned how they preferred their sons to be online, inside their homes, instead of not online and using their leisure time outside the home.

Moreover, while the participants reported a range of different power relationships among siblings, they still referred to males as having the power in these interactions. One woman

who focused more on her son had noticed and accepted that he had the right to use the computer more than her or her daughters. On the other hand, other women felt concerned or were uncomfortable at this. Such feelings might have been related to their belief that sons and daughters should occupy the same position, as equal siblings of the same family, even when they were aware of negative uses related to computers such as access to forbidden sites or meeting strangers online.

These women's reactions were, I would argue, influenced less by western feminist notions than by feminism from an Islamic perspective. As Muslim women, they might be less concerned with the existence of social differences between sons and daughters, because males (fathers, sons, brothers, uncles or grandfathers) have the responsibility to protect and guard females within their families. Rather than as a critique of this situation, their responses revealed the women's high resistance to being subservient to the power of their husbands. In addition, the women's reactions towards their husband's power, in general was not visible, since as Libyan Muslim women they accepted that they should follow and obey their husbands without any resistance. These actions reflected women's consciousness relating to power relationships in their own society, which stopped them from making any immediate efforts to change these situations in their family. This was clear when one woman said:

Nour: I have the desire to use it but my husband wants to work on it and when he goes out he tells you to be careful with the computer and if he leaves the computer on you can't because of his studies.
(Second Al Lamma discussion on 15th February 2008)

However, these women's actions showed the possibility of changing their thoughts regarding power relationships in their families in North Manchester. As a result, they

attempted to gain more access to home computing without directly questioning their positions as Muslim females, and without engaging in an overt challenge to male power. Furthermore, they were in a position to become computer literate with invisible resistance to power relations within their families. Pohl (1997:190) suggests that when women use the internet they either adapt to male values or develop a different model of internet use. This model of internet use involves emotions and 'person-centeredness' by women who communicate with others, and thus the internet becomes a more feminine technology.

Gender and power were important elements in my research in that they provided significant information for understanding the role of home computing for the immigrant Libyan women. According to the participants, the fathers were the power in their families. But one woman talked about her husband in a different way from other women, in that he never stopped her from using the computer. However, her son did. These findings show us that the type of relationship that existed between family members in this Libyan community, while gendered, could also differ from one woman to another.

These issues led me to conclude that using the computer as a home activity could be a way for increasing and developing women's empowerment among Muslim Libyan women, even when they return to Libya in the future. At the same time, my analysis revealed how gender relations and hidden power issues were involved, and that these might become more explicit or intense through the family's use of computers at home. Moreover, home computing might show shifts in women's visions of computer use, something which will be discussed in the following section.

4.8. Women's vision of computer use

The Libyan women in this study held a strong view about their own identity/ethnicity prior to their move to North Manchester. As a result, they have attempted to re-create elements of their former lives in Libya (as for instance when they make their sitting rooms look like the *Al Dar Al Arabia* rooms discussed in Chapter 3), even with the presence of computers. Guevarra (2009) argues that for technology to work properly it has to depend on the users' distributions and access to that technology within a specific location. The participants in my study had access to the internet and they started to interact with a new intelligent technology in the middle of their domestic spaces; their homes (Georgiadou, et al 2008). As a result, changes in their identity took place that 'represent the multiple and continually renegotiated outcomes of complex multifaceted phenomena operating both within individual biographies and for societies as a whole' (White, 1995: 3).

A useful starting point for a discussion of experiences of home computing by the participants is that of 'setting up a conceptual framework consisting of a series of possible shifts in identity that occur in relation to migration, both at the individual and at larger-group levels'(White, 1995: 2) (for more detail see Chapter 6). The group of women who participated in this study, to discuss their experiences of home computing while in North Manchester, included employees and housewives. I use the term 'employee' to refer to the participants who were teachers or worked outside the home and the housewives for women who did not work outside the home. The idea of categorising my participants as 'educated' and housewives was not discussed during the *Al Lamma* gatherings. However, the participants themselves started attaching categories to women such as "an employed woman" or "a housewife" during the second *Al Lamma* gathering. For example, they described employed women as being computer literate, with a degree, a job, and literate in

English, financially independent and having less time to go shopping. On the other hand, the housewife was regarded as computer illiterate, holding no degrees, jobless, without English, financially dependent on the husband, and with time to do activities outside their homes. These categories were not fixed. For example, a woman with no degree could be computer literate like Howdah was, while a woman with a degree could be jobless, like Nour.

The majority of research on ethnic minority women who have access to and use of ICT has been on women who belong to socially excluded communities (Lytras, et al 2008; Georgiadou, et al 2008; Fairlie, 2007; and Mullis, et al 2007). These studies relate to women from deprived backgrounds and focus on how they were included or excluded from computer use. None of these studies tried to explore middle class women who belong to an elite group. In this respect, I decided to highlight the differences between professional women and housewives in relation to their computer use in a home context, with reference to my participants. My intention was to explore the learning dimension of these Muslim women's identities, to find out how their computer literacy practices were bound up with their own social and cultural lives (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). The question that I asked was how women used and read topics on the internet to fulfil their needs and communicate with their own society. It emerged that there was a variety of factors influencing what internet topic they choose to look at, that were religious, cultural, educational, commercial or to do with leisure.

For example, one of the main topics on the internet that the professional women and housewife participants looked at was Islamic information and explanations (*Fatwa*), as well as for reciting the Quran. This shows how values related to Islamic religious belief

affected how both groups of participants used the internet in a similar fashion. The second major reason for the professional women's use of the internet was for commercial and leisure purposes. They talked about buying books, cameras, and travel tickets, as well as playing games and listening to music online.

Mona: I use it to buy travelling tickets. At the beginning the internet was used for communication and for making relations between men and women. We thought it was for entertaining only and not for buying things.
(First Al Lamma discussion on 8th July 2005)

The participants mentioned that professional women were aware of the importance of computer and internet use at home, while housewives were not. This comparison revealed a view that Libyan women, as housewives, did not take advantage or see the significance of this new technology for their everyday learning.

Faheema: The educated woman knows the importance of computers but the illiterate one [housewife] doesn't. The educated woman is educated about the computer. I am not forced to use it but I only want to take information from it even if I am a housewife.
(Second Al Lamma discussion on 31st October 2008)

There is no doubt that these findings offer a starting point for researching the relationship between women's awareness of learning and internet use, and internet use as a powerful home tool for changing Muslim women's attitudes toward self development. As a result of internet use, there was a substantial change regarding understanding feminist ideas embedded within this community of Libyan women. While the notion of feminism among the professional women contrasted with that of the housewives in this study, for both, internet communication became a tool for developing feminist ideas within an Islamic framework. Both groups referred to previous negative ideas on internet use in the Libyan

community that made them feel uncomfortable about using the internet at home. However being in North Manchester provided an opportunity for them to overcome these internal constraints, after discovering that there were religious, social and educational advantages from computer and the internet use for themselves and for their whole family.

4.9. Conclusion

The findings of this chapter offer a starting point for exploring computer literacy practice among Libyan Muslim women, within the domesticated spaces of their homes in North Manchester. These findings have suggested that computer use as practiced by these Libyan women can be discussed as a literacy practice used for a range of purposes; from calling family members in Libya, reciting the Quran and learning English, to exploring Arabic cooking, or reading e-mails online. Their online interactions did not hinder their face-to-face interactions during social gatherings, but instead provided new enriched spaces for communication and information exchange with their home communities. However, during their online interactions the participants encountered different types of constraints and difficulties due to their limited English and computer skills or due to their lack of financial recourses and time. As a result, these women adopted strategies to overcome these difficulties by developing informal styles of learning, and thus started educating themselves to become computer literate women. In addition, power relationships and gender issues coloured the computer activities practiced by these women and their children, leading them to develop a unique model of online interaction without undermining their own positions as Muslim mothers.

Computer literacy, as practiced by the participants of this study, had its own distinct cultural characteristics which helped these participants to develop their new identities as

Muslim mothers using computers and the internet in a Westernised context. To achieve this, these mothers had to overcome their feelings and emotions related to home computing and internet use, feelings such as 'fear' or 'jealousy'. These developments in their feelings and identities as Muslim women, whether professional or housewives, were directly and indirectly related to their computer literacy practices. In other words, computer and internet communication and interaction, became a tool for developing feminist values within an Islamic framework, as well as for discovering the religious, social, commercial and educational advantages of practicing computer literacy. In the following chapter, I discuss in more detail power and family relations, as experienced by immigrant Libyan women in North Manchester. I show how family relationships are influenced by home computing, and how families engage and interact with computers to decrease their social isolation and increase their feeling of belongingness.

CHAPTER 5 POWER AND FAMILY RELATIONS

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss power and family relations, and their implications for understanding the significance of home computing for the women in this study. I address the questions: What is the role of Libyan parents in the domestic space? What forms do adult-child relationships take in these Libyan families? What kind of support do they have? How does the relationships between these parents and their children, influence family members' interactions with a home computer?

At the beginning of this chapter, I present some examples from the *Al Lamma* discussions relating to family relationships, together with brief interpretations of what is happening between members of these families while using a home computer. My intention is to show how my research journey started with my own interpretations and was followed by ideas and findings from other studies.

I follow these examples with a discussion of family conflict theory and its relation to gender issues. Then I look at home computing and child development, referring to debates in post-Piagetian theory on child development and its implications for what is understood as 'virtual realities'. Social isolation and child-relationships with others, the world and the self, are discussed in relation to computer use in the home. Finally, I explore further the issue of family cooperation and how family members support each other in a bid to reduce their 'techno-phobia'.

5.2. Examples reflecting issues relating to family relations

In this section, I present some examples from my data transcripts, together with my interpretations, to highlight some of the primary themes relating to power, family relations and home computing, that emerged from the data. I focus on the implications of power, gender, and conflict on my participants' family structures in relation to practices around home computing and internet use. In this section I include examples drawn from the preliminary interviews that were conducted with one mother and her daughter, as well as examples from the *Al Lamma* gatherings.

5.2.1. Family benefits

The first set of examples relate to the benefits for families of home computing. I first present a few examples under relevant sub-sections, before discussing these in more detail.

5.2.1.1. Consolidating family ties

Nagat: What do you get out from using Internet communications?
The mother: To communicate with my family, my son is in Libya. I use it to find out about his studies, his feelings. He can write to me by sending me an email. It's not expensive, I can see him on the Internet, the telephone I can't. I know what is happening in Libya; get information about events… family events or religious. To see your family because it's both picture and talking, alive, it's very thatching, and important. You capture new events in Islam, to coup with your own environment and religion.

The daughter: Emails to make new friends and to communicate with my friends and family outside Manchester.
(Mother and daughter interviews)

One of the main problems that the women in this study reported was the struggle of leaving members of their families and kin back in Libya. They needed to communicate and keep connected with their families and with what was happening during various events. When the women started using computers and the internet, they found a form of communication with their families in Libya that was visual, live and current.

5.2.1.2. Family freedom

Nagat: How does it fulfil your needs to communicate with your home country?
The mother: Using the internet makes you near your home and family. It's very important because you can use it at any time, day or night. You are also free, you've got your freedom to reach your family without disturbing the others, no one notice what you are doing unlike the phone when ringing.

The daughter: By using emails. It's cheap. You can see them as if they are near you and you feel more comfortable.
(Mother and daughter interviews)

This reveals how there was a sense that the women were able to be *near* their home country whenever they wanted to, at anytime. They were free to connect with members of their families, in Manchester as well as in Libya, from inside their homes. The women could not go outside their homes whenever they wanted, due to certain constraints such as family commitments and being in a foreign culture. However, these women practiced the freedom to communicate with others in Libya and Manchester from the comfort of their homes, through the internet.

5.2.1.3. Family knowledge

Nagat: How, in your opinion, is the internet successful in providing information?

The mother: If you want to find about information instead of looking in many books or asking friends, you can use the internet very quickly, in short time, in different ways and you can choose what suits you. Also, you can save it on a floppy disc that is very easy to carry with you. It's more secret which give a more personal dimension and success.

The daughter: The internet is everywhere so you know about the news that happens anywhere, like my father, who knows about what's happening in the Islamic and Arabic countries through the internet. Without the internet you will never know about what happens in these places. You don't have to look in the Library for information instead you can use Yahoo. You don't have to go to school in that you can do your work from home.

Nagat: What are the effects of your own interests and knowledge on using the internet?
The mother: If you want to find out how to develop your own knowledge about something like music or cooking, which are very important to increase, you may use the internet. It's a good way for improving and increasing your knowledge. My interests are in sewing so I use the internet to look for new catalogues on new sewing machines that is very easy to find. The information you get from the internet plus your own together form a nice frame for your own picture of knowledge and ideas.

The daughter: The internet is more important than TV and it's good for chatting. My own interests don't affect my uses of the internet. I use for every thing and to know about many things.
(Mother and daughter interviews)

Howdah: My children use it to learn letters, numbers and to do numerical problems.
Nagat: Do you choose these sites for them?
Howdah: No. It's I and their father. They enter games sites only. Now, my son … is better with his letters and numbers.
Norrya: They use it to do their homework on the internet and forward it to school.
Howdah: After school, there isn't enough time so I divide it between them.
Norrya: Children also use it for games or drawing.

These examples illustrate how the women and members in their families valued learning and developing knowledge. It was important for them to know about what was happening in the Islamic and Arabic world, as well as improving their understandings and knowledge about different things in a more practical way. In this way, home computing enabled the increasing of their knowledge as a family and as individuals, by helping them engage in an informal type of learning.

5.2.1.4. Social aspiration

Nagat: What are the difficulties you faced when using internet?
The mother: Many. You must know some English. It's a new technology developing very quickly. I felt afraid at the beginning and I may make things go wrong, but it takes time. It was very difficult but you need to use it if you want to be regarded as a literal person who follows science innovations.
(Mother interview)

It is difficult to start using for the first time technical machines such as computers with no, or limited, knowledge. These women needed to start using computers and the internet when they came to live in the United Kingdom in order to communicate with family and friends back home. However, there are other reasons that encouraged these women to use computers. They wanted to be regarded as literate women with the will and the motivation to learn new technologies and to become computer literate. They were inspired by how computers and the internet provided alternative ways of communication and learning.

5.2.1.5. Family Identity

Nagat: What is the impact of internet on your identity?

