# UCL Institute of Education

# Reading and writing across transnational space

## An exploration of literacy and learning in the lives of a group of migrant domestic workers

Thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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## Declaration

I, Amy Orianna North, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signed:

# Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the literacy practices and learning experiences of a group of female migrant domestic workers from Nepal and India, who, between June 2008 and July 2011, attended an informal learning support group at the Migrant Resource Centre, London. It reports on the analysis of ethnographic data collected over this period through the observation of group sessions, the recording of texts, and life history interviews. Drawing on insights from the New Literacy Studies and the conceptualisation of literacy as a social practice, the thesis explores the values and meanings that these women attach to literacy and their literacy learning. In particular, it examines the way in which their emerging literacy practices in English affect and are affected by the dislocations and tensions that, as migrant domestic workers, they experience as they move and make connections between different transnational spaces. In doing so it engages with and contributes to recent debates within literacy research regarding the relationship between the global and the local and the need to pay closer attention to theorising and understanding the global – or transcontextual – as well as the local dynamics of literacy practices. It argues that understanding the transnational nature of the women's lives, and the way in which their literacy practices interact with processes of power and agency as they navigate across different contexts, is essential to understanding their engagement with different forms of literacy learning and the complex ways in which literacy is threaded through their social and material practices. The analysis that is developed throughout the thesis suggests a need for a more complex conceptualisation of context and of the relationship between the local and global within literacy research which pays attention to the way in which literacy practices may interact with processes entailing, movement, connection and disconnection between transnational spaces.

# Acknowledgements

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## Acronyms

**ESOL**: English for Speakers of Other Languages

**ILO**: International Labour Organization

**MRC**: Migrant Resource Centre

**UNESCO**: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

# Chapter 1: Introduction

*My employer asked how I learnt so many languages if I can't read and write. She said she has to write things down to remember. She uses her computer all the time. I told her "my brain is like a computer".*

**Sudha - 250809**

Sudha[1] is a migrant domestic worker from Nepal who, between 2008 and 2011, participated in an informal literacy learning support group, together with other domestic workers from Nepal and India, at the Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) in London. When I met Sudha in 2008 she was living and working in London and trying to learn to read and write for the first time. Like the other members of the group, all of whom had little or no formal schooling, she had left home at a young age in order to find employment as a domestic worker and so had not had an opportunity to attend school in Nepal or to develop literacy skills in Nepalese.

This thesis is concerned with the literacy practices and learning experiences of Sudha and the other women in the group. Drawing on ethnographic data collected between 2008 and 2013, it examines the values and meanings that these women attach to literacy, their literacy practices and their literacy learning in English. In doing so, it considers the ways in which their engagement with particular forms of literacy and learning affect and are affected by their relationships with others and their individual and collective experiences as migrant domestic workers moving between different spaces.

As migrant domestic workers, the women in the group form part of a growing body of migrant women: according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), women make up approximately half of the world's 215 million migrants (ILO, 2015). A substantial number of these women are employed as domestic workers: of the estimated 53 million domestic workers worldwide, 83 per cent are women (ibid). Often originally from the global South, these women work – and often live – in the private households of wealthy families as housekeepers, nannies, cooks and carers.

The experiences of migrant domestic workers have been widely researched, with studies often pointing to the complex nature of the asymmetrical (and gendered) relations of power and dependency that exist between female workers and their employers, and the long working hours and vulnerability to abuse and exploitation that are often entailed (see, for example, Bridget Anderson, 2000; Briones, 2009; Cox, 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007; Lutz, 2008; Parreñas, 2001). Many of these studies have focused on the experiences of migrant women with relatively high levels of education who, as a result of migration and entering domestic work, experience processes of downward mobility (see, for example, Abrantes, 2012; Ismail, 1999; Lutz, 2011,

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[1]To protect the anonymity of participants all names used are pseudonyms

2008; Pratt, 1999). Far fewer studies however, have engaged with the experiences of migrant women like those in this research, who have little or no formal education. Moreover, while a small body of work has considered the way in which migrant domestic workers engage with literacy or experiences of learning (for example, Cuban, 2007; Rao, 2011; Rockhill, 1993), this area remains relatively underexplored. In examining how the women's literacy practices and engagement with literacy learning affect and are affected by their experiences as migrant domestic workers, this research therefore makes a useful contribution to the literature on migrant domestic work. Moreover, in focusing on the literacy practices of the women, and the way in which they draw on them as they navigate between and across transnational spaces, and negotiate the tensions and dislocations that their experiences of migration for domestic work entail, it also engages with, and contributes to, emerging areas of debate within literacy studies.

Literacy, what it means, and what it does, has long been debated within the literature. By focusing on the women's own constructions of what literacy means for them, and how these interact with the broader social world which they inhabit, this research approaches literacy from the perspective of literacy as a social practice which is associated with the 'New Literacy Studies'. It thus draws on an 'ideological' model of literacy (Street, 1984), which in contrast to 'autonomous' models that view literacy as a neutral technical skill, emphasises the way in which literacy practices are embedded in relations of power and social and cultural values (Street, 1984, 1994, 1993). In doing so, it situates itself within a body of literature which has examined women's literacy as a gendered social practice, often using ethnographic research to explore the experiences of literacy learners, many of whom are women, in developing country contexts (see, for example, Chopra, 2004; Kalman, 2005; Robinson-Pant, 2001). Such studies have examined the complex interactions between gender, literacy, and development, and problematised the assumed relationship between women's literacy and empowerment by considering the way in which literacy practices are embedded within particular social and cultural contexts, and the relations of power they bring with them. In doing so, they have revealed the way in which the uses, values and meanings associated with literacy are contingent on the local context in which they are situated.

However, while much of this ethnographic research has emphasised the primacy of the local context in shaping literacy practices, over the last decade there has been an increasing concern with understanding the global as well as the local dynamics of literacy, particularly in the context of globalisation. In 2002, Brandt and Clinton argued that the New Literacy Studies has tended to exaggerate the extent to which local contexts are determinate in defining the meaning and forms that literacy takes (Brandt & Clinton, 2002). Since then, a number of influential commentators from within the New Literacy Studies have engaged explicitly with a concern with the relationship between the local and the global in literacy practices. In doing so, they have pointed to the value in considering processes of movement between contexts when studying literacy practices, and called for research to examine this empirically (see, for example, Baynham & Prinsloo, 2009; Pahl & Rowsell, 2006; Reder & Davila, 2005; Street, 2004a, 2012).

This research contributes to this endeavour by examining the literacy practices of women who as migrant domestic workers, move and make connections between different global or transnational spaces. All of the women in the case study group for this research, during the period of time over which I collected my data, were living and working in London, mostly in private households for international employers. Many had worked in other countries, including India, Hong Kong, Spain and Dubai before coming to the UK. Meanwhile they maintained close links to family and friends in their home communities, as well as in a range of other countries around the globe. They also participated in social gatherings with others from Nepal – particularly friends from their own Tamang community – in the UK, and went to English classes attended by other domestic workers from a range of different countries. My analysis suggests that understanding the transnational nature of the women's lives, and the different ways in which they are able to position themselves, negotiate identities, and exercise agency as they navigate across contexts, in which they experience different opportunities and constraints, is essential to understanding their engagement with different forms of learning and the complex ways in which literacy is threaded through their social and material practices. My exploration of the way in which literacy plays out in these women's lives as they negotiate the dislocations and tensions that their experiences as transmigrants and as domestic workers entail thus highlights the transnational – or transcontextual – dynamics of their literacy practices. In doing so it suggests a value in developing a more complex conceptualisation of context within literacy research in order to understand the way in which literacy practices may interact with processes that involve movement, connection, and distancing, between and across transnational spaces.