The mother: IT affects your personal identity. You are no more a forgotten person. You are not worthless. There are things specially done for me as a Muslim woman and not for men only so you feel you are equal to men. You feel you are modernized and make you a valuable person. Feminism! At the beginning, I felt ashamed because of the negative ideas on using the internet especially in Islamic societies. But now I know it's normal for me to use it.

The daughter: I don't feel that internet has any impact on my identity.
(Mother and daughter interviews)

The mother talks about how computers changed the way she felt about herself as a Muslim woman living in a westernized city. She was proud to find her identity recognized and thus reflected on the internet. She describes starting to feel more equal to Muslim men, who previously have had more freedom to access public space, but not any more. This illustrates how Muslim women are starting to access public spaces while sitting in front of the computer in the private space of their homes. These women are breaking the boundaries between public and private spaces but without neglecting their Islamic society. However, the daughter's remarks suggest that the younger generation may be more likely to feel that the internet has not changed the way they feel about themselves, perhaps because they were born in the digital age where computer access is provided from early stages even in Libya. As a result they become computer experts from an early age, something they might use for their own advantages, as referred to in the following sub-section.

To sum up, all the previous examples presented some key family benefits of home computing that the women of this study had experienced while living in North Manchester.

These benefits included; consolidating family ties with family members in Libya, finding alternative forms of communication and learning, and increasing family freedom, knowledge and identity.

5.2.2. Children's support

The children of the mothers in this study learned how to use computers in school and therefore they appeared to be more confident in approaching their fathers' computers even when their fathers were not home. While they may have felt worried that a virus could infect the computer and destroy their fathers' work, they knew that that was always a risk and so they appeared unafraid of using their fathers' computers. Their previous computer knowledge helped them to overcome their fears, if there were any, of switching their fathers' computer on/off. At the same time this did not stop them from fighting with their siblings over their turns using these computers. As discussed in Chapter 4, the Libyan mothers saw these conflicts between their children over computer use as a barrier that stopped them from using these computers themselves, while they were home. However, the examples that follow refer to the possibility of children's support when using computers at home.

> *Nagat: How do you and each member of your family use the internet?*
> *The daughter: My father studies with it and my brother likes chatting. My sister doesn't like it much. I chat with my friends, study and do my homework with it. My mother doesn't know how to use it. My father and my sister help my mother to use the internet.*
> *(Daughter interview)*
>
> *Nour: How can I use it...you need to have someone else with you...if I ask my children will they show me how to use it?*

Howdah: They [our children] know how to use computers and the internet. Their English is good.

In the previous example, Nour showed that she was willing to learn how to use a computer with the support of her children, but she was not sure that her children could have helped her to start using the computer independently. However, there seemed to be something else that stopped her from using the computer during the three years in which she has been living with her family in North Manchester. Could it be her lack of knowledge of how to use a computer? Could it be the father's control, her husband, over computer use at home? Or perhaps her children are also using and benefiting from her lack of knowledge, to avoid giving up their own privileges of use?

5.2.3. The family in the public and private sphere

Control and conflict in the families of the women in the study were reflected in their practices around home computing and internet use. I present examples of conflict relating to fathers' and siblings, before referring to other examples regarding issues of conflict and power relationships within these Libyan families.

5.2.3.1. The father as a controlling figure

The fathers, as husbands of the Libyan mothers who participated in the study, were in control of computer use in their homes. As a result, their children were only allowed to use computers with the permission of their fathers, which included when they could use it, for how long could they use it, and what could be done with it. These fathers knew and were

sure that their children had always followed their rules in general and expected them to do the same with those related to computer use at home. These fathers had mainly bought the computers for their university studies and thus everybody was expected to keep that in mind whenever they wanted to use their fathers' computers.

Nour: In my whole life I have never used it...my children use it when their father is not there...they are already fighting over it...I don't want to add to that...they are already in conflict.
(Second Al Lamma discussion on 15th February 2008)

Amal: Their father told them: I want the computer for my studies and no one can use it or access internet. And after I finish my studies and we go back to Libya you can then use it and access internet.
(First Al Lamma discussion on 8th July 2005)

5.2.3.2. The fathers' work space

The fathers' control strategies often seemed to involve designating the computer as primarily for their own work. In this way the computer became a sort of extension of the work space – a space from which Libyan women are often excluded. In such a view the computer becomes almost a small island of 'public' space inside the private sphere. According to the participants, their husbands knew that it was difficult to control their wives over computer use at home. They, as men, were certain that their wives would eventually find their own way of using the computers while their husbands were not at home and either sitting in front of the computers or controlling their use. This can be seen in examples from the transcripts and my field notes:

Nadia: Husbands' control has its say on women's learning.
Faheema: She can't touch anything [the computer] in anytime.

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Norrya: Because her husband stays home [working on the computer].

Nour: This one her husband goes out from morning to night.

Nadia: That's right she has more chances [to use computers].

(Second Al Lamma discussion on 15th February 2008)

The husbands started adapting different strategies in order to control or even stop their wives from using their computers. "Their computers" was the phrase which the wives who were participants in this study, chose to use when referring to the computers in their homes. Such an attitude stemmed from the thinking that as the husbands were the ones who had paid for these computers to provide their families with these technological devices, they were therefore were responsible for looking after them and had the right to control their use. However their husbands' strategies might have pushed their wives to become more resistant to these actions and this resistance could enable the women's empowerment when combined with their self development, as discussed in Chapter 4.

5.2.3.3. Conflict and gender issues

There are interesting issues that came out of my analyses of the interviews with the mother and her daughter, as well as the *Al Lamma* gatherings, which reflect feminist principles in relation to power relationships in Libyan society. According to the mother interviewee, the father is the power in her family, while her daughter suggested that her brother is the power in their family. The daughter interviewee in the example below, talks about her father in a different way from her mother, in that her father had never stopped her from using the computer. However, her brother did:

Nagat: Who is in control?

The mother: Dad, dad is the power. The dad can't stop his children. My children know the time they can't use the internet. I mean their dad has some specific hours in a day

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for him to use the internet.

Nagat: What about you?

The mother: For me, I use the computer with the help of my daughter. I can't use the internet when my husband is using it or will use it. My husband has a certain time of the day for using the internet that he chose when he is at home and not outside.

Nagat: When do you use internet then?

The mother: I try to use it at other times when he is not using it but it will be for a short time. The time that he had set to use the computer suits me too but…

Nagat: Did you use it at those times?

The mother: I didn't try to use it or to ask him if I can use it when it's his time for working on the computer because I know it is more important for his studies and research.

The daughter: My brother controls the computer. I have to wait until he is finished.

Nagat: What about your father?

The daughter: My father doesn't tell anyone to stop or not to use internet.

Nagat: Who's the power then?

The daughter: Power is my brother.

(Mother and daughter interviews)

These answers show us that the type of the relationship that exists between daughters and their fathers may be different from the relationship between mothers and their husbands (Fathers) in Libyan society. The fathers might fear the access computers can give to an unspecified 'outside' world – bringing women into contact with people or ideas that might either threaten their safety, or provoke (unwanted) emancipation, for example, enabling women to move from the private to the public sphere. This is the same kind of cultural fear that is expressed by those who worry about children being introduced to ideas and practices that are inappropriate for them, for example regarding; sexuality, violence, or moral ambiguity. In both cases, there is an anxiety about the possibility of computers 'opening out' onto a wider public sphere. Such concerns come into conflict with more

positive uses of the internet, such as its place in reducing social isolation.

5.2.3.4. Power relations between siblings

There were distinctive features of power relationships between siblings in families, even though males are still referred to as the power and patriarchy in these relationships. The interviewee daughter focused more on her brother, perhaps because she has noticed and accepted that her father has the right to be in a higher position than her brother in their family. The brother in this Libyan family is presumably getting himself ready for his patriarchal position in the future as a father, but his sister, the daughter, clearly felt upset about this. This feeling might be related to the daughter's belief that she and her brother should be in equal positions as siblings of the same family.

Sara: My daughters are not allowed to use internet because he [her husband] is afraid of a virus.
(First Al Lamma discussion on 8ᵗʰ July 2005)

Faheema: My children [my daughters] could go on websites that are not appropriate and could allow a virus into the computer.
(Second Al Lamma discussion on 15ᵗʰ February 2008)

Nagat: How do you and each member of your family use internet?
The mother: This is a problem! The whole family sit to watch what's on the screen. My son provides ideas on using the internet as a good start for discussions and guides us for using other sites. It's ideal for shopping.
The daughter: Sitting in front of the computer is better than TV in many ways even if there are some bad sites on internet which I don't access.
(Mother and daughter interviews)

However, some families might prefer their children to spend time on the internet,

especially boys, rather than going out into the 'real world' where they might engage in activities that are proscribed within family and religious culture, such as drinking. So here, the computer acts as a kind of virtual 'proxy' for the 'real', more dangerous, outside/public sphere.

5.2.3.5. Family resistance

The daughter's beliefs seemed not directed towards feminism but much more focused on human rights. As a female however, she did seem concerned with the existence of social differences between her and her brother, in that as a male he has more power than her in accordance with Libyan culture. I gained the impression from the daughter's responses, of her determined resistance to the power of her brother over rights to use the computer. Her answer to what she does when her brother refuses to let her use the computer was:

> *The daughter: I will tell my brother that I want to use the computer but he refuses most of the time.*
> *Nagat: Does this stop you from asking again?*
> *The daughter: No, I will always ask.*
> *(Daughter interview)*

One participant in the *Al Lamma* gatherings, talked about how her husband controlled computer use in their home and how she was also afraid of using the computer by herself. Her husband placed a lot of constraints on her computer use by limiting her freedom. Her fear was not only as a consequence of the difficulty of learning to use a computer, but also from her husband's control of computer use in their home.

> *Nour: I am also afraid of the computer, my husband was on a site doing work on it and*

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he didn't save it...after he left I went on the internet but noticed that my husband work left on the computer was lost, I tried to find it but didn't know how so I switched it off...when my husband came back he blamed me for losing his work on the computer. (Second Al Lamma discussion on 15th February 2008)

This participant felt guilty that because of her mistake her husband lost his unsaved work. She became afraid of using the computer and might have stopped using it altogether. She insisted on pointing to herself as the main cause of this problem instead of her husband, who neither saved his work nor told his wife about it before leaving home. This participant was afraid because of her lack of basic computer knowledge as well as of her husband's anger if he found out that she used the computer when he was not home. But why did she switch the computer on/off when her husband was not home? Why had her husband left the computer on even when leaving home?

These questions 'illuminate' the behaviours of these Libyan women and their husbands surrounding computer use at home. These husbands might have discovered or suspected that their wives were using the computers while they were out of the house at work or university. As a result, it is possible that the husbands started applying different strategies in order to prevent their wives using the computers at home while they were not there to supervise them. I think these husbands knew that if they left any work without saving it their work would be lost, so it is not impossible that they did this on purpose to find out if their wives used the computers, and at the same time to stop their wives using the computers without asking them. However, as discussed in Chapter 4, women found their own ways and times to use the computer and the internet secretly when their husbands were outside their homes.

5.2.4. Gender issues in relation to power

As a Libyan Muslim woman, a daughter has to follow and obey her father and brother. And later, she must do the same with her husband without any resistance. These cultural conventions explain why the mother interviewee's consciousness of power relationships in her own society stopped her from making any efforts to change the situation in her own family. This appears clearly in the following excerpt from the interview with the Libyan mother:

> *Mother: I didn't try to use it or to ask him [her husband] if I can use it when it's his time for working on the computer…*
> *(Mother interview)*

The mother's attitude points to a possible future change in her daughter's thoughts regarding power relationships in the family. The daughter in the future, it might be assumed, might become more aware of Islamic rules and Libyan culture, and how they dictate her position as a female in the family. Furthermore, if the daughter gets married, her husband will be the power in her family. So, the question arises as to whether she will be in the same position as her mother, resisting power only in very subtle and invisible ways or continue to do so more openly. This makes me think about whether using computers as a home activity might be a way for generating empowerment among young Libyan women, even when they become mothers in the future and so more confined to the domestic sphere.

5.2.5. Trapped between two cultures

Resistance is a reaction common to most human beings living in socialised communities. As Foucault (1981:100) argues; where there is power, there is resistance (and he sees power everywhere). The Libyan women in North Manchester are not only affected by their own Libyan culture, but instead are also trapped between two different cultures. For example, the daughter interviewee seemed to resist cultural and Islamic restraints, which regard males as the guardians of females and brothers in higher positions than their sisters in Libyan families. Instead, she placed herself in an equal position to her brother in resisting her exclusion from accessing their home computer.

The Libyan women in North Manchester found it difficult to interact with the outside world. As immigrant mothers, they needed to take care of their children as well as their husbands, but without getting the support they used to from their extended family members or friends in Libya. At the same time, they could benefit from being in the United Kingdom by leaning English, using computers or gaining higher degrees. However, not all of them could do this due to the need for them to engage with a western culture if they wanted to access these opportunities. Some felt that this posed a threat to their identity.

Nour: The housewife puts herself in one frame so the focus is on the children. For example how doesn't she learn English or computer after living here? She tells you, no the important thing is my children and my husband! Women types are different from one to another. Everyone knows her surrounding environment. The man wants the woman to be low and he is high.
Faheema: No, no, no not all men.
Norrya: She said she didn't want to learn but not that he told her no.
Nagat: I can stay at home or learn or go online. I can study and look after my children, cook.
Nour: The resources regarding the availability of education not related to the

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husband's control. There are many other things in the equipment [the computer].

Faheema: I want money.

Nagat: But some women have money, they buy with it gold [jewellery], furniture and not use it to educate themselves.

Nour: Men know that point, women don't want to improve themselves and men insist on controlling them.

(Second Al Lamma discussion on 15th February 2008)

The significance of these examples is in showing how these Libyan women tried to engage or disengage with a western environment. The women described different forms of engagement. One scenario included learning English, using the computers, and at the same time looking after children and doing house work. Another scenario referred to devoting women's time to domesticated work only. However, in both these situations the women reported that they could keep improving and learning new skills without changing their identity.

The problems related to computer use in these Libyan homes might have been resolved through communication and computer education, but this was something that could happen only if the husbands and their wives agreed to talk to each other about all the relevant issues relating to computer use at home as a family activity. This might then mean that such Libyan women would be allowed to start learning more about how to use computers and thus be able to solve technical problems such as making sure to save any work left open by their husbands.