## Origins of the research

This research emerged as result of my collaboration with the MRC over a number of years. The MRC, which is based near Victoria in London, is a centre which is open to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to receive advice, learn English or computer skills, meet with others, and come together to share ideas and concerns about issues that affect them. It has also been involved in campaigns and advocacy work which seeks to influence policy to improve the lives of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and ensure that their rights are protected[2].

Between 2007 and 2011 I collaborated with the MRC in various ways. When I initially approached the MRC offering to collaborate with them, they asked me whether, drawing on my background in research and advocacy, I could support them with some of their policy work. Part of this work involved participating in advocacy workshops, which focused on migrant experiences of integration, and which were linked to wider research and campaigning in this area (see, North & Cheetham, 2008). These workshops, which were held at the MRC, were mainly attended by women. While literacy was not an intended focus of the workshops, during discussions it often emerged as a critical issue affecting the lives of many of the participants in different ways. While some participants clearly had very advanced literacy skills in several

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[2]For more information about the work of the MRC see http://www.migrantsresourcecentre.org.uk/

languages, others found reading and writing difficult. Some women used the opportunity provided by the workshops to bring in letters or documents that they wanted help reading, understanding or responding to. Others asked me for help in filling in the workshop evaluation and equal opportunities forms as they found the literacy demands associated with these difficult. As the workshops progressed, I became increasingly interested in understanding the apparently complex ways in which the women attending the MRC engaged with and sought to develop skills in literacy in English, when this was not a first language for any of them. As I result, I spoke with staff at the MRC about ways in which I could engage with activities that had literacy as a direct concern.

These discussions led me to start working with the MRC under the mentor scheme, which pairs people wanting to improve their skills in English, with volunteers who are able to help them. Although often the migrants participating in this scheme are concerned with improving their spoken or conversational English, for some literacy is a particular concern. I worked with a number of different people under this scheme, and was introduced to Sudha, Priya and Nhanu, the original members of the group on which this research was based in June 2007. Initially my involvement with Sudha, Priya, Nhanu and other members of the group was based on the provision of literacy learning support only, and was not associated with a research agenda. However as I began to work with the women I was struck by the richness of their experiences and reflections and the complexity of the ways in which they engaged with literacy and with their learning. I realised that there was a value in documenting these experiences and analysing them further. In discussion with the women themselves, I therefore developed the research that is presented in this thesis. My initial experiences with the group were therefore the inspiration for this research, and the group members are its central focus.

While the research presented here stems directly from my involvement with the MRC, and in particular from my work with Sudha, Priya, Nhanu and others in the group under the mentor scheme, its development was also informed by my wider interests and my background of working on issues relating to gender, education and adult learning. Over the last fifteen years I have been involved in both activism and research concerned with the promotion of gender equality, women's rights and social justice in a number of different countries. This has, for example, included work with young women activists in Central America, and involvement in a number of research projects concerned with gender, schooling and global education policy, particularly in relation to sub-Saharan Africa. Although the focus of this thesis is distinct from these other areas of work and research, it draws on a number of ideas and themes articulated through them. These relate in particular to a concern with the ways in which people and ideas travel and make – or don't make - connections across spaces, and to a concern with understanding processes of women's empowerment (see, for example, North, 2010; Unterhalter & North, 2010, 2011a, 2011b).

## The research focus

The process of identifying my research focus and developing my research questions was an iterative one. My original research interests, and the questions that related to these, were formed as I started working with the group and documented my observations from our group sessions. As I got to know the group better, developed my reflections on my and their practices within our sessions, and engaged more deeply with the relevant literature, I returned to these questions, and refined and added to them. My initial research questions were thus quite descriptive in nature. They were concerned with understanding how the women engaged with different forms of literacy practice, what meanings and values they attached to these, and how they affected and were affected by, their lived experiences as migrant workers. As I learnt more about the women's lives, as they told me about the households in which they worked, their connections to family back at home, and their experiences of work in different countries before coming to London, I was struck by the very global or transnational nature of their experiences[3] and the ways in which these played out in their relationships with literacy and learning. Meanwhile my engagement with the literature regarding literacy as a social practice highlighted the significance of debates regarding understanding the relationship between the global and the local for the theorisation of literacy. It therefore seemed important to include a specific concern with the transnational nature of the women's lives and practices, and the implications of this for understanding literacy as a situated local practice at the conceptual level, within my research questions.

My final research questions which gave shape to my overall analysis as presented in this thesis therefore were as follows:

1.      How, and in what spaces do the women in the case study group engage with different forms of literacy practice and negotiate the forms of literacy they want to acquire and use?

      i) What meanings and values do they attach to literacy, "being literate" and their own literacy practices?

      ii)  How do these relate to the way in which, as migrant women they move between different local and global or transnational spaces?

2.      How do their literacy practices affect, and how are they affected by, their interactions with others and their position in relation to family, friends and employers?

3.      What is the impact of this on their lived experiences as migrant women/migrant domestic workers?

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[3] This relates not only to the way in which they have lived and worked in different countries but also to the nature of the households within which they live and worked – their employers are often 'international' living in countries which are not those from which they originate - and to the way in which they interact with transnational networks of other migrants from Nepal and other countries.

4.      What are the implications of the women's engagement with literacy for the conceptualisation of context and the relationship between the local, global and transnational in literacy research?

In developing my research I was aware that the transnational nature of the women's experiences, and the fact that English was not their first language, meant that their engagement with literacy had translingual, as well as transcontextual, dynamics. However, the nature of the English literacy support sessions through which I engaged with the women, and the fact that English was the common language that we shared as a group, meant that their literacy practices, texts and experiences in English were those to which I had most access. Therefore, although my analysis includes some reflection on aspects of the women's literacy practices in other languages, in responding to my research questions through this thesis my main focus has been on the women's literacy practices in English.

## Methodological approach

My overarching methodological approach was qualitative, interpretivist and constructivist, and  I drew on ethnographic tools, in particular participant observation and life history interviews, in order to explore the way in which the migrant women in the group engage with literacy within the group sessions and in their lives more broadly.

The main focus of my data collection was the literacy support sessions themselves, which I documented through detailed observation notes and the recording and documentation of texts and resources. Over the period of the research I documented a total of sixty-three sessions in this way.

In framing my data collection in relation to these sessions I drew on the notion of the literacy event as a methodological and analytical tool (Heath, 1983; Moss, 2007). I consider that the literacy support sessions I ran comprised literacy events, understood as time bound moments in which "the role literacy plays in the immediate social interactions between participants becomes available for study" (Moss, 2007, p. 40), and which involve interactions between participants around texts. These occurred in a particular context:  the women came together specifically for literacy support, the sessions took place in a small classroom or meeting room and in a centre offering a range of educational (and other support) services to members of migrant communities. However the way in which the content of literacy learning that took place within sessions was negotiated between the different participants, meant other contexts – and discussion of other events – were brought into the session space, as participants shared updates about friends and family from their communities back home, discussed their working lives and relationships with employers, or brought in texts from outside the sessions which they wanted me to help them read or respond to. This meant that although I was unable to directly observe literacy practices in their daily lives outside these sessions, by analysing the interactions that occurred within sessions, and, in doing so, attempting to trace the connections between observed literacy events in the sessions and other related events discussed by the women, it became possible to piece together a more complete picture of their engagement with

literacy beyond the group space. The group sessions thus provided an opportunity not only to examine the women's engagement with literacy within the specific context of the group itself, but also to try and understand how this linked to the wider, shifting, contexts of the women's lives, and the ways in which they encountered and drew on literacy as they moved between different transnational spaces. Meanwhile, conducting interviews and collecting more detailed life-history data with selected group members, enabled me to situate their current literacy practices within the broader contexts of their life experiences both in the UK and in Nepal.

My active role in working with the women as a teacher/mentor supporting their learning, as well as researcher was central to informing the shape my research took. It affected the way in which I collected my data, as rather than taking on the role of a silent observer I was actively involved in shaping the sessions themselves. It also meant that I had to be particularly alert to ensuring that I was attentive to the ethical complexities of combining research and practice, particularly with regard to concerns around consent. Finally it affected my approach to working with my data: while my central focus throughout the thesis was on the experiences and practices of the women in the group, my analysis inevitably also includes reflections on my own practice.

My research is focused on a relatively small number of participants: a total of eleven women attended group sessions over the course of the research, and of these a core of eight attended on repeated occasions and form the case study group for the research. I do not presume the experiences of these participants to be representative of all migrant domestic workers, or even all Nepalese migrant domestic workers living and working in London. Indeed, within the group itself a diversity of experiences are apparent. Rather, in my analysis of the data I consider the literacy practices and experiences of the women in the group as "telling cases" (Mitchell, 1984) which can be used to "elucidate more general theoretical principles which underpin the construction of literacy within a given community" (Moss, 2007, p. 42). In particular I consider that the women's experiences, and my analysis of the ways in which literacy is threaded through the social, material and symbolic realities of their lives as migrant women, are valuable for understanding the transcontextual dynamics of literacy practices and the way in which literacy may be implicated in processes of connection and disconnection between and across transnational spaces.

## The structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured around six main chapters, in addition to this introduction. In chapter two I focus my attention on the academic literature that has considered the two major themes in my research: literacy and migrant domestic work. In doing so I identify and discuss a number of key areas of debate which have been central to the conceptualisation and theorisation of both literacy and domestic work, and consider how these have been examined empirically. These include debates concerned with the 'consequences' of literacy, the relationship between the global and the local in relation to literacy practices, and the ways in which migrant domestic work has been conceptualised as entailing exploitation or empowerment, with migrant domestic workers variously characterised as victims or as exercising agency. I then consider the smaller

body of work that has explicitly been concerned with the overlap between these two fields through the study of the literacy practices or educational experiences of migrant domestic workers. In doing so I identify a number of core themes that appear to cut across these two fields, particularly in relation to the conceptualisation and discussion of power, agency, identity and the nature of transnational space.

In chapter three I discuss the approaches I took to collecting and analysing my data. I consider how my research approach sits within a broader paradigm of ethnographic approaches to researching literacy, and draw out the similarities and differences of my research in comparison to more conventional ethnographic studies. In discussing my approach to analysis I consider the use of the notion of literacy events as a methodological and analytical tool, and discuss the ways in which I draw on this concept, together with narrative and thematic analysis, in order to understand the ways in which the women engage with literacy within and beyond the group space.

Chapters four to six are concerned with the analysis of my data and consider the women's lives, literacy and learning respectively. Chapter four focuses on data relating to Priya, Sudha and Nhanu, and presents their individual narratives of migration and domestic labour. Focusing on their experiences and reflections as telling cases, it considers the way in which, as migrant women, they move among and negotiate their position within different transnational spaces. In doing so it draws out the tensions and dislocations they experience, as migration for domestic work represents both an opportunity and a constraint, entailing long hours, exploitative working conditions and continued obligation to family at home. Chapter five focuses on the women's literacy practices. It looks at the way in which literacy, and the women's engagement with it, plays out in the different transnational spaces the women move between. In doing so it considers how women across the case study group draw on their emerging literacy practices in English to help them negotiate some of the tensions they experience as they move between and position themselves within different spaces and make connections across extended social networks. Chapter six focuses in on the session space itself, and examines how the women's engagement with processes of learning, and how they articulate the sort of literacy support they want and need, is affected by the transnational nature of their experiences and associated literacy practices, needs and aspirations. It also reflects on the ways in which my own deepening understanding of the women's engagements with literacy and learning shaped my approach to pedagogy and teaching within the group sessions. Finally in my conclusions (chapter seven), I draw together key findings from chapters four to six, and identify potential areas for further research.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

## Introduction

In this chapter I look at the way in which the two major themes in my research – literacy and migrant domestic work – have been researched, conceptualised and analysed.

While there are only a limited number of studies which bring together explicit concerns with both literacy and migrant domestic work, taken separately both literacy and migrant domestic work have been subject to considerable research and debate in recent decades. As a consequence there is a significant body of academic work associated with each area. In defining the scope of this review I have therefore chosen to focus my concern on areas of research that either relate directly to my own research focus, or which I feel are particularly useful in shedding light on key issues of concern at a conceptual level. In my discussion of literacy I have chosen to focus largely on adult literacy, looking in particular depth at studies concerned with women's literacy, or which explore the relationship between literacy, migration and transnationalism. Similarly in my discussion of domestic work, I focus in particular on studies that consider the experiences of migrant labourers rather than the nature of domestic work as a whole. I only consider the wider body of literature which is concerned with gender, migration and transnationalism more broadly, when it touches specifically on migrant domestic work.

In reviewing the literature relating to each field I identify and discuss a number of key areas of debate which have been central to the conceptualisation and theorisation of both literacy and domestic work. I then use a more detailed discussion of a smaller number of research studies to examine the ways in which these have been explored at the empirical level and relate these to key themes or issues, which have particular relevance to my own research. These include the way in which notions of power, agency and identity have been discussed and conceptualised in relation to both literacy and domestic work, and a concern with understanding ideas around context, 'community' and the relationship between the global and the local with respect to processes of migration, globalisation and transnationalism.

The review is structured around three main sections. In the first I discuss the literature relating to literacy as a social practice. I then turn my attention to the literature that has explored migrant domestic work. Finally I consider the studies that have brought these two fields together, and reflect on the implications of work across both fields for my own research and analysis.

## Literacy as a social practice

Literacy, what it means, and what it does, has long been a subject of debate within the social sciences. Writing in the 1960's anthropologists Goody and Watt (Goody & Watt, 1968) pointed to literacy – and the introduction of writing as a technology – as an explanation of the 'great divide' between traditional and modern ways of life. Writing, they argued, was the cause of a major historical change from non-literate or oral society to literate society. Viewed as 'a technology of the intellect' (Goody, 1986), writing was seen as enabling an expansion of the

range of activities conducted by individuals and cultures, and heralded with bringing about significant social and economic changes. It was thus seen as an essential component of modern 'developed' society. However, while this view has continued to hold considerable sway within policy circles (Robinson-Pant, 2004b), it has been subject to trenchant critique from within the research community. In the 1980s a body of ethnographic research into literacy began to emerge, which highlighted the significance of understanding differences between schooling and literacy and pointed to particular meanings of literacy and orality among different cultural groups (see, for example, Heath, 1983; Scribner & Cole, 1981a, 1981b). In 1984, drawing on his own ethnographic research conducted in Iran, Brian Street made the case for an 'ideological' model of literacy which considered literacy to be a social practice, embedded in relations of power and locally defined social and cultural values (Street, 1984, 1994, 1993). In doing so he argued for the need to move away from an 'autonomous' model of literacy, which conceptualised literacy as a neutral technical skill, or which viewed literacy difficulties as 'autonomous' problems that can solved in isolation from the larger social structures and power inequalities within which they are located (see, for example, Street, 2003).