5.3. Power and family space

> Families are powerful institutions, and their influence can be strongly
> restraining on people. Barton and Hamilton (1998:253)

The family is not simply like any other social group such as a work group or a friendship group. Families are intergenerational through the act of birth, so they include people who are related to each other like parents, children, grandparents and great grandparents. Children need care-taking and care-giving. Parents need to nurture their children during in their early years of life. White and Klein (2008: 285) point to the differences that the family has from other groups due to its potential for longer lasting effects, through both the 'longevity' of the family group, and the 'historical' and 'intergenerational nature of kinship'. Due to these differences, White and Klein explain how theories specifically formulated about the family are important for us to discover family realities, in addition to sociological and psychological theories that focus on explaining individual behaviour. In this respect, I want to explore the possible implications of home computer use on family relations by adapting an interdisciplinary approach to my research.

5.3.1. Family conflict theory

Foucault (1981:92) states that:

> Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force
> relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute
> their own organisation; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and
> confrontations, transforms, strengthens or reverses them; as the support which
> these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, …

According to Foucault (1981), power is both enabling and constraining. The circuits of power make social exchange possible, but always produce imbalances of 'power/knowledge', as can be seen in the power relations amongst my participants' families. He describes power relations as being intentional and with a set of aims and objectives (Foucault, 1981:94-95). Power relations are capable of enforcing individuals or groups, to produce alternative forms of power and resistance to break the norms of a society (Weedon, 1997:110).

Conflict as a process is defined by Sprey (1979) as a confrontation between individuals or groups over scarce resources, controversial means, incompatible goals, or a combination of these. The conflict as a process can be observable (overt) or not observable (covert) (cited in White and Klein, 2008). Thomas Hobbes (1947) stated that 'humans are motivated by self-interest which is rooted in the will to survive…humans form a social contract where all humans give up some of their rights of self-interest to live in a stable and secure society of laws' (cited in White and Klein, 2008: 180). One of the primary concerns in the study of the family as a social group is finding how conflict is managed. In this respect, family conflict theory is most frequently applied to identify the techniques used in marriages and families to keep them from breaking down. For example, I previously mentioned that there were different techniques used by Libyan husbands, wives and their children in order to manage conflict over computer use at home. These techniques ranged from the father's control of computer time and type of activity allowed, to the children's following of these rules, while at the same time, being comparative computer experts they were able in an implicit way to control their computer time and site access when their fathers were not home. At the same time, some mothers used their children's fighting over use of the computer as an excuse as to why they themselves did not use it, (the average number of

children in these Libyan families ranged from five to seven children in each family) while other mothers referred to 'fear' of the computer, lack of English language and their limited financial resources as barriers to them using the computers in their homes.

Families are structurally disposed to conflict, therefore variables such as the number of members in the family, their age, gender, or all of these together, affect the techniques used to manage conflict, as well as the power and resources of each family member, and their role within the family (White and Klein, 2008:188). For example, family size determines the tactics that each member might use to get through a family conflict, such as by either arguing or negotiating. According to Caplow (1968), the children's power in the family increases when they grow up and have more resources, while their parents may lose some of their resources and thus their power in the family (cited in White and Klien, 2008:186). One of the main rules that Muslim parents believe might solve and control this dilemma is their hope that their children will understand that one day everyone will become older and powerless. As a result, they feel their children, their lives being subject to religious rules, should follow the words of *Allah* that command younger people to look after their parents.

Scanzoni (1972:193) views the rules of a family 'as governing the exchange of the husband's instrumental duties for expressive rights and likewise the wife's expressive duties for instrumental rights' (cited in White and Klein, 2008). So each member of the family has rights and duties that are codified in informal agreements and laws in a society. I am interested in exploring further the meaning of family (varying in size, age and gender), as a social structure, and how this relates to family conflict over computer use.

5.3.2. Impact of family conflict in the household

A lot of the recent research has investigated the challenges faced by individuals and families with no, or limited, computer and internet experience, in order to improve certain services provided via the internet. For instance, Kontos, Bennett and Viswanath (2007) researched 12 low-SEP (Socio-economic Position) urban novice computer users in the USA, to identify the obstacles in implementing a project to improve access to health information. The most frequently noted barriers that the participants experienced, included time constraints and family conflict over computer use at home. The family conflict that these participants experienced related to time spent using the computer by each member of their family and included conflict between parents and children, between spouses, and between siblings. For example, while siblings wanted more time with the computer, parents wanted their children to spend less time doing non-educational activities on the computer. In addition, spouses wanted their counterparts to spend less time using the computer. Interestingly, there seemed to be something like computer 'jealousy' when family members were accusing one another of spending too much time with the computer (see Chapter 4).

However according to Holloway and Valentine (2003:155) there is no inevitable impact on household relations from computer use, because computers are domesticated depending on factors such as; parenting styles, parents' and children's differential interpretations of what the machine is for, and the time-space within which the home computer is located and used. The participants in my study implicitly mentioned the importance of the social support they received from each other when facing computer problems, and that due to their 'fear' of computer use (Facer, et al 2003) most of them asked for help from either their older children or spouses rather than calling formal technical support for assistance.

This type of 'social support' or 'social learning' (Kontos, et al 2007) increased the confidence and the self-efficacy of novice computer users. Furthermore, Kontos, et al (2007) recommended providing participants with strategies and negotiation techniques to help home computer users alleviate any computer problems related to family conflict.

In my study, it appeared that each family member tried to apply his or her own techniques and strategies, either in an explicit or implicit way, in order to avoid or reduce the tension of family conflict over home computer use. This means that research on computer-related family conflict needs to consider questions such as: Who is in a position of power and in control in the family and who paid for the computer and the internet connection at home? What is the effect of cultural and gender issues on family relations? Are there young children in the family? How many members are there in the family?

A survey by Jung Lee and Gil Chae (2007) on 292 fourth, fifth and sixth grade South Korean children, investigated parental mediation techniques and children's internet use in a family context. They found that parents' recommendations of useful websites were positively related to the frequency of children's educational online activities. However, parental restrictions on time and websites did not alter children's actual internet usage. This could be due to the fact that children who have a computer at home tend to control what they want to do on the computer as well as controlling their own time spent on it (Facer, et al 2003).

These parental reactions to their children's use of computers and the internet may have caused parents to exert control over the movement of their children inside and outside the home. Additionally, it might have made the parents more concerned about their children's

perception of legality and health issues (Haddon, 1992:93). According to Wheelock (1992), to reduce computer-related family conflict, more personalised systems for socio-technical innovation develops in the household. As a result, and as Putnam (2006) argues, the existence of computers in domestic spaces bring about a new type of family domestic conflict that the 'electronic industry' has responded to, by promoting more individual devices, and the move towards the modern house as a 'technical terminal' space.

5.3.3. Conflict and gender issues

According to White and Klein (2008), there are three dimensions of gender; the individual gender, the structural gender and the cultural gender. Individual gender or gender identity, relates to the different ways that people acquire their personal construct of gender, by looking at the features of being feminine or masculine. The structural gender, or gender as a social status, looks at gender as a class and sorts people into hierarchical groups and organisations. Cultural gender relates to symbols attached to a social gender, such as those found in religions, as well as to the way language constructs gender. In this respect, 'gender has been used as a basic dimension for identifying differences, gender relations, culture, and language' (White and Klein, 2008:221). A study by Holloway and Valentine (2003:153) showed that traditional patterns of social inequalities such as race, gender and class shaped young people's opportunities to develop ICT skills. In addition, Walkerdine (2007:4) found that the type of regulations that parents gave to their children when playing video games were gendered, with parental regulations for boys different from those for girls.

In the section 5.2.3, which listed examples from my data, the father's regulations for his daughter's use of computers, were very different to the father's regulations for his son. So

one can see that the father/daughter relationship is different from and more controlling than the father/son relationship, which is in line with traditional family rules that put brothers in a higher position than their sisters. Furthermore, this family under discussion seemed to be full of 'resisting' members who wanted to use the computer in a domestic space, but at the same time were frightened of openness and breaking family traditions. Thus, through the use of this new technology, their resistance took a silenced form. According to MacLure et al (2007), silence can be read as a form of resistance. I want to argue that if silence can be a form of resistance, then it becomes relevant to explore how 'resistance' found in the speech of the participants of this study, was silenced by family rules and regulations embedded in the Libyan community.

Females' voices are regulated by social and religious rules within Libyan society and of course within Libyan families themselves. For example, women are not supposed to speak about personal, private or intimate topics in the presence of men. They can only talk about such topics with their husbands or other women. At the same time, females' speech is excepted be low in volume as a sign of femininity and privacy. Additionally, females' silences represent acceptance and agreement. 'Silence is a sign of acceptance' is a phrase used among the Libyan community when girls do not answer the question: "Do you agree to marry …?" On the other hand, silence is held to be better than speaking in some situations such as talking about other people in their absence, known as gossip and which is forbidden in Islam. In all, children are brought up in this community to believe that 'If talking is silver, then silence is golden.'

Wheelock (1992:111) has explored gender and generational differences in the process of adopting personal computers, by conducting a pilot study of thirty-nine families in a

peripheral region of the North East of England. She found that 'in learning about and using PCs there were marked generational and gender characteristics, with a strong bias both towards children and towards males'. Therefore, the computer was perceived as male gendered, in that the main users of PCs were more likely to be sons than daughters. There was no mention of the reasons behind these actions, which I would suggest might be related to husbands' control and power relationships or to wives' household commitments. However, Wheelock (1992:110) argues that an 'early introduction to computers would counter-balance gender differentiation in usage and access within the family'. My research suggests that early introduction would not be sufficient on its own, without measures to address cultural factors and religious beliefs.

5.4. Child development

Krcmar and Strizhakova (2007) claim that, the study of computers and videogames is treated separately from the study of computer technology. For example, there are theories such as the General Aggression Model (GAM) for studying TV violence that researchers have implemented to explain the relation between violent videogames and imitative behaviour. Aderson et al (2004) who applied the GAM found that excessive exposure to videogame violence could increase and lead to aggressive behaviour (cited in Krcmar and Strizhakova (2007:63). In this respect, some researchers such as Salomon, (1979) and (1990), studied the effect 'of' and 'with' TV on children's cognitive and social development, and later applied this to computer technology. On the other hand, social studies of technology have focused on the theorisation of technology in order to understand how families have incorporated technology into family life (Rogers, 1995). Furthermore, Krcmar and Strizhakova (2007) have pointed out that there has been little research on computers and children's development. Therefore, while there has been extensive research

on children's development and exposure to TV, which could be of relevance to this study, such a connection relies on the assumption that the interaction between a child and these two types of technology (a computer and a TV) is very similar. If there had been scope to pursue this line of enquiry in depth, this broad set of theories of child development might have been useful for my research, in that by looking at a child's cognitive, emotional, social and moral development, I might have gained another perspective on the relation between children and computers, and how Libyan families living in Manchester have incorporated computers as new technologies into their homes and everyday lives. I was able to make some use of such theories to explore the social relationship between family members (mother-father- children) of some Libyan families and how this related to their use of computers. I explore below how theories of child development can show us another side to the implications of home computer use, by looking at the way young children distinguish 'reality' from 'fantasy'.

5.4.1. Issues of virtual realities

Piagetian theory has suggested that children younger than the age of five, seem to think in personal ways and concentrate on only one thing at a time, therefore finding it difficult to distinguish reality from fantasy (Krcmar and Striznakova, 2007). Applying Piagetian theory on child development to the online activities of very young children such as toddlers, would suggest that when they are online they become unaware of what is real and what is fantasy. Walkerdine (2007) argues that while Piagetian theory posits that child development occurs through engagement with the object world, playing video games makes children enter a virtual space without solid objects. She further argues that in this virtual space children become the experts and not the adults. As a result, 'new technologies and international communication-flows collapse some central notions of what it means to

be a child in terms of traditional accounts of development' (Walkerdine, 2007:2).

As previously discussed, live video-calling via the internet is one of the online activities used by many Libyan families living in Manchester in order to communicate with other family members who live in Libya. For example, one women talked about how her children helped her use live video-calling on the internet from their home in Manchester to help her watch, talk and 'feel' her grandson, who was living in Tripoli with his mother, her daughter. She was therefore able to communicate with her grandson, her parents and other members of her extended family. This live communication continued regularly once or twice a week and the baby grandson, the first grandson for this family, was two years old in September 2009, when fieldwork ceased.

This baby has been watching, listening and perhaps talking to his grandmother, grandfather, his uncle and his two aunts since his birth via the screen of a computer. It is possible that this will become almost a 'fantasy' scene for this child, since the possibility that one day he will meet his grandmother, grandfather, his uncle or two aunts in person, is not certain. What effects might this have on this child's emotional, social and moral development? We need to understand the child and not only the medium, which in this respect is computers, in a wider social context to explore further the effects and concerns of computer use on children's social and emotional development. Clearly this greatly depends on how this activity is embedded in, and made sense of, by the 'real' people he is viewing these scenes with.

Holloway and Valentine (2003:155-156) discuss the concept of the 'real' and the 'virtual' in relation to children using home PCs and to parents protecting their children from danger

and trouble. They claim that for parents and children the 'real' and the 'virtual' are 'mutually constituted rather than oppositional spaces'. As a result, online and off-line dangers become related to one another and children using PCs at home develop online and off-line social relationships with the outside world. So a baby's 'meeting' of their extended family in virtual space, before they meet them in 'actual' space, might contribute to the development of social relationships with their families online as well as off-line in the 'real' world. However, I previously discussed how Libyan mothers also possibly prefer their children to interact in a 'virtual' public space inside the private space of the home, rather than going into the 'real' world. To sum up, my research has raised more questions than it has been able to answer, about the implications for child development of relating to others in virtual spaces, and the significance of cultural contexts in this.

5.4.2. Questioning social isolation

Although the introduction of computers is associated by some critics with a decline in family interaction, in that children are spending more time with the computer than with their family, according to Krcmar and Strizhakova (2007:69) computers may also increase the children's feeling of belonging to their peer group. These concerns over social isolation of children as a result of using computers is debated, but recent research suggests that most children use computers and the internet for social activities such as having fun, playing games, learning, e-mailing and messaging (Facer, et. al 2003). What are the implications, then, for children who are living with their families as immigrants far away from home, but are able to socially interact via the internet with other family members who are still living back home?

I would suggest that these Libyan immigrant children are spending some quality time with

many of their family members, both those who are living with them in Manchester, and those who are living far away in Libya, in that they all sit together in front of a computer in two different places at the same time in order to talk and watch each other. Children are likely to be talking with their older siblings who are married or studying in Libya, as well as getting to communicate with their friends, grandmothers, grandfathers, uncles and aunts, even when living far away from them. In addition, the participants in this study talked about how their children started using home computing when they came to live in the United Kingdom, and pointed to computer activities such as; playing games, drawing, doing homework and sending it to school, practicing letters/sounds and learning numbers. They also mentioned how their children supported them with computer use when they had language or technical problems, as well as helping their siblings or other children in school (see examples from my data in section 5.2)

The role of online communication in supporting family relationships can also be seen in TV programmes such as 'Wanted: Down and Under Revisited' (2009) (BBC1), a programme which supported British people wanting to immigrate to other places like Australia. The presenters of the program went back to Australia to meet one of the families that they had helped in fulfilling their dream of living in Australia with their two children. It is very interesting that the mother talked about how they socialise with their family back home, through live video-calling via the internet. She explained how she, with her daughter (about seven years old), her son (about two years old) and her husband, gather round a table in front of a computer to have a 'virtual' meal over the internet with her father and mother who live in Britain.

Online and live computing could thus be opening new spaces that offer social facilities, especially for immigrant children. By increasing the time that they have to spend with their family members and friends, online communication may decrease their feelings of being socially isolated. Interestingly, Wheelock (1992:111) states that 'use of networks of friends and relatives shows no gender differentiation in the older generation, yet a very strong bias towards boys in the younger generation. This also increases boys' socializing, and shifts its locus towards the home; traditionally both are features of girls' experience'. Haddon (1992:93) discusses 'fears of isolation' through home computing. For example, she describes how a mother talked about her 'shy' son who had made new contacts through the internet in a positive way. On the other hand, Haddon explains how parents see home computing or playing games online as harmless compared to other behaviour such as 'hanging around' with other boys, an attitude shared by the participants in my study. Therefore parental control over children extends from not only inside the home but also to outside it. However, there are further issues related to the ways in which people move 'back' and 'forth' between two cultures and how these might differ for women, men, or children, which I discuss in Chapter 6.

5.4.3. Children's socialisations

In this section, I argue that there are positive and negative aspects to the sociality of computers. Essentially there are different sets of relationships that arise from children using computers. The computer becomes 'one kind of intermediary in the child-other relationship'; in the child's relationship with the outside world (such as the child's relationship with his parents or his friends), and the child's relationship with the self (Krcmar and Strizhakova, 2007:70). As mentioned before, children may be spending less time with their families and more time with computers, but as I have suggested, they are

unlikely to be socially isolated. As discussed above, recent research has found that, children's relationships with their peers, off-line and online, is facilitated by computer use.

Holloway and Valentine (2003) show how children, who are referred to as 'geeks' or 'nerds' and who may be socially excluded from their peer group, use technology to challenge these new social exclusions currently being established, through access to PCs. Children may build new relationships with individuals or groups by using different activities online, which may increase children's socialisation (Wheelock, 1992). In other words, these are new types of socialisation, and children may be leading 'the way in utilizing and establishing new technology cultures' (Krcmar and Strizhakova, 2007:62).

It appears that the child-world relationship mediated by computers has both positive and negative aspects. Children are offered both harmful and useful information, which requires parents and policy makers to be more vigilant, especially now that internet access is easier and quicker with the introduction of wireless Broadband. For example, Krcmar and Strizhakova (2007) describe the computer as the 'door' that could be opened or closed with the parents' permission. However, one problem is that the 'key' to this 'door' is with those who are more technologically advanced; who are often more likely to be the children themselves, whose expertise (Facer et al, 2003) is celebrated by their families and peers. In addition, children may support their struggling parents to use a new technology, thus further consolidating their expertise.

As I have argued above, a child's computer use may affect her development, and affect the nature of the childhood itself. For example, Holloway and Valentine (2003) argue computer gaming can provide a good opportunity for cognitive growth and entertainment,

if used in a positive learning environment. The quality of the game (from violent to educational) is significant, as this can have positive or negative effects. To sum up, I end with the words of Krcmar and Strizhakova (2007:62):

> The presence of children in the home may be a primary reason for the adoption of computer technology in the household. This phenomenon implies that computer technologies may play an important role in the children's socialization, allowing children to learn and explore new venues to which they might not have otherwise enjoyed access.

5.4.4. Generational differences

As noted above with home computing, the traditional adult-child relation is reversed because children are often more technologically competent than their parents. Children are becoming the experts in home computing as 'technology masters' (Facer, et al 2003) and many children are encouraging their parents to use computers at home (Ribak, 2001). In recent research on home computing (Hynes, 2004) , adults mentioned their 'fear' of the computer and how they asked for support either from their children or from their friends, a feeling and practice that was echoed in my study (see Chapter 4). However, according to Holloway and Valentine (2003) 'techno phobia' was evident among some children as well as adults. This was rarely a fear of the machine itself, but rather a fear of their performance on it and how it might change their social identities and relationships in peer group cultures (Holloway and Valentine, 2003:154).

Parents have different temporal and spatial horizons from children. For example, for parents, a PC may be a tool for their children to become more technically knowledgeable

for their future career, while for children a PC is leisure and social tool that they use to establish and reproduce their social identity amongst peers, reflecting these generational differences of perspective (see 3.7 in Chapter 3 for examples reflecting these issues).

According to Holloway and Valentine (2003: 158), 'ICT use among children was shaped by global/local processes experienced with particular sites, which were shaped by our understanding of childhood'. In other words children's online cultures are both global in the way the children reach them, and local in the way these children interpret them. New social studies of childhood need to take into account the relation between our spatial ideas of childhood and the socio-spatial practices surrounding childhood, in that studies of childhood have tended to separate the global from the local (Holloway and valentine, 2003).

5.5. Conclusion

In the preceding sections I discussed how family conflict theory, childhood studies and child development can be usefully applied to help us understand home computer use as a social and cultural activity. I also explored insights offered from studies on; technology and internet use in the home, on gender and technology, and on adult-child relationships in the cyber-age. In doing so I have attempted to develop a richer understanding of everyday practices around home computers, and the significance of these for child and family relationships, especially for families living far away from home, as in the present study.

I would like to finish this chapter by mentioning an item in the March 2009 issue of the *Reader's Digest* magazine, on a mother who saved a child's life online. In the article 'The picture that saved a baby's life' (Adlam, 2009), the baby's mother posted a question on the

message board of an online community site, asking if their babies' eyes changed colour. Another mother, who was her friend, asked for a picture to be sent to her, so the baby's mother posted pictures on the website. This is when the friend noticed white shading in the pupil of the baby's left eye, and she remembered having seen such a phenomenon before. A Google search confirmed her fears that this indicated cancer. She needed to act quickly, and decided to send an email to the baby's mother suggesting that she must have her checked by an optometrist. She did and the baby was diagnosed with Retinoblastoma, a rare aggressive cancer that occurs in the retina in infants and children, usually under five. Its main symptom is when the pupil of the eye flashes white in flash photography and in some artificial light. After the baby had some sessions of chemotherapy, the tumour was reduced for surgery, which confirmed that the cancer had not reached the baby's optic nerve. After this treatment the baby was cancer-free.

It is argued that the way people socialise is changing due to computer and internet use in the home. As Haddon argues, 'The popularity, patterns of usage, the meaning and the gendered nature of the home computer arise in large part from processes outside the home. So-called "home computing" cannot be viewed as an activity based solely in the home' (Haddon, 1992:94). Taking these issues in mind, in the next chapter, I will discuss these points when exploring the way my participants, as immigrant mothers living in Britain, negotiated cultural conflict outside their homes.

CHAPTER 6 EVERYDAY NEGOTIATIONS OF CULTURAL CONFLICT

6.1. Introduction

> Racial identity is also an interactionally accomplished category, enacted through the multiple ways that individuals and groups negotiate identities as they encounter others on either micro or macro levels.
>
> (Ajrouch and Jamal, 2007:862)

The preceding chapters have argued that the immigrant Libyan women who participated in my study used computers at home as a social activity in a way that is distinctive from other computer uses, and that in order to understand this distinctive computer use among these women, it is necessary to understand the social and cultural context of their lives. This chapter explores these cultural issues in greater depth. The focus is on the different strategies that the Libyan Muslim women in the study applied on a daily basis, to negotiate cultural conflict arising firstly from their experiences of displacement, and secondly, from their location within a larger Asian Muslim community mostly from Pakistan.

First, I reflect on my exploration and reading of literature from; migration studies, gender and migration in geography, media studies, the sociology of migration, and international and transnational migration. In presenting this literature I show how I was surprised to notice that most of these studies referred to socially and economically disadvantaged populations as well as referring to immigrant women as followers who have little role in

decision making regarding their migration. I then discuss what is distinctive about the social, cultural and economic situation of these Libyan Muslim women by exploring their day-to-day life in Manchester.

I also identify features of integration, accommodation and resistance, which these women practiced in order to keep their own identities as Libyan Muslim mothers/grandmothers, while at the same time feeling proud to be recognised as modernised women after starting to use computers and the internet. I discuss the women's accounts of their emotions and feelings of guilt, feeling visible or invisible, and feelings of isolation that they expressed during our *Al Lamma* gatherings. This chapter builds on the discussion in previous chapters on resistance, emotions and cultural identity.

Finally, I explore individuality and difference, using examples from the women's accounts. I identify three different personae among the participants: Nadia the modernist integrator, Faheema the compromising negotiator, and Norrya the online socialiser. These labels that I use to describe these women are taken from their own speech during *Al Lamma* gatherings. My intention in using these labels is to explicitly show how Muslim women living within the same collective group nevertheless have distinct identities when looked at as individuals. I analyse these women's accounts in relation to literature from across a number of different disciplines.

6.2. My critical reading of the literature of migration

The written literature on migration in relation to computer and internet use is scarce. I could not find a specific article, book or research study that looked at the relationship between these two phenomena. So I referred to research on ethnic minorities and their use

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of home computers and the internet in literature from media and technology studies (Kantos, et al 2007; Fairlie, 2007; and Mullis, et al 2007).   In these studies the participants are generally selected from groups of low-SEP (Low Socioeconomic Position) or from other disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, studies usually focus on urban novice computer users, as well selecting those who belong to the lower group in the 'digital divide' (Norris, 2001). It seems to me that whenever research is conducted on an 'ethnic' group such as; African-Americans, Latino Spanish, Chinese or Asian, there is almost always a connection between their low income and low education, and their technology access rates. In other words, these ethnic groups' differences are examined most specifically in relation to them having lower incomes, less educational opportunities, poor health services and less access to technology. Things become even more restricted when these ethnic groups are immigrants, who are usually assumed to have fewer resources and less power in society (Ajrouch and Jamal, 2007; Kolig and Kabir, 2008).

Moreover, one can say that most research on migration in the U.K. is on Asian, Black Africans or Caribbean, Chinese, and more recently European, immigrants (Bhachu, 1993; Luk, 2009; Garapic, 2008; and Ryan, et al 2009). Migration studies in France and Spain tend to relate to immigrants from North Africa such as from Morocco and Algeria. In the U.S.A. and Canada research on immigrants has been wider and includes studies with those of Arabic origin such as with; Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian, Iraqi, Yemeni, and Somali immigrants (Ajrouch and Jamal, 2007). The same can be said of migration studies in Australia and New Zealand where there is more interest in conducting research on immigrants from the Arabic world, as well as on Arabic Muslims and non-permanent resident students (Kolig and Kabir, 2008).

Surprisingly I found very few United Kingdom studies on Libyan immigrants who reside in the United Kingdom. Furthermore I could not find any articles written on immigrant Libyan women who came to live in the United Kingdom from the 1970s, with their families. So I decided to research the internet for articles on Libyan immigrants more generally and I succeeded in finding a small number. However these were mostly on Libyan Jews who had migrated to live in Israel, on African transit migration through Libya, or on immigrant workers in Libya. A study by Youssef et al (1979:18) refers to Libya's general outmigration pattern (migration from rural to urban areas). It shows female dominated migration for all age groups but the researchers found no literature on women's migration in Libya. Youssef et al (1979) state Libya as a country in need of sex-specific migration research.

I am going to discuss the terminology and discourse used in the vast literature on migration and in the media in general to refer to people who leave their home countries to live permanently or temporarily in another country/place. This, I suggest, is a terminology of deficit with racist or colonialist overtones. For example, if one considers words such as migrant, immigrant, emigrant, incomers, movers, female migration, male migration, family migration, white immigration etc., it is noticed that these often appear in very negative contexts. For example, recently I read the articles: 'French pledge to close camp for Britain-bound migrants' (Manchester Evening News, 2009), and 'Calais anarchists want refugees to flood Britain' (Metro, 2009), on immigrants mostly from the Middle East and Africa detained in Calais/France. These stated that the immigration Minster in the French government was determined to return the town of Calais to 'normal' and that he promised to clear 'squatters' from Calais: 'Soon the jungle will no longer exist'. There is also the story of the eleven male Pakistani nationals living in the United Kingdom who were

arrested across the North West of England over a suspected 'terrorist' bomb plot and then released without charge. However they still face deportation on national security grounds. Just from these two readings I can add to the migration terminology list another two words used to refer to immigrants, that of 'terrorist' and 'squatters', as well as the association with the 'jungle'. (See also Ahmed, 2003)

In general migration studies rely more on quantitative methods, systematic analyses, census data, and rating scales etc. than on qualitative methods. These studies are more likely to regard the population and the subjects of their studies as 'objects' such that, by comparing their 'objects' to 'other' ethnic groups residing in the same context, some numerical findings can be achieved. The objectifying nature of quantitative research overlooks cultural aspects such as gender and race. However migration is a gendered phenomenon (Donato, et al 2006; and Silvey, 2006), which I would argue requires researchers to create interdisciplinary discussion by referring to different topics that represent immigrant women in the whole of society.