This ideological, or social practice model of literacy, which can be associated with a broader 'social turn' away from a focus on individual behaviour, towards a concern with social and cultural interactions within a range of research disciplines (Gee, 2000; Hawkins, 2013) was central to the development of a considerable body of work associated with what became known as the 'New Literacy Studies'.

## Literacy, gender, power and empowerment

The emphasis that an ideological approach to literacy as social practice places on understanding the way in which literacy practices are embedded in relations of power has been particularly valuable in studying the relations between gender and literacy, and has given rise to a considerable body of research concerned with adult women's literacy practices and experiences of literacy learning in both developed and developing contexts. Such research has illuminated the complex interactions between gender and literacy and highlighted the multiple ways in which in which women understand and use literacy, how they identify themselves as literate or illiterate, and what this means for their identities, lives, and relationships to others (see, for example, Mace, 1998; Martin-Jones, 2000; Robinson-Pant, 2004c). In doing so, these studies have highlighted how access to particular literacies may be highly gendered and embedded in relations of power (see, for example, Horsman, 1994; Rockhill, 1987, 1993). But they have also challenged commonly held assumptions about the 'illiterate (and therefore 'ignorant'/ 'passive'/ 'oppressed') third world woman', pointing to the ways in which women without formal literacy skills are able to negotiate the reading and writing demands they encounter in their everyday lives (Betts, 2004; Chopra, 2004, 2011; Kalman, 2001; Robinson-Pant, 2004a, 2004b; Street, 2004b).

There are some common themes running through studies of adult women literacy learners. Rockhill's (1987, 1993) research into the literacy experiences of Hispanic immigrant women in Los Angeles, for example, reveals the complex relationship that the women in her study had

with literacy, pointing to the symbolic and emotional dimensions of literacy in their lives, and the way in which it was tied up with notions of 'threat' and 'desire'. Rockhill's analysis reveals the contradictory relationship that the women in her study had with their learning: although they considered learning to read and write to be unnecessary as they "get by alright" without literacy, they all speak of their desire to learn in order to "be somebody" (Rockhill, 1993, p. 170), despite the sometimes violent objections of their husbands, who see their learning as a threat to their own power. In reviewing how her research contributes to bigger themes in the literature on empowerment and rights, Rockhill suggests that "conceptions of empowerment, resistance and rights do not capture the way the women we interviewed talk about their longing for literacy, how they think about their lives, what is meaningful to them, or the conflicts they live" (ibid, p. 163).  Instead she argues for the need to pay much closer attention to the symbolic meaning of schooling and literacy in the context of an understanding of the material realities of the women's lives.

Similarly, a number of studies in developing contexts, which  have turned their attention to women's experiences of adult literacy movements and programmes, have examined how women participating in such programmes 'take hold of' literacy  in particular ways, which draw on their own gendered experiences and the particular social contexts in which they are located (Chopra, 2004, 2011; A. George, 2004; Kalman, 2005; Maddox, 2005; Niño-Murcia, 2009; Prins, 2008; Robinson-Pant, 2000, 2001, 2004a, 2004c). Robinson-Pant, for example, in her ethnographic study of two literacy programmes for women in Western Nepal, revealed how women participants contested the dominant model of literacy put forward by the international aid agency, which focused on form filling, keeping minutes and doing accounts in order to promote 'empowerment' through economic activity and independence.  Despite their different priorities, these women nonetheless saw participation in the programme as being valuable because it enabled them to gain a new literate identity and provided a space for them to come together as a group (Robinson-Pant, 2000, 2001).

Kalman (2005), meanwhile, in exploring the literacy learning experiences of a group of women in Mixquic, Mexico, emphasises the way in which their literacy practices and engagement in learning are rooted in the local context within which they are located and the social relationships through which their access to literacy is constructed. For Kalman, becoming literate implies "constructing communicative practices in specific contexts that include social processes, a relationship with knowledge and connections with other readers and writers" (ibid, p. 128). For the women in the study, participating in the literacy program "does not necessarily guarantee major changes in [their] daily lives" (ibid, p. 128), which continue to be marked by poverty and violence, but nonetheless, their acquisition of literacy skills is associated with the formation of new identities and sense of agency and with processes of social transformation.

Such research has interrogated and added nuance and complexity to understandings of the relationship between women's literacy and empowerment (Prins, 2008; Robinson-Pant, 2004a; Stromquist, 2006), suggesting that it is a complex and sometimes contradictory one. It also points to the challenges associated with the term 'empowerment' itself, the meaning of which is

highly debated. Although women's empowerment in policy and donor circles is often associated with access to economic resources and opportunities (Robinson-Pant, 2004a), feminist researchers have called for more nuanced and multidimensional conceptualisations of empowerment as a process (see, for example, Kabeer, 1999b; Murphy-Graham, 2010). This has entailed paying attention to the relationship between processes of empowerment and the expansion of women's agency, ability to make choices (Kabeer, 1999a, 1999b), and capabilities or freedoms (Sen, 1999). They have also drawn attention to the way in which, for some women, processes of empowerment may be associated as much with changes in terms of identity, confidence and self esteem – what Rowlands (1997) has referred to as 'power from within' - as with changes in the economic sphere. Thus many of the studies of women's literacy learning discussed above, point to the way in which accessing learning and engaging in new literacy practices may bring about positive changes for women in terms of changing identities or enhancing self-esteem.

Some studies suggest that literacy learning may, in some cases, also facilitate more collective processes of empowerment, enabling women to come together to challenge discriminatory practices, gendered hierarchies and male power (see, for example, A. George, 2004; Khandekar, 2009; Prins, 2008). However, the research reviewed here suggests that this process is not always straightforward, and is contingent on the nature of the local environment and the existence of opportunities for women's social and economic participation. Moreover, research by Ahearn (2001, 2004), which explored women's incipient literacy in Junigau, Nepal, and the way in which it enabled the emergence of new courtship practices and self-initiated marriages, suggests that although literacy may be a catalyst for social change, so too, in some contexts, may it result in the reinforcement of gender ideologies and the undercutting of "some avenues to social power, especially for women" (Ahearn, 2004, p. 305).

**Literacy consequences?**

The research and discussion regarding the relationship between literacy (learning) and empowerment, particularly for women, speak to on-going debates regarding literacy 'consequences'. The notion of consequences is a highly contested one within literacy research. Literacy programmes and policy are often based on the belief that literacy learning will result in increased participation in development, particularly for women (Robinson-Pant, 2004b). However, in rejecting the 'great divide theory' of literacy (Scribner and Cole, 1981a), the social practice model of literacy associated with the New Literacy Studies challenged the assumption that the acquisition of literacy automatically could be associated with economic and social change.  Indeed, the rejection of the idea that literacy by itself could be understood as having particular consequences is central to Street's original view of an ideological model of literacy (Street, 1984).