I am concerned to note that women as migrants are frequently referred to in the literature as domestic workers, employees in industry, and as victims of sex trafficking, and at the same time they are generally described as passively dependent on males (Azmaz, 1984; Kofman, 2004; Kofman, et al 2000; Pessar and Mahler, 2003; and Ryan, et al 2009). Such references are one dimensional in their view of immigrant women, and are covered with negativity. It places these women in a lower power position in the host society. The negativity associated with immigrant women in general and the ignorance of the other positive roles that these women take to provide income and support to their families (and at the same time contribute to the host community) led some feminists to start to examine the

feminisation of migration (Buijs, 1993; Bhachu, 1993; Salih, 2003; Pessar and Mahler, 2003; Silvey, 2006; and Donato, et al 2006). Feminisation of migration, which is it a feminist approach to migration, often focuses on the increased number of women coming to the West to work in the housekeeping sector because Western women are working outside of their homes. Particular groups are often looked at, such migrant women from the Philippines and Cape Verde who work for the sweat shop industries, or women from Eastern Europe, Latin America and Nigeria who are used for sex trafficking (Pozanesi and Merolla, 2005: 7). Thus feminist studies also frequently concentrates on marginalised and dispossessed migrant women.

Another factor that seems frequently to be ignored in immigration literature is religious affiliation, which is a key to showing how the host community views the immigrants and how the immigrants view themselves. Ajrouch and Jamal (2007:875) state that when 'immigrants are ascribed an ethnic or racial identity at their arrival, the fact is that they actively restructure or reconstruct these identities to suit their particular national and religious profile as well as their everyday needs'. A further issue, which researchers like Bryceson and Vuorela (2003) have argued for, is the need for the sociology of migration to develop the study of global immigration from a non-peripheral approach, as a counter to the predominant view that renders the country of origin subordinate to the supposed 'centre' of the West or North.

There is however an international migration literature that is interested in transnational movement and the contact of immigrants with their home country that helps them keep social, economic, political and cultural ties with their homes (Mason, 1999; Baldassar, 2007; and Bochove and Rosinovic, 2008). This literature offers a less 'centrist' view of

migration and offers a more informed understanding of responses to displacement. Such research highlights the diversity of transnational ties, due to the availability of transportation and development in communication technology, such as cheap flights, the internet, email, mobile phones, and television etc. (Zhou, 2004; Baldassar, 2007; Wilding, 2006; and Ryan, et al 2009). As described in previous chapters, some of the Muslim Libyan immigrants in the United Kingdom have strong social and cultural ties with their families and friends in Libya through the use of phone calls, web cameras and the internet, as well as using relatively cheap transport to go to Libya and returning to the United Kingdom for a variety of reasons. To this extent, they could be described as transnational immigrants.

To sum up, it is apparent to me that there is a 'discourse of deficit' surrounding migration studies that tends to erase cultural, social and religious specificity; and to represent migrants, and especially women, as lacking or deficient with respect to some static notion of a 'mainstream' culture. Studies generally focus on the host country, which is usually a Western one, as well as on the public areas of politics or citizenship. However, with the increased mobility in people's lives, especially families, there is a case for an increased focus on transnational families in what Gardner and Gillo (2002: 179) call 'the transnational domestic sphere'. Migration studies should, they argue 'consider activities within households and families' (Gardner and Gillo, 2002: 179).

In the following section I describe what is distinctive about the social, economic and cultural situation of the Muslim Libyan women who are living in Manchester with their husbands and children. These Muslim women can be easily identified by other ethnic groups because of their Islamic Arabic names and their Islamic dress, the *hijab* or the

'veil', which most Libyan women wear to cover themselves. All the women who participated in my study wore the *hijab*.

6.3. Situating Libyan women in Manchester

Since the 1960s, Libyan immigrants have come to the United Kingdom for a variety of reasons that range from; political conflict, economic and health issues, work or professional training, to postgraduate and undergraduate studies, mostly for degrees in Medicine or Engineering. A number of these students settled in the United Kingdom after finishing their training or studies. However the number of Libyan students and trainees in the United Kingdom decreased after the United Nations, with the support of the United States of America and United Kingdom governments, imposed sanctions on Libya due to the terrorist attack that blew up the Pan American airplane above the town of Lockerbie in Scotland 1985.

During these sanctions there were no flights in or out of Libya and foreign relations with the British government were stopped so the British Embassy as well as the United States Embassy in Tripoli were closed. Only in the late 1990s were Libyan citizens, especially students and trainees, given permission to enter the United Kingdom. Since then, the number of Libyan citizens living in the United Kingdom has continued to increase consistently and more Libyan communities have begun to develop within other Muslim communities. The Muslim Asian community in Manchester is one such community and is one of the biggest Muslim communities in the United Kingdom.

The Libyan women who participated in the *Al Lamma* gatherings were temporarily located in this Muslim Asian community with their families, because of their husbands' studies

and work. Not all of these Libyan women made the decision of migrating to the United Kingdom, but they all wanted to be with their husbands and wanted their children to receive a better education, as well as to become fluent speakers of English. The Libyan women participants all belonged to an Islamic patriarchal society and came from a number of ethnic backgrounds (Malcolm and Losleben, 2003) (see Chapter 2).

Moreover, one of the fundamental elements of Libyan society is that it is structured around families, which is a central component of rural social organisations/communities in general. As a result, Libyans regard keeping their social connections with family and friends who are still living in Libya, and with the ones that live in the United Kingdom, as an essential part of their daily life. Additionally, some of these women still have formal connections with their employers, allowing them to return to their jobs when they go back to settle in Libya. As noted previously, computers are cheaper in Manchester than in Libya and they are essential for their husbands who are studying in Manchester.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, these Muslim Libyan women live in the city of Manchester, which is one of the most cosmopolitan cities in Britain, with a diversity of people including those of Asian, Caribbean, African and Chinese background. Many of the Libyan families live in Victorian houses located in a large Muslim community mainly of Pakistan heritage, but also including Christian and Jewish communities. There is a large Libyan community that consists of undergraduate and postgraduate students, political asylums seekers, and young professionals like doctors. There are two Libyan schools in this area and some of the women that participated in the group *Al Lamma* gatherings teach in the Libyan school as well as doing support work in mainstream schools. These Libyan schools open when the British mainstream schools are closed so that the Libyan children can go to both schools.

There is also a *Masjid* (mosque) that is operated by Libyans, beside the other *Masjids* in the area, which most of the women in the study attended to learn how to recite the Quran.

These women live in Manchester with a sense of obligation to provide care for the whole family, which includes those members of their families who live in Libya. This brings me to the following section in which I discuss how these Libyan women managed to fulfil their family responsibilities to relatives in Libya while living in Manchester.

6.4. Women as active communicators at a distance

These women felt they had a duty to care for their transnational kin, to 'fulfil their culturally constructed ideals about appropriate family responsibilities' (Bladassar, 2007: 280). As Libyans and Muslims, these women have to follow the traditional expectations that personal, financial and emotional care must be provided within the family whenever possible. Some of these Libyan women had to go to Libya to visit their ill parents as soon as they were informed about their parents' situation. They usually stayed near their parents for a very short period, between one or two weeks. These Libyan women would prefer to stay near their parents in Libya to assist them and care for them, because keeping older parents at home and looking after them is in line with religious and traditional practice of family care, expected in Libyan society. Alternatively, when parents need care they can ask a relative to look after them, or bring them to live in the United Kingdom. Due to the growing number of foreign immigrants employed to care for elderly or ill people in Libya, they can also choose this option. Most of the foreign immigrants in Libya that are employed to assist with domestic work are women from East Africa and Morocco (Salih, 2003). Unfortunately, these immigrant women have to leave their families back home and the problem of women limited to domestic work does not seem to end, as the earlier

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discussion of the feminisation of labour indicated.

If there is a death in the family it is very likely that the Libyan women will go to Libya. Sometimes the whole family goes back to Libya if their sponsors, such as the Libyan Embassy in London, an oil company or others will pay for the return tickets to Libya, especially if the relative is listed as first of kin i.e. father, mother, brother or sister. At the same time, they can only fly back to Libya if they have their passports with them and have not been required to leave these with the British Home Office for visa purposes. All of this involves a lot of anxiety in dealing with their grief due to the death in their families. This type of anxiety is the one that the Libyan women talked about most often – that of having a member of their family die 'at a distance'. I discuss these feelings and others that the Libyan women mentioned during our *Al Lamma* gatherings later in this chapter.

Loretta Baldassar (2007) found in her study on transnational families and aged care, that care practices differed between the Italian migrant groups involved, according to; type of care, intensity of 'distant thinking', level of financial support given and received, type of technology used, and ideas about truth and illness. More specifically, Baladassar (2007: 293) found that the more recent, 1990s generation of migrants and their parents tend to have a better grasp of the day-to-day lives of their distant kin due to their daily use of the newer technologies such as email and text messages. These findings are similar to the way the Libyan women in my study talked about how regular phone calls, live video-calling, photo exchange via the internet (especially now that Libyan mobile phones are internet active), internet chatting, and emails, were all important forms of communication with their families in Libya and offered ways of receiving news of their family back home.

Horst (2006) similarly found that these technologies enabled immigrants to maintain their transnational ties through regular and affordable communications for emotional support, with those living outside their immediate physical environment. This was especially important for some of the women in this study, who also had to deal with the difficulties of having children divided between two places, with some living with them in Manchester while others remained in Libya. These women dealt with these situations by getting 'practical and emotional support, facilitated through the availability of cheap phone calls, emails and texts' (Ryan, et al 2009: 74). In the following section, I will explore in more detail some of the feelings of guilt, (in)visibility, and isolation that the Libyan women mentioned explicitly or implicitly during our *Al Lamma* gatherings.

6.5. Women's accounts of feeling physically distant

Jones (2005:205-206) states that memory is important within geographical and emotional geography because 'emotions are systemic and interact constantly with our conscious and unconscious selves, memories and environment. These emotional spatialities of becoming, the transactions of body(ies), space(s), mind(s), and feeling(s) in the unfolding life-in-the-now, are the very stuff of life we should be concerned with when trying to understand how people make sense of/practice the world'. One of the significant things that I noticed during the Libyan women's discussions was the different types of feelings or emotions they describe as having experienced from being far away from home. These feelings ranged from feelings of guilt and isolation to the feeling of being visible/ invisible, and are clearly evident in the women's talk about their experiences of living as mothers with their families in a British environment. My intention here is to explore the women's feelings in relation to the importance of *time* and *place* in family duties and obligations, by focusing on the domestic features of their experiences in Manchester, and whenever applicable, that

of their kin in Libya.

6.5.1. Accounts of feelings of guilt

Accounts of feelings of guilt were mostly related to the way the women were disappointed and dissatisfied that their family duties were not adequately fulfilled, and family relations were not what they should be. In their accounts they mentioned how there was less time for them to be with their children and husbands, and that limited time was left for their children to engage in learning activities on the home computer after school. Added to that was the fact that some of these children went to the Libyan school, at the end of British school day, during the evenings and the weekends, as well as to the *Masjid* to learn how to recite the Quran. Most of their husbands spent long times studying in the university, doing part-time jobs and praying in the *Masjid*.

> *Nafeesa: I want somebody to sit with me.*
> *Nagat: Is there someone who can help you?*
> *Nafeesa: How? All the mornings I am busy cleaning, I don't have any time left.*
> *Nagat: You are doing nothing.*
> *Nafeesa: I don't have any time.*
> *Nagat: It takes only an hour.*
> *Nafeesa: That is impossible.*
> *(Second Al Lamma discussion on 15th February 2008)*

On the other hand, they experienced guilt because they could not be near their parents in Libya and take part in their families' duties of looking after their parents and at the same time keeping in physical contact with them. Baldassar (2007:282) discusses in her study the 'feeling of guilt about inability to meet family obligations' that Italian immigrants and their parents experienced due to their 'physical absence- not being there' when they needed

each other.

Nagat: In my town, someone took an old lady to the café net there so that she can speak with her son living abroad via the Internet.

Sara: My uncle refused to take my father to the café net so he can communicate with us and see us alive but they didn't agree to do that. So my father used only the phone to talk to us.

(First Al Lamma discussion on 8th July 2005)

There are different ways of dealing with the sense of guilt when living far away from family members. One of them is by projecting an image of an 'ideal family' or an 'ideal migration'. This may be attempted by immigrants through concealing certain negative experiences of their migration experience from their parents, such as; feelings of homesickness, when they are physically ill, or when they have financial problems. And the same is true for parents or relatives in Libya who often try to hide any family crisis and deaths in the family in order to keep their United Kingdom relatives away from any upsetting news. In this respect, Bryceson and Vuorela (2003: 10) describe this idea of an 'ideal family' as 'imagined communities', taken from Anderson's (2006) concept of 'imagined communities', in the following way:

> Families, ethnicities and nations can be seen as imagined communities. One
> may be born into a family and a nation, but the sense of membership can be a
> matter of choice and negotiation…The inclusion of dispersed members within
> the family is conformed and renewed through various exchanges and point of
> contact.

During the *Al Lamma* gatherings the women repeatedly talked about their kin who lived in Libya as if they were trying to make it clear and explicit that they are still members of their families overseas and thus part of the Libyan community. They constantly described to each other the different methods each one of them used in order to get into contact with their kin in Libya. For example, they sent photographs taken on mobile phones, via the internet. And at the same time, they told each other the latest political and social news of incidents that had taken place in Libya, either nationally or locally (see Chapter 3 for examples). Wilding (2006) states how immigrants use regular telephone calls, faxes, emails and mobile text messages to exchange emotional and practical news with their family members overseas. In other words new technology can assist immigrants; and in my study a number of the Libyan women used a variety of technologies to relieve their anxieties and depressed emotions relating to feeling homesick, and such technologies and the communication they enabled, may also have played a role in reducing their feelings of guilt.

Another way of dealing with a sense of guilt is by adapting a 'can-do' attitude to distance and kinship. Jennifer Mason (1999) describes a 'distance thinker' as someone who does not view distance as an impediment to functioning kin relationships and views distance as 'malleable'. Eventually, a 'distance thinker' might become a 'local thinker' who can relate to kin over long distances on a temporary basis. I argue that with the availability of the internet and mobile phones, it is likely that the Libyan women started to become 'local thinkers', who for example, chatted on the phone with their parents or used internet video-calling with their relatives in Libya on a daily basis. So communicating through technology helped them to engage in an intense 'local thinking' connection with kin relatives, while being physically distanced from their home country.