As a result, commentators writing from within the New Literacy Studies and drawing on an ideological model of literacy have often remained critical of discourse regarding the consequences of literacy for economic and political development (Bartlett, 2008; Street, 2011). Instead they have argued that the consequences of literacy practices cannot "be predicted as

they depend upon the ways in which literacy is 'taken hold of' in particular contexts" (Bartlett, Jayaram, & Bonhomme, 2011, p. 589). Such consequences may not always relate to positive forms of social change: Bartlett et al (2011), for example, in their research with Haitian immigrants in the Dominican republic, point to the ways in which 'state literacies' – a term which they use to refer to the way in which agents of the state use literacy in their interactions with immigrant populations - "mediate and constrain immigrants' claims to human or civil rights" (ibid, p.587). Through their analysis of the ways in which immigrants' lives were shaped by the withholding of documents and by the way in which state agents "selectively and arbitrarily interpreted documents, such as passports, visas, birth certificates, and national identity cards" (ibid, p.587), they argue that "rather than interrupting inequalities, literacy events frequently provide agents of the state an opportunity to further exploit immigrant populations" (ibid, p. 587).

Vieira (2013), writing about her ethnographic research in an immigrant community in the US, and with immigrants' families in Brazil, also points to the way in which literacy practices may be constraining – as well as enabling – for immigrant groups. She argues for the need to engage with the notion of consequences within literacy research but suggests that "to track the consequences of literacy's material affordances is not to uncritically rehabilitate strong text views of literacy, in which texts autonomously accomplish magnificent feats independent of the social" (ibid, p. 30). Instead, she claims that "it is a radically social view of literacy—literacy understood from the perspective, in these cases, of migrants and their families—that brings me up against literacy's consequences" (ibid, p. 30). She suggests that these consequences may relate to processes of empowerment. However, her analysis suggests that they may also be associated with oppression, disenfranchisement and regulation. To illustrate this she gives the example of how for immigrants in the US, literacy can both enable movement – as it allows, for example participants in her study "to orient themselves in unfamiliar surroundings.... To chart a route to Boston on a map. To decipher a street sign in English" (ibid, p.27) – and regulate it, as "literate infrastructures" represent obstacles to obtaining citizenship and, for participants without papers, prevent them from legally working or driving. Thus for Vieira, the consequences of literacy may be complex and contradictory, and understanding them – and what they might mean for individuals in particular contexts – requires engaging with both the material and social dynamics of literacy.

While in Vieira and Bartlett et al's work, the focus is on literacy (or literacies) itself, other researchers, in arguing for a need to pay closer attention to literacy consequences, have focused on the experiences of adult learners. Bryan Maddox's work, for example, which is situated within broader debates concerned with the relationship between literacy, inequality and social change in the context of development (Basu, Maddox, & Robinson-Pant, 2009; Maddox, 2009; Maddox, Aikman, Rao, & Robinson-Pant, 2011), is concerned with the consequences of literacy acquisition for adult learners (Maddox, 2005, 2007, 2008). In analysing data from his own research among adult learners participating in literacy programmes in Bangladesh, Maddox takes a more positive approach to thinking about literacy consequences. In doing so, he has been influenced by the capabilities approach, and the work of Sen (Sen, 1999, 2003) and Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 2000a, 2000b). Both Sen and Nussbaum view literacy as a central

capability, which they consider to be important for the realisation of other capabilities, freedoms and well-being. Maddox argues that Sen's conceptualisation of literacy both in terms of a person's functionings (what they are 'able to do and be') and in their capabilities (the set of functionings available to them), is useful in drawing attention to "the role of literacy in 'doing and being', involving particular forms of social practice, and the embodiment of literate social identities" as well as the way in which people's uses of literacy may contribute to enhancing "their wider freedoms and agency" (Maddox, 2008, p.191). He draws on this conceptualisation in analysing his own research data. He argues that, although, for the participants in the programmes he studied:"the process of becoming literate did not lead to a dramatic transformation in [their] lives" as the socio-economic, cultural and environmental challenges they faced meant that in fact they experienced a decreasing quality of life over the period of the research, acquiring literacy skills helped them cope with their increased vulnerability. He thus claims that literacy "enabled marginal improvements to their functioning, agency and capabilities" (Maddox, 2008, p. 196).

Maddox's analysis of the findings from his ethnographic research in Bangladesh appears to resonate with other ethnographic studies, including those discussed in the section above, which have pointed to the often complex ways in which the acquisition of literacy may have a (positive) impact on the identity, agency and esteem of individual learners in particular contexts, even if it does not lead to a dramatic transformation of their lives and economic opportunities. On this basis, he argues for "revisionist readings of ethnographic accounts recognising cross-cultural patterns of utility" in order to explore the "significance of literacy for human agency, gender relations and well-being" (Maddox, 2007 p. 253). In doing so he calls for "a more situated account of the complex and plural roles of literacy in processes of social change" (2009, p. 188). He thus argues that there is a need to move beyond the polarization between 'ideological' and 'autonomous' positions regarding literacy consequences. He suggests that the emphasis on situativity that has emerged within the New Literacy Studies (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; Collins & Blot, 2003; Gee, 2000) may be helpful in doing this.

Maddox's work is useful in articulating the role that literacy learning, and the way in which people take hold of literacy, may play in contributing to shaping relationships and social identities, and the way in which this is contingent on, and situated within, the wider social, cultural, political and economic context within which they occur. In highlighting the complexity of the relationship between the acquisition of literacy and wider changes at an individual and societal level, it, like Rockhill's work discussed above, also points to the importance of understanding the value that learners themselves place on literacy, even in contexts in which the returns to their learning are not obvious or easily measured in economic terms. However the tensions running through both their analyses are clear: Maddox makes a clear positive association between literacy acquisition and empowerment at the individual level at the same time as denying an automatic link between literacy and wider social and economic consequences; in Rockhill's analysis she draws on the women's stories to show how they value participation in literacy learning and think they've gained personally, yet it is difficult to demonstrate 'impact', as the women in fact experience increased levels of conflict with (and

violence from) their husbands as a result of their participation. Such tensions point to the some of the difficulties associated with thinking about literacy consequences and understanding the impacts of particular literacy programmes. However they also point to the value in trying to unpack and understand the complex and contradictory effects that literacy learning might have. This requires paying attention to what is valued, and by whom, in any particular context.

It is clear that in engaging with the debate around literacy consequences, it is important to distinguish between the consequences of literacy – as either a technology, skill or a social practice – at societal level, and the consequences or impacts of engaging in *literacy learning* for groups or individuals. As the research concerned with the experiences of women participating in adult literacy classes has shown, the impacts that attending literacy classes might have for participants do not necessarily solely relate to the acquisition of literacy itself. Indeed some of the aspects of this participation that women value – and which have led to changes in their lives – are associated with the social aspects relating to attending classes and coming together with other women rather than the literacy skills they acquire through them. These non-literacy dimensions of participation may, in some cases, have a significant influence on the sorts of changes relating to "agency, gender relations and well-being" that Maddox associates with literacy acquisition. It is therefore difficult to separate out the consequences of literacy acquisition from those linked to participation in the wider processes through which that acquisition occurs.