Chayko (2002: 1) states that there are many examples of connecting with others from a distance since there are often people who are looking for 'social connection'. These social connections, 'exist in a space that is not created in the imagination of one individual but requires two or more minds to activate', and how despite physical separation they can help us to 'make a deeply felt sense of closeness and connectness to people we felt we knew'. It is a connection in the space of our minds, in other words 'a meeting of the minds' (Chayko, 2008:23). Applying this to the Libyan women of this study, their use of technology to connect with people they already knew and had close family relations with, made them 'social connecters' and they experienced not only 'a meeting of the minds' but also 'a meeting of the emotions'.

6.5.2. Accounts of feeling visible/invisible

One of the things that surprised me is the way some of the participant Libyan women felt when they started living in Manchester. In their accounts they described how, when they were outside their domestic spaces, they were being recognised as Asian or Muslim women/mothers by the British public community. First, Libyan women felt 'visible' and 'targeted' because of their Islamic dress, the *hijab* (veil) as a very visible sign (Koling and Kabir, 2008). On the other hand, their national identity became 'invisible' when they were looked at and dealt with as undifferentiated members of the Muslim Asian community within which these Libyan women live. The women also became a visible and negatively targeted ethnic group because of the treatment and attitudes towards Muslims and Arabs in the wake of the New York 9/11 and the London 7/7 terrorist attacks. This made them feel even more marginalised, and as a result they did not particularly identify with dominant British society. (Ajrouch and Jamal, 2007)

Exploring established ideas about Muslim women who are immigrants in Britain, reminded me that not all Muslim immigrant women who live in Britain are the same even within similar cultural identities, which has implications for services provided for these women while living in Britain. Immigrant women in Britain are usually referred to in the literature as Asian women when mentioning Non-Western immigrants (Bhachu, 1993). This led me to think about how the conceptualisation of an identity, such as being a Muslim woman in a Western context like Manchester, can at the same time make Libyan women 'invisible'.

This has some implications for local provision of services. In North Manchester most of the support and intervention in the local area facilities, is aimed at Asian communities. Schools, job centres, post offices, hospitals, surgeries and others services, often provide posters, workers and interpreters, but these are seldom aimed at Arabic speaking communities. There needs to be more understanding of everyday life practices, by focusing on the local (Dilwar, 2007) so that we can get a more appropriate representation of people of different communities. These feelings of visibility and sometime invisibility, in different times and places in Manchester, made some Libyan women feel even more isolated from home and the host country.

6.5.3. Accounts of feelings of isolation: time stopped

I would suggest that the type of interaction between home and the host communities, through transnational networks and individuals, needs to be able to transgress time and space. In this respect, time needs to be understood in relation to Libyan women's daily lives. Colley (2007:428) argues that 'without … engaging in sociological thinking about time as well as change, our understandings of transitions remain impoverished, and in

ways that render social inequalities less visible'. Such engagement can therefore enable understandings of Libyan women's lives and transitions by highlighting differences such as gender, race and class.

During the *Al Lamma* gatherings, time was sometimes described as something almost physical that stopped when they came to live in Manchester. This stems from the feelings these women started having when they were isolated from their home society, but at the same time were not fully integrated within British society. This had repercussions when they returned home. They discussed how their family members who had remained behind in Libya had certain expectations regarding the style of clothing these immigrant women should adopt before they went back home, whether for good or for a short visit. These expectations were different from the reality they saw in the migrant women's clothes; styles were out of fashion because Libyan women in Manchester were trapped in a Western culture in which they did not approve of its style, and they did not have access to the shops and communal ideas about fashion that were current among women in Libya.

As a result, they missed changes taking place in both places; in Manchester and in Libya. It felt, as one women said: 'As if time has stopped for us'. And so they kept an image that was different from the 'imagined immigrant women' in their home country of Libya. Sense of time had therefore stopped for the Libyan immigrant women who lived in Manchester; they were not fully actively engaged in the Western host society, nor were they influenced by changes that were taking place in their home towns back in Libya. As a result these women felt that they had experiences in the United Kingdom that they could not speak about with family and friends when they returned home. They were also unable to apply what they had learned in Manchester, such as speaking English or using a computer on a

daily basis (though some of the participants did express their intention to keep on using the internet on their return to Libya: see Chapter 3). However, they had established their own social networks with other Libyan women in the host country, especially in their localities. These networks provided social assistance to these immigrant women, as discussed in the next section.

6.6. Social networking

Hall (1966) argues that 'cultures differ in their use of space. People socialized in the *contact cultures* … seek direct social *contact* whenever possible' (cited in Forsyth, 2006:501).These Libyan women, I would argue, belong to a strong 'contact culture' that looks for direct social contact. They tend to increase social involvement with others by getting together during social gatherings. Therefore living away from home did not stop these Libyan women from seeking more direct social contact with other individuals who are similar to them in terms of gender, religion and ethnicity. Being physically separated from 'home' only made them more determined to gather together, even in a space very different from their Libyan home, such as Manchester (see Chapter 2 and 3).

According to Horst (2006) the experience of immigrating to a foreign place, forces immigrant women to construct themselves as actors within various social locations, both home and abroad, since migration reinforces and disrupts gender roles. Usually women are the ones who take up the responsibility for helping the family adapt to life in a new country. Ryan et al (2009: 501) state that women usually leave the work force when emigrating with their families and start focusing on domestic work within the 'sphere of the family'. The same happened to the Libyan women in this study who left their work in Libya to be with their families in Manchester.

By doing this they kept their domestic role as housewives, but lost their financial role as employed women. That had implications for the women's finances in that they had to rely on their husband's income alone. For example, Faheema, (who I describe below as the compromising negotiator), talked about the difficulties she encountered when trying to enrol on to an English course online, but had to stop completing the application when she needed to provide a credit card number. She also wanted to purchase a personal computer so as to have one she alone could use, but was unable to do so as she could not afford it while she did not have her own income/job while in living in Manchester (see Chapter 4).

One further issue is that the free childcare provided by family members, usually grandmothers, back home in Libya is not available in the host country Britain. Therefore a lot of support with childcare was provided to Libyan women in North Manchester by Libyan friends, husbands, older siblings, and the school nursery when children reached the age of three. Thus women's social gatherings had to be arranged around the times childcare support was provided or during school times when their children were in school.

This type of social networking gives women emotional support, informational support, and instrumental support, as defined by Oakley (1992). Emotional support can be provided through companionship and socialising, during which time a lot of information about what is happening abroad and 'back home' is exchanged. At the same time, women can get instrumental support through others showing them how to do things like switching the computer on, moving the mouse or writing their own computer manuals.

Norrya: I need more courage and I tried with the help of my children but controlling the mouse is difficult.

Nagat: Don't stop trying; continuing it's like sewing skills. It's important to know how to switch it on and off don't be afraid.

Howdah: At first, I made my own step by step sheet which I use it when on the computer.

Nagat: I did the same thing. The other students were telling me what to do and I wrote these steps down on a piece of paper.

Norrya: It needs practicing and courage. Opening is easy but closing is difficult because the mouse is difficult to control. This frightens you.

Howdah: Don't worry. Ask your daughters and they will help you to open the computer.

(Third Al Lamma discussion on 31st 2008)

In the following section, I present three examples of Libyan women who participated in the *Al Lamma* gatherings, in order to demonstrate the impact of cultural changes that each one of them has experienced, while living in North Manchester. I try to do this by describing how individual Libyan woman with distinctive identities, dealt with new changes such as home computing.

6.7. Individuality and differences

McDowell and Massey (1996:459) argue that 'the spread of capitalist relations of production was also accompanied by other changes. In particular it disrupted the existing relations between women and men. The old patriarchal form of domestic production was torn apart'. In this respect, I am interested to explore how the Libyan women who participated in this study, dealt with changes to men's dominance and position while living in North Manchester. This could be revealing as to what was happening in the domestic space, in that Libyan women's role in this area was important and fundamental. The domestic sphere became an active place for these Libyan women, as the ones who

controlled it, regarding aspects such as; spending, providing food, and arranging social events (Mernissi, 1992; Ridd. 1994; El Solh and Mabro, 1994; Afshar and Maynard, 1994; and Ahmed, 2003). However, the distinction between the public and private spheres has been criticised for its neglect of more subtle and complex differences (Rose, 1994). These differences were clear in the lives of these women as discussed in the following sub-sections 6.7.1, 6.7.2 and 6.7.2.

Access to British communities was an important factor for these Libyan women but at the same time it could become a major problem for them. Graham Huggan (2005: 93-109) argues that the term 'multiculturalism' is about a clash between two 'incompatible discourses', that of modernisation; where all different ethnic communities are part of Britain, and that of an 'integrationlist' approach; one which attempts 'unity-in-diversity' (Cited in Pozanesi and Merolla, 2005). This was apparent with some of participants in the *Al Lamma* gatherings, who retained selective aspects of their Libyan culture, but at the same time they carefully chose which aspects of British society to adopt, by accommodating, negotiating or resisting cultural conflict (Ajrouch and Jamal, 2007; and Dwyer, et al 2008).

Blunt and Rose (1994:6-7) argue that 'the central task for many feminists today is to articulate the extraordinary complex and simultaneous interaction of gender, class, race and sexuality that creates differences between women; the politics of difference with which many feminists are now concerned is not only the politics of difference between two genders, but also the politics of diversity among women'. In the following section I present the three distinctive personae of three women who participated in the *Al Lamma* gatherings: Nadia the modernist integrator, Faheema the compromising negotiator and

Norrya the online socialiser.

6.7.1. The modernist integrator

The impact of internet use on Libyan women's sensitivity towards feminism was apparent in Nadia's responses. She expressed the way her feelings of neglect and worthlessness have changed to that of recognition and equality after she started using the internet and receiving emails at home. Internet use allowed her to feel that she was finally been looked at as a valuable Muslim woman, inside and outside her own community. She reported:

IT affects your personal identity. You are no more a forgotten person. You are not worthless. There are things specially done for me as a Muslim woman and not for men only so you feel you are equal to men. You feel you are modernized and make you a valuable person, a feminist. At the beginning, I felt ashamed because of the negative ideas on using the internet especially in Islamic societies. But now I know it's normal for me to use it. Sometimes it is time consuming. It takes you from your family duties. For women, she may use it to look for silly things like what is the price of that mobile; I am not interested on that! What did that actor wear? This is wrong. There are negative uses of the internet. It's not for entertainment. You can use it for hours with out stopping. Emails can make you know about things you may not necessary be interested in. Emails become your own personal things. You feel you are a valuable person that others send emails to you.

However, there might be initial changes that take place within the boundaries of feminism and the cultural beliefs embedded in Libyan society, as a result of immigrating to a western country. For instance, internet communication among Libyan women who participated in this study became a powerful tool for developing notions of westernised feminism. Their interpretation of feminism as 'emancipator' without necessarily disrupting family values

and a women's role at home was expressed explicitly in Nadia's accounts. She explained how she started to feel equal to *Muslim* men, as well as to feel as a modernised *person*, after living in Manchester and using the internet. She did not describe herself as being equal to *men* or to modernised *women*. She expressed these feelings because she was worried of losing her position and role as a Muslim woman, or of being compared to Western modernised women. Nevertheless, she insisted in referring to her new identity as a modernised Muslim woman rather than just any woman. Her identity shifted towards adopting and selecting from the westernized environment, things that suited her Islamic and cultural values.

Nadia as a mother, also referred to the negative ideas on internet use her community held, that made her feel ashamed in using it, but how being in Manchester was a good chance for her to come through these internal constraints after discovering the positive effects of using the internet. This brings to the surface the possibility of two things happening in the future as a consequent of internet use. First, Nadia's feelings of depression due to her being in this situation might stop her from using the internet, especially if she goes back to Libya. Alternatively, her feelings of deserving could make her encourage other Muslim women, especially her Libyan friends to access the internet.

Aside from that, Nadia mentioned that she had to learn English in order for her to be able to access the internet (and, I would argue, the public space) as well as the work required to become computer literate through enrolling in computer courses. However, living in Manchester for nearly eight years offered a good opportunity for her to start using computers and at the same time be able to improve her English language skills.

Nadia agreed that the internet has special features such as being alive, real, secret, and private, as well as practical and cheap, all making internet communication more usable and useful than the telephone. She used this technology to communicate with her family abroad, enabling social, personal and family interactions to take place during these internet communications. For example, members of her family demonstrated acts of cooperation, support and discussion, which took place when they sat together in front of the computer. Nadia's actions, during such acts, were more concerned with family circumstances and power relations. In other words, she used internet communication as a home activity, to fulfil her social needs and to keep close in her relationships with relatives and friends. Nadia talked about the different informational and educational benefits she gained from internet use. These benefits included planning school lessons, learning English, developing various skills, and studying at home. Internet use gave Nadia the opportunity to enhance her own knowledge and interests while being at home with her family, such as by searching for catalogues about new sewing machines or buying household items online.

6.7.2. The compromising negotiator

Faheema as a housewife represented an example of Libyan women who tend to resist and compromise between modern and traditional ideas and values while living in a westernised country. Firstly, living in such an environment helped Faheema learn new skills independently. She revealed how being in Manchester made her think about her own status and encouraged her to start developing literacy and computer skills. On the other hand, Faheema refused the participants' vision on the future of Libyan housewives who might get a degree, work from home, or do shopping online. She said:

Do you want me to stay home and not to go out? I want to go out and use the computer for finding information only. The internet shopping is for women who work and don't have time to go to the market. I am a housewife and I have a lot of time I want to go to the market. We are not used to it [Internet shopping]. Educated woman knows the privilege of the computer but the illiterate? Women who stay home use computer more. But you [the researcher] have more opportunities. In Libya there was no internet because of the sanctions. Girls aged between 11 and 12 will use it but not us. I have the desire but we will not use it [in Libya]. There are a lot of sites. I use the internet and I wish I can learn English. There should be a computer for you to use only. No to listening to songs online, but I agree to learning cooking, Quran, and languages.

I would argue that this account describes how after living in the United Kingdom, Faheema started to resist her previous status in Libya, which needed her to be at home. This explains why she refused to accept any ideas that could prevent her interaction with the outside public space. At the same time, she seemed to be worried about going back to Libya and loosing her new freedom. This freedom was tailored to her own understandings and needs. She insisted that Libyan families can not go to a Café net because such places present and reflect public and not private spaces such as homes. Faheema also referred to domestic housework as a barrier to computer use at home, and how computers in Libya were used only by educated women but not housewives who have less skill or knowledge about computers and the internet.