The nature of the classes themselves, including not just what is taught, but also how it is taught, by and to who, also affect how learners engage with and use their learning, with implications for the impact that it may have on their identities, lives and relationships. Research in the field of adult literacy have thus pointed to a need to pay attention to both the content and pedagogical approach taken in literacy programmes. In particular 'functional literacy' programmes, narrowly focused on developing skills concerned with income generation (Hamilton & Burgess, 2011; Rogers, Patkar, & Saraswathi, 2004) are often seen in contrast to literacy programmes, which, drawing on a social practice model, explicitly seek to engage with learners' interests, knowledge and existing and everyday literacy practices (for example, Kalman, 2005; Millican, 2004) or which are inspired by the critical pedagogy of Paolo Freire (1973), which emphasises the need for adult education to support marginalised groups to analyse their own realities and causes of oppression. Often such programmes include an explicit concern with unequal gender relations and women's empowerment (Archer & Cottingham, 1996; Attwood, Castle, & Smythe, 2004; Fiedrich, 2004; Prins, 2008).  However it is clear that the relationship between the type of literacy programme and its consequences for learners is not a straightforward one. Robinson-Pant's (2001) research revealed how women participants took hold of the learning they experienced in their functional literacy programme in unintended and unexpected ways. Meanwhile, ethnographic studies of Freirean inspired programmes suggest that these do not always lead to collective empowerment or increased gender equality (see, for example, Fiedrich, 2004; Prins, 2008).

My own research, in examining the literacy practices of a group of migrant domestic workers, and the way in which different forms of or approaches to literacy learning are valued by them, suggests a need to disrupt or unsettle the way in which literacy programmes have often been categorised as 'functional' or 'empowering'. Rather, it shows how, for the women in the group, different forms of learning may be valued and considered important for different women in different ways. These are affected by both the literacy environment within which they are located and the forms of literacy or literacy practices that they encounter and interact with, and by the symbolic value (Papen, 2005) that they place on the development of particular skills. Through my analysis, I suggest that both literacy – in terms of the literacy practices they experience, interact with and are affected by in their daily lives - *and* their engagement with particular forms of literacy learning are important for the women in the group. I argue that, for this group, understanding the significance or "consequences" of both literacy and learning requires understanding the way in which their engagement with both is situated within the transnational context of their lives as women moving across and between different transnational spaces. This has implications regarding the way in which their lives are affected by particular literacy infrastructures, the forms of literacy they need to use and engage with, and the literacy skills required to do this. It also affects their ability to engage with and benefit from, and the value they place on, particular practices and approaches to learning.  In the next section, in discussing debates regarding the relationship between local and global dimensions of literacy I discuss the way in which transnationalism has been considered in the literacy literature.

## 'The limits of the local': literacy in the global/transnational space

The relationship between the local and the global or the 'distant' has been a key area of debate within the New Literacy Studies over the last decade. The emphasis that has been placed on literacy as ideological, socially constructed and embedded in context has resulted in a wealth of studies examining the local dynamics of literacy and placing emphasis on literacy as *local* practice, shaped by local contexts, and relations of power at the level of the family and local community. However, particularly in the context of increased concerns with understanding processes of globalisation, some commentators have questioned the validity of such a localist approach[4]. Writing in 2002, Brandt and Clinton, in an influential paper "the Limits of the Local", argued that the New Literacy Studies has tended to exaggerate "the power of the local to define the meanings and forms that literacy takes" (p. 337) and suggested that paying greater attention to global contexts is essential for understanding local literacy practices. Both authors closely associate themselves with a social practice model of literacy, and, in doing so, explicitly recognise the important role that they consider that paying close attention to context has played in enabling deeper understandings of literacy practices. However they argue for the need to also consider "transcontextual" aspects of literacy, asking:

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[4]And risks of romanticising the local

"can we not recognize and theorize the transcontextual aspects of literacy without calling it decontextualized? Can we not approach literacy as a technology – and even as an agent – without falling back into the autonomous model? Can we not see the ways that literacy arises out of local, particular, situated human interactions while also seeing how it also regularly arrives from other places – infiltrating, disjointing, and displacing local life?" (Brandt and Clinton, 2002, p. 342-343)

Like some of the commentators concerned with understanding the potential consequences which may be associated with the use of literacy discussed above, in developing their argument Brandt and Clinton emphasise the materiality of literacy, and suggest that there is a need to reinstate the notion of literacy as 'technology' located in particular situations in order to repair the break between the local and the global, and in doing so, "acknowledge the heavy hand literacy has had in building networks across time and space – in de-localizing and re-framing social life" (ibid, p. 347).

The concern articulated in Brandt and Clinton's paper with paying closer attention to understanding and theorising the global as well as local dynamics of literacy – and the interactions between them – has been expressed by a number of influential commentators from within the New Literacy Studies (Baynham & Prinsloo, 2009; Hamilton & Pitt, 2011a; Pahl & Rowswell, 2006; Reder & Davila, 2005). Baynham and Prinsloo, for example, have suggested that there is an increasing awareness of the need to temper the focus on locally located literacy practices "with a sense of how remote sites and remote literate practices shape and constrain local literacy practices" (Baynham and Prinsloo, 2009 p. 4). They point to the value of a translocal perspective entailing a concern with the processes of production and consumption of texts across localities, and argue for the need for a shift in analytical focus towards understanding "the subtle saturations of literateness in daily life, the way in which texts are talked up over time and space" (ibid, p. 13). Other literacy researchers, meanwhile, have engaged with the issue of the (re)theorization of context and the need to consider issues of scale (Baynham, 2009; Collins, 2011; Collins, Slembrouck, & Baynham, 2009; Kell, 2009b); and highlighted the increased significance of communication technologies and the implications of multi-modality for understanding literacy practices across contexts (Hornberger, 2007; Omerbašić, 2015; Pahl & Rowswell, 2006; Street, 2004a, 2012).

At the empirical level, some studies have responded to calls for increased attention to the global dimensions of literacy through an examination of how global dynamics and influences have played out and affected literacy practices in particular localities (see, for example, Cheffy, 2011; Papen, 2007; Tamtomo, 2012). A good example of this is research by Papen (2007), who examines the role of the global context in affecting local and dominant literacy practices in Namibia, with a particular focus on the former township of Katutura. Papen argues that "in order to understand 'local' literacy practices we need to examine how these are fashioned by both local and global economic and cultural forces" (ibid, p. 1), and she illustrates this with an examination of the way in which the Namibian participants in her study engage with new forms of literacy practice, which are associated with, for example, access to state resources or

participation in the local tourism industry. Papen's analysis of tourism – which she argues has contributed to drawing Namibia into the global capitalist system, albeit in an uneven way – in particular points to the interconnectivity of global and local literacy practices in the Namibian context. It reveals how the literacy practices of tourism workers in the local area are "directly affected by changes in the global tourism industry, and global economy" although "that doesn't mean that... informants were without agency and that local conditions and potentialities had no bearing on what was happening" (ibid, p. 8). Papen's study suggests that the relationship between literacy and globalisation is complex and multi-directional: she argues that, just as local literacy practices are influenced by the global economic and cultural context, literacy itself is 'centrally involved' in processes of globalisation and social change in the country and at a local level as "a mediating force working in various ways, enabling and disabling new social practices, forms of conduct and identities, altering some while reaffirming others" (ibid, p. 6). In this context literacy is closely associated with power, and struggles over cultural and economic resources, as well as the diffusion of ideologies and social identities as texts were used as tools to spread particular "values, norms, worldviews and identities" (ibid, p.13).

Papen's study is persuasive in demonstrating some of the ways in which global dynamics and dimensions of literacy influence local practices, and interact with power dynamics and struggles over resources and meanings. The focus thus very much remains on the local space and the way in which wider global and national contexts play out within it. In contrast, others have considered what happens when literacy moves out beyond 'the local'. Blommaert and Kell have both paid explicit attention to what happens when texts move – and examined the processes of recontextualisation that occur, as written materials move beyond the local space (Blommaert, 2001, 2008; Kell, 2006, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2011).