Faheema seemed to become a selective woman who tried to situate herself in a new environment but without changing her previous ideas and thus her identity; compromising was a way of adapting to this new environment. Moreover, Faheema accepted certain usages of the internet, such as reciting the Quran or learning English, as culturally appropriate activities for Libyan families in Libya or in the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, she suggested that her generation is not a computer one, but that teenager Libyan girls will

benefit more from computers and internet use when they become women in the future. Faheema's resistance to westernised ideas or values took a compromising as well as a negotiable route.

6.7.3. The online socialiser

Watching her children on the internet provided Norrya an alternative virtual space for connecting with her family in Libya. She was able to witness her first grandson, who was with his mum in Libya, growing step by step online. From his birth until he started walking and saying his first words Norrya was there online, in a sort of virtual space. She explained how her baby grandson accompanied by her daughter used to go to their grandfather's house once a week (usually on Fridays) to talk to her online.

There is voice and image. I felt relaxed. It did solve a problem for me. I am more relived now and I can be less worried about them. Sometimes twice a week or depending on circumstances and different occasions, and when I am not busy, it could be every day. Sometimes it's them and sometimes it's us. They call us on the phone and then we use the internet to call them online. I call them mostly on Fridays when my sisters and my married daughter are in my father's house. I can't stop it, you feel relaxed after using it. If they [her family in Libya] don't see you online that's ok. Our camera was broken but I can still see them and I send photographs to them on the internet using the mobile. Home is safer than outside, my son on the computer at home near me is safer and better than him being outside and I don't know what he is doing there and then.

Norrya's connections with her family online were unique because she did not know how to use the computer or the internet. She sat in front of the computer screen while her children did all the technological procedures, from switching on the computer to starting the live

connections online. Norrya became an online socialiser but without touching or operating the computer and the internet by herself. Her explicit resistance to new changes such as learning English, enrolling in courses or using computers independently became implicit.

After attending the *Al Lamma* gatherings, Norrya was encouraged by other participants to start using the computer independently, and she did. However, Norrya's reactions to the difficulties encountered while living in the United Kingdom, such as the language barrier, made her feel unrecognised as an Arabic woman.

> *But the language is a problem. How can I understand? There must be a language [That I can understand], there are Pakistani interpreters. Language is a problem it distracts and doesn't let you understand. We need as an Arabic community to have interpreters even in hospitals there are all the languages: Japanese, Pakistan (Urdu)… signs are written in all languages except Arabic… there are people who don't know English! Why us? Look at us… in Libya they write things in English.*

Resisting cultural imperialism was also apparent in Norrya's reactions. Arabic usage in the local community was invisible within Norray's surroundings. As a result, she called for more practices of translation and arabicisation. This influenced her feelings about home computing and its potential uses for her family. Norrya felt relaxed when her teenager son, who lived with her in Manchester, stayed at home in front of the computer instead of going outside; the home as a domesticated place with computers and the internet was to her safer than the public, westernised space, outside the home.

To sum up, exploring individuality and differences among Libyan women who participated in this study highlighted the significance of analysing data from a different perspective. It provided alternative reasons for studying women's identities as individuals who at the

same time belong to a collective community. In addition, it revealed that exploring the identities of Muslim women belonging to a marginalized ethnic community, requires interpretations that recognise those women's feelings as an important element for analysing and thus understanding them.

6.8. Conclusion

Writing this chapter opened my eyes to a lot of the things that I could not see when I started doing my research, because initially I wanted to explore my participant's accounts as a collective group only, rather than looking at each one of them as an individual identity. Directing my research to focus on individual accounts helped me realise that belonging to a collective group of women who have a lot of things in common like religion, gender, race and culture, could not prevent each individual woman from adding her own particular perspective and having a personal identity that is distinctive from the others.

However, my intention in presenting my participants as a collective group of women who have certain beliefs relating to Islam, the use of Arabic language, and share customs and traditions; helps readers understand these women's social and cultural situation, as well as their everyday computer practices which they used in fulfilling their emotional and social needs while living away from home. At the same time putting some of my participants into certain categories brought about for me the surprising conclusion that belonging to a collective community did not prevent different individual identities from being included within the Muslim community as a whole, (as long as they did not interfere with certain core values).

In general, this approach of studying Muslim collective groups from a dual perspective; looking at both shared, collective identities and other more individualised identities that are distinctive from each other, could be beneficial if multicultural communities want to fully include each member belonging to a marginalised ethnic community. By doing so, authorities and policy makers might reach to these marginalised groups of women and provide for them the services they need from society, without relying on previous (mis)perceptions of what these groups of women are capable of doing for their families and their larger community.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

7.1. Introduction

In this chapter I revisit the issues I explored in the study as a whole. The theoretical implications of these issues and any practical difficulties are discussed in reference to different factors that have arisen during the process of conducting this study. Firstly in this conclusion, I review the aims and the main questions of this study. I do this by summarising the issues addressed in each chapter and I present the overall conclusion of each chapter separately, in order to highlight the important issues that this study has explored in relation to the displacement and migrant experience of middle class, Libyan women. This exploration is done by focusing on the role of the computer and the internet in sustaining community and family relationships at a distance. This includes all the main themes dealt with in this thesis; the methodological issues, the *Al Lamma* gatherings, computer literacies, power and family relations, and women negotiating cultural conflict. I reflect on the implications of the theoretical issues of this study, to build up a theoretical framework of displacement and the migrant experience of middle class Libyan women, who used the computer and the internet to sustain relationships at a distance.

Secondly, I present the issues that this study has recognised, as centred in the barriers and obstacles to Libyan women's access to home computing, and how home computing and the internet was used as a vehicle for informal learning and self-development. Libyan women's deployment of 'passive resistance' to access home computing and the internet, as well as the contribution of such access to the empowerment of Libyan women are referred to in this section. In addition, the influence of power, culture and religion on family

structures is discussed through a consideration of the conflict and power relations in Libyan families, as well as through the use of feminist ideas within an Islamic framework. Furthermore, this section also reflects on the significance of engaging with virtual realities for children's development and of home computing in sustaining 'real' and 'imagined' community.

Following this, I discuss the practical difficulties that I encountered when conducting this study and their implications on the process of collecting and analysing the data. Reflexive comments about the research process are added to show how the researcher dealt with and felt about cultural and logistical difficulties. Issues related to the process of translating spoken Libyan discussions, by an 'insider' are highlighted.

Finally, I reflect on the overall outcome of this study and consider the various wider implications that the study as a whole offers. I suggest some recommendations for issues that need further investigation or could be a starting point for conducting research in the future.

7.2. Reviewing the aims and questions of the thesis

The main aims of this study were to explore how Libyan women living in Manchester communicated via the internet with others from their communities, in the United Kingdom and in Libya, to investigate the use of computers and the internet as a new literacy practice, with particular significance for marginalized groups, and to contribute to knowledge of literacy practices as an important way in which communities define themselves.

The more specific research questions explored in this study addressed Libyan women's practices of computer literacies in their social context - i.e. in their homes. As a result, the research was concerned with engagement with new technologies in a Western cosmopolitan context, by Libyan women who had come to live in North Manchester with their husbands and children. This led to an investigation into the different types of computer literacies learned and practiced by the women at home as a social activity, and who was included or excluded from acquiring and using these types of computer literacies. The study also presented certain feelings that were associated with using computers and the internet among the Libyan women community in North Manchester. In addition, family relationships based on unequal power, greatly shaped the different uses of computer literacy by immigrant Libyan women as well as other members of their families. Finally, the study showed how the participants of this study were able to negotiate cultural conflict while living in North Manchester as immigrant Libyan women.

However, this study also addressed new issues that were not referred to in the initial research questions, such as; the significance of engaging with virtual realities for children's development, the role of home computing in sustaining 'real' and 'imagined' community, and the acquisition of feminist ideas within an Islamic framework. In other words, the research process raised new questions that need to be explored further in future studies and which I will address at the end of this thesis.

7.3. Summary of issues addressed in the thesis

In this section, I present a summary of issues and challenges that I encountered when conducting this research, from starting a preliminary study to writing the final report.

7.3.1. Methodological issues

The overall approach of the study, the methodological framework, and the analytical framework, were the main factors focused on when discussing the methodological issues of this study. First, this study explained the reason for selecting an ethnographic case study approach, and the process by which this was used; through exploring the 'case' used in this study, setting the boundaries around the 'case', and discussing strengths and weaknesses of the 'case' in question. In addition, the significance of the ethnographic principles for this case study, my position as a 'participant observer', as well as the way this study became a feminist ethnographic case study, were highlighted and discussed in detail.

Secondly, the methodological framework addressed the research questions, design of the study, the participants, and the research methods. Moreover, important research methods used in this study, such as the *Al Lamma* gathering process, and issues of language and translation, were discussed as a starting point for a more detailed explanation in the chapter that followed this.

Finally, the analytic framework was discussed in two parts. The first part described grounded theory methods with reference to a discussion based on a preliminary study, followed by a critical reflection on the initial exploratory study, and showed how analytic categories were generated from *Al Lamma* discussions. The second part explored reflexivity by a Muslim feminist researcher, which led to discussing researching/non-researching Libyan men's spaces, as well as researching the emotional spaces of the women who participated in this study.

In all, the methodological framework of the present study showed the significance of

culture and language for conducting an ethnographic case study by feminist researchers, especially by those who can be considered 'insiders'. This method allowed me to explore the use and significance of home computers in an immigrant community of Libyan women who had accompanied their husbands to the United Kingdom. Some comments about questions of specificity and generality in relation to conducting a qualitative study, such as the present one, were also discussed in this chapter.

7.3.2. *Al Lamma* gatherings

The importance and the implications of using *Al Lamma* gatherings as a focus group method for collecting qualitative data for this study, and the reason for studying Libyan women and not men, were discussed in detail in Chapter 3, which dealt specifically with these *Al Lamma* gatherings. The advantages of utilising existing social practices so that researchers can analyse their own practices, were explained with reference to these *Al Lamma* gatherings. The *Al Lamma* gatherings were more practical and sensitive for myself as researcher to research, and thus helped to build a distinctive approach that was both like and unlike focus group methods. In addition, being an 'insider' researcher assisted my readings of the participants' experiences expressed during the *Al Lamma* gatherings, which had their own distinctive cultural and traditional features. However, these cultural issues also reduced the possibility of interacting with or researching Libyan men's spaces. As a result the study used the participants' accounts as lenses for attending to some of the men's activities within Libyan women's domestic spaces.

Gender and space in Libyan women's everyday practices was described in relation to their domestic space in North Manchester. My own position as a Muslim immigrant Libyan woman was described in order to highlight some of the main advantages and disadvantages

of researching my own community. One of the main challenges I encountered was translating *Al Lamma* gatherings discussions from Libyan Arabic into English. Therefore, I presented examples of explicit analysis that I conducted during the process of translating discussions from the *Al Lamma* gatherings, and discussed my attempts at creating a culturally mediated translation. Finally, the women's talk and their different styles of interaction, in addition to my own fieldwork notes, were clarified and explored during the analysis of these *Al Lamma* discussions. The analysis yielded several major themes that were grouped under three main topics which formed three chapters of this thesis.

7.3.3. Home computing activities

Computer literacy use as a home activity was an interpretation of the responses of Libyan women who lived in North Manchester as a transnational immigrant community. The study described computer literacy practiced by women with different levels of education, who were also housewives within a domesticated space. The computer literacy practices of these Libyan women included calling family members in Libya, reciting the Quran, learning English, exploring Arabic cooking, or reading e-mails online. Such interactions did not prevent Libyan women's off-line interactions, but instead appeared to enhance them by providing new online spaces for communication and information exchange with their home country. However, Libyan women faced different types of barriers and obstacles to their access and use of home computing. Most of these difficulties were related to the women's limited English or computer skills, and to the lack of financial recourses or lack of time to spend online. The women used similar strategies to solve these difficulties, such as using home computing as a vehicle for informal learning and self-development. The women and their children practiced computer activities that were influenced by power relationships and gender issues. As a result, the women in this study

started to develop a unique mode of engaging in online interactions without challenging their own positions as Muslim mothers.

Home computing and internet use, helped the Libyan women in the study to develop their cultural identity as Muslim mothers living in a Westernised context. As mothers, they overcame their feelings and emotions relating to home computing and internet use. Their feelings ranged from feelings of 'fear' or 'jealousy', to feelings of 'equality' and 'respect'. The change and development in their feelings and identities as Muslim mothers was reflected and related to their computer literacy practices. Centrally, it was argued that computer communication and interaction can be a powerful tool for developing feminist ideas within an Islamic framework.

7.3.4. Family computing and power relations

The study explored the role of Libyan parents in the domestic space and looked at the different forms of adult-child relationships that took place in these Libyan families. It addressed the support they provided to each other in a situation where children were often more expert than their mothers in computer use. The relationships between these parents and their children continued to be important and appeared to be influenced by uses of home computing and the internet. Power, culture and religion greatly influenced Libyan family practices around these activities. Therefore, literature on family theories, social studies of childhood, and adult-child relationships were discussed and referred to in this study. This literature informed my own analysis of family conflict and its relation to power relations in Libyan families in North Manchester, and as reflected in the use of home computers, as discussed in Chapter 5. Home computing and its implications for children's development, particularly in relation to engaging with virtual realities, were one of the

interesting issues found in this study. Social isolation and 'techno-phobia' were discussed in relation to computer use in the home as practiced by family members, who supported each other to reduce their fear and isolation.

7.3.5. Women negotiating cultural conflict

This study considered issues of collective versus individual identity. This helped me to highlight that belonging to a group of women who had many things in common such as religion, gender; race and culture, did not necessarily prevent distinctive and individual identities from being expressed. By presenting the participants of the present study as a Muslim collective group, the study helped to increase an understanding of Libyan women's social and cultural situation, as well as of their everyday computer practices. The research therefore took account of the women as members of a particular group, yet still belonging to their collective Muslim community. Studying Muslim Libyan women groups as having a distinct cultural identity, as well as addressing individualised identities that were distinctive from each other is, I suggest, beneficial for understanding multicultural communities in the United Kingdom. Authorities and policy makers might be enabled to reach to such marginalised groups of Libyan women and provide for them the services they need from society, without relying only on previous perceptions of what other ethnic groups of women are capable of doing for their families or their larger community.