Kell's research is concerned with the way in which texts travel between different contexts within South African townships. In her 1993 study of literacy practices in Masiphumele, a South African shanty town, she documented literacy events and tried to trace "the life histories of agenda items" in and across three development organisations working in the area (Kell 2009 p. 82). This research, as well as a later study (2006, 2008, 2009) of literacy practices in a house building project on the outskirts of Cape Town's black townships in South Africa, led Kell to argue that although "literacy itself cannot travel but when used as a mode of representation in a particular medium it can enable a meaning to travel and that meaning may or not be 'legible' in the context in which it arrives" (Kell, 2006, p. 165). In exploring this process of recontextualisation, Kell questions "the binary concept of the local and the global" (ibid, p. 166), arguing that "we cannot ever definitively say what is global but that we can perhaps say what is 'not-local'" (ibid, p.166). However, despite Kell's explicit concern with movement – and with (problematising) the relationship between the local and the global – her research relates to a relatively defined geographical areas, and remains very much rooted in a sense of place.

In contrast, Blommaert, in exploring the notion of 'grassroots literacy' (Blommaert, 2008, 2011), has examined the way in which texts travel between spaces separated by large geographical – as well as socio-cultural – distances, in the context of uneven processes of globalisation. In his

2008 book, he draws on a detailed textual analysis of two documents – a set of three versions of a life history from the Congo, written by Julien, a former houseboy, for and at the request of his Belgian ex-explorer, Mrs Arens, and a hand written 'history of the Congo', produced by a popular Congolese painter Tshibumbi – to show how locally produced 'grassroots' texts intended for an external (global) audience, lose voice when they travel from a local to a global context. Implicit in Blommaert's analysis is a sense of disconnection between the local and the global (or non-local) as literacy texts and practices emerging from a local 'grassroots' context are not able to connect effectively to wider spaces and processes despite their movement between them.

Although for both Blommaert and Kell, it is the texts rather than the people that move, a significant body of literature has also emerged in the last decade concerned with the literacy practices of people who – like the women in my own research – move between different countries and global spaces as migrants (Bartlett, 2007; Bigelow & King, 2014; Bruna, 2007; Gordon, 2011; Guerra, 1996; Meyers, 2014; Sarroub, 2007, 2008, 2009). Such studies have highlighted the significance of the complex interactions between literacy and language (Canagarajah, 2013; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; Hawkins, 2013; Hult & King, 2011; Klassen & Burnaby, 1993; Pettitt & Tarone, 2015); pointed to concerns regarding the relationships between literacy and citizenship (Bartlett et al., 2011); and explored the ways in which literacy practices may play out in the development and functioning of migrant networks and gendered relations of power within migrant communities (Bazerman, 2013; Blackledge, 1999, 2000a, 2000b; Hartley, 1993; Lam, 2014; Meinhof, 2009; Warriner, 2004).

In some cases – like the literature concerned with the experiences of domestic workers, discussed below  – such studies draw on the notion of transnationalism, and point to the significance of considering the way in which migrants may move between different transnational or translocal spaces for understanding their literacy practices (Baynham, 2007; Lam & Warriner, 2012; Warriner, 2007, 2009). Significantly, in contrast to the emphasis on distance and disconnection that characterizes Blommaert's work, research that focuses on the literacy practices and experiences of 'transmigrants' (Glick Schiller, Basch, & Blanc, 1995; Pries, 2008), draws attention to the way in which literacy practices may also be involved in processes of connection between and across spaces which transcend national boundaries. Studies, for example, have pointed to the way in which literacy practices may be influenced by or facilitate transnational movement, have explored how emergent literacy practices are affected by transmigrants' continued connections to their communities and countries of origin, and examined the role literacy plays in maintaining social networks and connections 'with home' (Lam & Warriner, 2012; Meyers, 2014; Sarroub, 2009).

One recent example of a study that explores the literacy practices of migrants who move between different national spaces is Meyers' (2014) research looking at literacy practices across the Mexico-US border. Her research focuses on the small town of Villachuato in the Mexican state of Michoachan, which counts more than half of its citizens as currently living in the US, and considers the literacy backgrounds and experiences of transnational migrant

students who have lived in both the US and Mexico, and the implications this has for their educational achievements and experiences. She suggests that the way in which these students move back and forth "both geographically and metaphorically" (ibid, p. 3) across the US-Mexico border in both directions means that "it has become insufficient to discuss literacy in a single, cultural context because literacy has become quite literally transnational" (ibid, p. 6). In exploring the impact of these transnational connections, she argues that, in Villachuato, the interconnectedness of the local with the global and the implications that this has for understanding literacy occurs in multiple ways and at multiple levels, and is affected by migration as well as other economic and social processes; for example technological changes, which may impact individuals in local communities "even if they don't have computers" (p. 8). She suggests that members of poor local communities, such as her study town, in rural Mexico are "profoundly aware of the impact of transnational dynamics on their lives, not simply through migration but likewise through a huge range of value and assumptive qualities and changes" (ibid, p. 9) and points to the agency of community members in interacting with and responding to such changes and the literacy demands and practices that accompany them, despite their limited material conditions.

Meyers' main focus is on literacy in the 'home' community in Mexico, which transmigrants leave and return to, as they negotiate life between Mexico and the US. In contrast, Sarroub,  in her research into the literacy learning and practices of young Yemeni and Iraqi immigrant and refugee men and women, is largely concerned with the experiences of men and women who are physically based in the US, and the ways in which they "strive to become literate as they negotiate transnational spaces" (Sarroub, 2009 p. 63). In exploring the ways in which participants in her study negotiate some of the tensions that their lives as migrants entail, and the way in which their merging literacy skills and practices play out accordingly, Sarroub draws on an analysis of research participants' experiences of transnational marriage, considering the experiences of Sabrina – a young Yemeni American woman who had married a Yemeni man without literacy skills in English, and Amina, a refugee from Iraq, whose younger brother had just returned to Iraq to get married. For both women, marriage, which Sarroub describes as being situated in "transnational and textual identities" (ibid, p.77) represents a form of tension, which is in part mediated by their use of literacy. For Sabrina, having access to the literate world paradoxically both gave her power in her relationship with her husband, while at the same time increasing her responsibilities as a mother, wife, daughter, sister – and teacher – "so that she is overwhelmed by them" (p. 67). Meanwhile, for Amina, the possibility of marriage was associated with "restraint and lack of freedom" and, having seen "the transnational ease" with which her brother travelled and married, she deliberately failed her citizenship test "not because she did not want to become a citizen but because her literacy skills would inadvertently bring a future for which she was not ready" (ibid, p. 67).  Sarroub highlights the contradictory ways in which Sabrina and her husband, and Amina and her brother, as immigrants, find and negotiate their identities through their engagement with institutional texts and literacy practices. She claims that "the young people adopt a set of institutional literacy practices thus mastering domains of power in order to fully participate and expand possible boundaries for legitimacy and agency" (ibid, p.

77). She therefore argues that "with and through their new literacies, [they] create, invoke, and restructure the conditions of their own possibilities in the United States" (ibid, p. 77).