7.4. Wider implications of the study

In this section, I highlight some significant general issues that this study was able to identify, through the exploration of the role of home computing and the social, religious and leisure benefits this offered to Libyan women and their families. I argue that these

issues can contribute to a framework for understanding displacement as experienced by an under-represented group of migrant women, and their practices around home computing and internet use.

7.4.1. Barriers and obstacles to Libyan women's access to home computing

The Libyan women in this study were able to overcome different types of difficulties which acted as barriers and obstacles to their access to home computing. These women and members of their families used computers and the internet to keep connected with relatives and friends in Libya and, at the same time, to increase their knowledge and educate themselves. Family communication online and computer education was an essential key for making Libyan women less afraid of using computers at home. This type of communication helped these women understand that barriers to computer use, such as English ability, financial difficulties or technical problems, should not leave them full of guilt or stop them from using computers. Instead, they accessed computers and the internet in their own distinctive ways. In addition, the support these women received from their children and husbands, as well as from each other helped them overcome many of these barriers when they started using computers in their homes independently.

Belonging to a traditional conservative community, Libyan women and above all their husbands controlled home computing and internet use. The negativity that surrounded computers and the internet due to religious issues was a major obstacle that prevented women and their children from using online activities. Nevertheless, these protective immigrant parents preferred even their sons to stay home and go online instead of being outside the home. They were willing to allow their children less controlled time and space at home, but not outside their home. As a result family conflicts related to using computers

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at home started to be part of their everyday lives.

7.4.2. Home computing as a vehicle for informal learning and self-development

Home computing allowed the Libyan women in this study to learn how to use new technologies within their domestic space, in an informal way which was done independently or with the support of others. Learning informally was an appropriate and practical activity that allowed Libyan women to adapt to changes in their new environment. Collaboration, encouragement and co-operation were important factors that coloured Libyan women's learning spaces in North Manchester. Crucially, they shared their personal learning experiences with each other. Such practices boosted the women's self-esteem and confidence which they needed for developing computer skills and knowledge.

7.4.3. Women's deployment of passive resistance to access home computing

Deployment of passive resistance in order to secure access to home computing and the social and leisure goods that it offers to Libyan women, involved acts of negotiating western culture. As a marginalised group of immigrant women who belong to a Muslim collective community, they had to fulfil their social, emotional and moral needs while living away from home. They started to adapt and adopt from western society what suited their life style and beliefs. They followed a selective process of choosing things that were appropriate and accepted within their whole community. However, these women persisted in using computers and the internet even with all the negativity associated with online activities. They managed to apply different kings of negotiations with the host country after discovering the social, educational and emotional benefits that came from using

computers and the internet.

7.4.4. New spaces of empowerment for Libyan women

Libyan women's empowerment within transnational immigrant families and among marginalised groups in the United Kingdom was an important issue that emerged from the present study. However, women's empowerment required change which Libyan immigrant women were often afraid of, in that such change related to the possibility of changing their cultural identity.

Spaces of empowerment were formed when Libyan women began to transform their domestic spaces into places of empowerment, by increasing their knowledge through informal learning and self-development. They increased their connection with the public environment through learning English online and off-line, and by starting to access computers and the internet in order to benefit from the social, religious and educational services that they offer.

7.4.5. Conflict and power relations in Libyan families in Manchester

Conflict and power relations in Libyan families as reflected in access and use of home computers helps our understandings of family conflict and relationships within the Libyan immigrant community in North Manchester. The power relations between parents and their children and between siblings were clear and apparent in these families, in that power, culture and religion greatly influenced these Libyan family structures. Most of these power relations conform to Islamic rules and regulations such as obeying and respecting older members of the family, and following family obligations and duties. However, the role of

power shifted between members of these immigrant families, specifically after Libyan children took the role of experts and taught their parents English language and computer skills. The children gained control when they advanced beyond their parents technically, and this suggested an increase in the children's power, considering that 'controllability, especially over the solutions to problems implies power' (Gonzalez-Prendes and Thomas, 2011:2). On the other hand, women as mothers may have felt powerless and frustrated in this situation, which points to the possibility for conducting further research on 'powerlessness' in middle class migrant families.

7.4.6. The acquisition of feminist ideas within an Islamic framework

Feminist ideas were considered, understood and applied in this study in relation to Islamic rules and regulations. This was achieved through the focus on feminist ideas that Islam also values and considers important for Muslim women and their families, such as; valuing women's lives, feelings, beliefs and knowledge. This includes granting power and freedom to women to become collaborative and productive citizens, but not necessarily as understood in western societies. In other words, hierarchical relations which feminists fight against become accepted in Islam in specific situations, such as wives asking permission from their husbands before leaving home and going to different places. Also, women's space is influenced by gender divisions, and every day practices and times are divided and influenced by Islamic practices and rituals such as praying times.

This study has addressed only topics that are suitable and acceptable for open and public discussions within Islamic communities. These included exploring power, gender, family obligations, language and knowledge. Consequently, the researcher escaped the 'feminist ethnographic paradox', through the use of feminist principles while following Islamic

values. The researcher, as a Muslim feminist ethnographer, tried not to come into conflict with what is suitable or acceptable for public presentation within her community. Instead, the researcher applied her subjectivity to select topics which were regarded as taboo to be excluded from the data, and the whole ethnographic 'truth' was therefore not revealed. On the other hand, this did not prevent the researcher from attending to the special, temporal, cultural, social, and political factors that affected the everyday practices of the Libyan women who participated in the study.

7.4.7. The significance of engaging with virtual realities for children's development

Children's engagement with virtual realities due to the use of online activities such as live video-calling and online games has important implications for children's development. Such engagement was essential because children learn through their engagement with the object world, but when they go online they may or may not become aware of what is real and fantasy. However, immigrant children used live video-calling to communicate with their family members at a distance, and they built social relationships online. As a result, the implications of online and off-line engagements with the virtual and real world for children's development became interrelated.

7.4.8. The role of home computing in sustaining real and 'imagined' community

Anderson's (2006) notion of 'imagined communities' offers, I have argued, a qualitative way of describing and understanding Libyan immigrant women's connections and communications with their families and friends over long distances. Family duties and obligations forced these women as well as their families abroad, to use home computing to keep connected with each other and their community in Libya. New technologies such as

computers and the internet facilitated women's connections to their children and family relatives in Libya by providing emotional support and assurance. Libyan women and their families wanted information about what was happening to their relatives and friends in Libya. As a result, Libyan families in North Manchester started to become transnational families who felt physically distant and isolated from home. Consequently, they projected an image of an 'ideal migrant family' that did not physically exist in North Manchester but instead existed as an 'imagined' community. They used home computing to assure and value their family membership, and to be included within their 'real' community in Libya as well as in this 'imagined' community.

7.5. Emotional and practical implications

My own feelings as a researcher, and particularly my feelings of anxiety, had implications for the conduct of this research. Some authors have argued that face-to-face contact with real people generates much more intense feelings than numbers, and that reflecting on these emotions or feelings could be reframed in a more inclusive way (Bondi, 2005: 233). As a result, the anxiety I felt as a researcher could be explored further in order to find out the different reasons behind such feelings. One of the reasons for the anxiety felt by the researcher in the present study was switching roles from a participant to a 'participant observer', and then to that of a researcher, (and switching back to take the other roles, but not necessary in a linear order). Such exchanges of roles made me feel worried about being more or less present and included in the participants' accounts, but at the same time, not leaving enough space for participants to narrate their own stories during the *Al Lamma* gatherings. The feeling of anxiety became intense when the translation process took place. The participants' identities as well as the researcher's became invisible after their accounts were not represented in their own language. I argue that the problem of such representation

was not only related to the implications of translating the *Al Lamma* transcripts from spoken Libyan Arabic to written English, but also due to the difficulties of representing culture, customs, and traditions between different ethnic communities (as discussed in Chapter3).

The times of meetings, getting the participants to attend, changing the participants' names, controlling the discussions, and not being able to transcribe all the recorded data, were some of the practical difficulties encountered in the process of conducting the present study. These difficulties were discussed in the previous chapters in detail and might be useful for other researchers. In the following section, I present my recommendation for some important issues in this study that could be explored further as well as other topics that could form a starting point for new studies.

7.6. Implications for future research, teaching and policy making

This study has presented a predominantly positive story of migrant experiences. These stories were experienced and lived in a minority culture, at a time when computers and the internet are changing the world. The engagement with such technologies took culturally specific forms which could form the basis of further research or teaching. For example, the engagement with home computing could have applications for classroom teaching or designing effective courses online. Knowing more about the way Libyan women engage with home computing, how they are motivated, support each other and fulfil their needs, is important for understanding their experiences. As immigrant Libyan women, they have clearly expressed that they have a diversity of needs and identities.

The women participants in this study were able to access and exchange different types of information in an informal way, which was free and suited Libyan women's lifestyles. This study could therefore inform the design of online courses suited to the needs of such women. Designing culturally tailored courses can provide online interactions for specific groups of women, without putting them in a pedagogical learning context. Such courses would recognise that women can find ways of meeting a need that they are interested in, such as reading blogs or watching films online, not only for qualifications but so as to increase creativity.

One of the features of family culture among immigrants is the need to be deeply connected to their own 'home' culture. This study showed how western technology such as computers and the internet can facilitate such connectivity. Such technology has the potential to enable families to engage in social, religious and traditional activities online as well as enabling generations to speak to each other and maintain relationships at distance. Keeping in contact with their home culture continues to be a mode of support for immigrant families. Therefore it is important for young immigrants who live away from home but want to stay connected to family and in contact with their 'home' culture, to use home computing and the internet as a powerful tool in aiding this. However, I have also noted in previous chapters that being in a western country can create problems of alienation on returning to one's 'home' country, due to having become accustomed to treating yourself in a different way that keeps your identity as an immigrant while trapped in a western social world.

The importance of exploring how middle class immigrant Libyan women develop empowering strategies and passive resistance, in order to secure access to home computing

and to sustain relationships at a distance, is a topic that could be explored in more depth. I suggest that to get a true understanding of such strategies, research involving immigrant Libyan women or other under-represented groups must include attention to social, cultural and religious factors. The focus of such research could be on informal learning and self-development among Libyan immigrant women in particular, but could also be applied to other minorities and marginalised immigrant groups in the United Kingdom or in the wider world.

As a qualitative study, this study has the potential to help educators and policy makers to develop culturally appropriate strategies to support marginalised groups, such as Libyan women and other minorities, to integrate into British society. This could be done by providing services that better fulfil the particular needs and the abilities of different groups. As a result, immigrant Libyan women and other marginalised groups in British society could be granted greater access to empowering resources such as education, employment and income. Education, employment and empowerment in relation to middle class immigrant women from under-represented groups in the United Kingdom, could itself be an important issue for further investigation in future studies.

This study suggests that the British Government needs to change the raced procedures used to put immigrant women together in specific groups according to their religion, race, language or ethnicity. Instead, another dimension should be added to their method of grouping these women; recognizing that these women as individuals have different and distinctive identities even when belonging to the same collective community. Each of these distinctive identities requires specific understandings and support from the British Government so that each immigrant woman can positively integrate with the host society.

One possibility would be to develop a policy of "Every Woman Matters", and to stop relating to them in such limited terms as only being Asian, Muslim, European, African, Arabic or Polish, etc. Such crude categories currently provide one of the main tools used for discriminating between different immigrant women. Such women should be seen as able to integrate, and accommodate or even resist Western culture – capacities which seem to limit the services provided by the Government in fulfilling their everyday needs. In this respect, the relationship between Muslim women's awareness of feminism and internet use, and internet use as a powerful home tool for changing Muslim women's attitudes toward feminism, could be explored in relation to middle class migration. In addition, gender relationships and internet use, the internet as a tool of empowerment, women's resistance strategies and internet use, and internet communication and home studying, are all important issues for further research.

Analysing conflict and power relations reveals the day to day resistance of immigrant women as reflected in access to, and use of, home computing and other practices. However, there are other types of resistance practiced by women which are often invisible and could challenge traditional gendered roles. There are also new forms of passive resistance which lead to the formation of new groups of women and involve different types of negotiations. In this respect, there is a need for looking at women's deployment of passive resistance in order to develop an understanding of the role of conflict among marginalised groups, as well as how they can be included within mainstream society. Moreover, according to Al Odah (2010), opening religious dialogue between people of different beliefs could be successful when the 'other' is not excluded, and the existence of differences is accepted. Such dialogue needs to be based on understanding and

communicating with other religious groups, especially within marginalised or immigrant communities, with the aim of accepting them as members of the host society. The focus should be on encouraging religious discussions which break boundaries and bring communities together.

Ideas about childhood inform our understanding of particular spaces, in that 'parents' temporal and special tactics to control children's activities in cyberspace bear some similarities with practices that they adopt in public space' (Holloway and Valentine, 2003:88). Therefore there are some key issues that need to be explored further, including:

- relations between children and adults

- relations between different individuals/groups

- relations of children with the objects that surround them

This might be achieved by studying children within the disciplines that deal with the social studies of childhood as well as children's geographies (Holloway and Valentine, 2003:157). According to Holloway and Valentine (2003:158), 'the material and ideological consequences of this dialectical relation between our spatialised ideas of childhood and the socio-spatial practices surrounding childhood warrant further academic attention.' I argue that further to this, there should also be such studies on children of immigrant families or transnational families.

Researching the role of the English language in creating hierarchies of knowledge and power among researchers is particularly significant in academia. Language becomes a significant component of identity in that researchers need to reflect on the implications of researching speakers of other languages, as well as on the process of translation and

representation in such research. Moreover, familiarity with other languages can create spaces for dialogue between researchers who speak different languages but face similar questions and issues over translation or representation. More attention could be aimed at organizing specific workshops or conferences in research degree training, on issues of translation.

Finally, this study has identified the need for research methodologies specifically designed for working with Libyan women, and for a greater volume of literature on the migration of Libyan women. This research has also opened new opportunities for conducting studies on the under-researched area of middle class migration. In addition, while national identity in education is beginning to be recognised, there is a lack of attention to culture and social identity in individuals who belong to specific ethnicities. We can enhance an appreciation of differences by teaching about different social arrangements and cultures in the education system. Equally, some of the findings of the present study can be used to inform global studies of women's migration, such as that in the United States of America. Facer (2011:90) states that 'online spaces are becoming increasingly important places where we can explore what it means to live with other people'. I have argued in this thesis that online spaces are becoming important places where we can explore what it means to live with other people in a transnational world.

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