In both Meyers and Sarroub's studies, understanding context is clearly important. However, they point to a need to understand context in a way that looks beyond the localist focus of much literacy research: in each study, rather than being neatly associated with a defined geographical space or local 'community', the contexts in which the literacy practices of the research participants are situated are complex, multiple, and shifting, reflecting the transnational dimensions of the participants lives, and the ways in which they are engaged in negotiating their lives, identities, and relationships with others as they move between very different cultural and geographic spaces. While these spaces include what Barton and Hamilton have termed literacy "domains" (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 11), for example the school, family and workplace - it is clear that each domain has complex transnational – and transcontextual – dynamics. For example, the families described by Sarroub include members coming from different countries and cultural backgrounds, which ascribe different values and significance to literacy, whilst in Meyers' study the school space encompasses students who have moved between the US and Mexico, and a curriculum that is itself informed by global economic and social pressures. Moreover, they both highlight the ways in which participants' lives as transmigrants entails negotiating additional spaces and literacies associated with the process of migration itself. What literacy means and how participants are able to draw on and use it, is clearly affected by the nature of their engagement in these different transnational spaces. Like Vieira's work, Sarroub's study in particular, points to the ways in which literacy may contribute to both constraining and enabling individuals' movement between spaces, helping or hindering the extent to which they are able to exercise agency as they negotiate life as immigrants/transmigrants.

Like the studies discussed in earlier sections, which consider the experiences of women participating in adult literacy programmes, both studies highlight the complex relationship between literacy, agency and identity. However, in contrast to the local focus of other research, Meyers and Sarroub's studies point to the significance of understanding the way in which, for transmigrants, these relationships have transnational dimensions that play out across transnational spaces and relationships. These are themes that I draw out in my own research as I consider the way in which my research participants' own transnational experiences are affected by the different forms of literacy practice they experience and engage with. I explicitly focus on the extent to which they are able to draw on their experiences of learning and emerging literacy skills in negotiating relationships and identities as they move between different transnational spaces. In doing so, I consider that it is essential to recognize the complex interaction between local and global dynamics in transnational literacy practices which may be implicated in processes not only of movement but also of connection and disconnection between diverse social, cultural and geographical spaces. Like Blommaert and Kell's, my analysis suggests that literacy does not always travel well between contexts, as how particular literacy skills are valued or texts are understood may change as individuals move between spaces. However, despite this, I argue that literacy is not only involved in processes of disconnection and recontextualisation but is also centrally involved in processes of connection:

for the women in my study, literacy practices play an important role in contributing to and tying them into, complex social and economic networks which transcend easily defined geographical, political or cultural boundaries or notions of 'community' or context.

## Researching migrant domestic work

Over the past decades, a considerable body of literature has examined the experiences of migrant domestic workers, a term used to refer to someone who has left their community or country of origin to work as a cleaner, cook, nanny, carer or other member of domestic staff in a private household. Often the term is associated with migrants from countries in the global South who move to live and work in wealthy households in the global North. It may also refer to a migrant from a rural community working in a larger city in their country of origin or another country in the global South.

Such migrant domestic work is highly gendered. Although in the last few years there has been increasing concern with the experiences of male domestic workers in the literature (see, for example, Kilkey, 2010a, 2010b; Kilkey & Perrons, 2010; Sarti & Scrinzi, 2010; Scrinzi, 2010), globally, the vast majority of domestic workers are women (Abrantes, 2012; Bridget Anderson, 2007; ILO, 2010). Indeed, a growing demand for domestic labour is considered to be the major contributor to changing gender dynamics within processes of international migration, leading to what has been termed the 'feminisation of migration', as increased numbers of women migrate independently for work, rather than joining male family members as dependants (Cuban, 2010; Gutierrez-Rodriges, 2010; INSTRAW, 2007; Lutz, 2008; Pyle, 2006). Moreover, while male domestic workers tend to take on the relatively prestigious roles of butlers, valets or gardeners (Cox, 2006), migrant women carry out the reproductive work associated with caring for children, as well general housekeeper tasks which are left when women in wealthy households engage in activities – including paid employment – outside the house, without care and domestic responsibilities being taken on by male household members. This reproductive labour is generally considered to be low status 'women's work' and as such is not seen as 'real work' (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007; Lutz & Palenga-Möllenbeck, 2011), or is stigmatised as 'dirty work' (Bridget Anderson, 2000; Briones, 2009; Zarembka, 2002)[5].

In the following sections I consider two key areas of concern which have emerged as central to research engaging with the conceptualisation of migrant domestic work and the experiences of migrant domestic work: these relate to the transnational nature of migrant domestic work and the connections that exist between migrant domestic workers and families at home, and to the way in which the experiences of domestic workers living and working in private households has been characterised as entailing processes of exploitation and abuse as well as agency and resistance.

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[5]Meanwhile gendered inequality remains embedded in social relations as men don't take on household chores.

## Global care chains and transnational women

The role played by migrant women from developing countries – who are often mothers themselves – in carrying out reproductive labour for other families in the developed world, has resulted in what Parreñas, drawing on Nakano Glenn's formulation of the 'racial division of international labour' (Glenn, 1992), has described as the "international division of reproductive labour" (Parreñas, 2001, 2012). A similar idea was developed by Hochchild through the conceptualisation of 'global care chains' (Hochschild, 2000, 2002; Yeates, 2004, 2012), which she used to consider the way in which a woman working as a migrant domestic worker caring for children in the global North may be using her wages to pay for someone to care for her own children in her country of origin, who may, in turn, be paying another woman from a rural community to look after her children.

Both conceptualisations draw attention to the role that global inequalities and uneven processes of globalization and development play in shaping both demand and supply for migrant domestic work (see, for example, Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002a; Pratt, 2004; Sassen, 1984, 2002a, 2002b), as well as pointing to the way in which migrant domestic work itself may serve to reinforce such processes of uneven development. Thus, for Parreñas, the notion of the 'international division of reproductive labour' is a way of "accounting for the costs of migrant reproductive labour to families and communities in countries of origin and juxtapositioning such costs against the gains made by the households of employers in the host countries" (Parreñas, 2012, p. 271). For Hochchild 'care chains' are associated with the extraction of care labour as "emotional surplus value" from the global South, and the provision of "surplus love" to children in the global North (Hochschild, 2000, p. 136).

Discussions of global care chains and the international division of reproductive labour also highlight the close connections that many migrant domestic workers maintain with their countries and communities of origin. Indeed, research into the lives and experiences of migrant domestic workers often use the term 'transnational' to represent the way in which migrant domestic women as transmigrants, may live in or inhabit social worlds that encompass more than one national context as they move between their country of work and their countries of origin, and are often connected into transnational communities of domestic workers working across the globe (see, for example, Bridget Anderson, 2001; Lutz, 2011; Lutz & Palenga-Möllenbeck, 2011). Anderson, for example, discussing the transnational connectedness of female migrant domestic workers in London points to the way in which individual migrant domestic workers may be linked into a community of other migrant workers from their country of origin in London, as well as a community of other migrant domestic workers from a wider range of countries bound together by a sense of solidarity and shared experiences. Meanwhile they might also be connected to a transnational community that extends across other national borders as migrant domestic workers often have other family members, typically sisters, also in domestic work, working elsewhere in the EU, in the Middle East or in Hong Kong (Bridget Anderson, 2001).

The role that migrant domestic workers play in sending remittances back to their home countries is well documented (see, for example, Abrantes, 2012; Barber, 2000; Batnitzky, McDowell, & Dyer, 2012; Deshingkar, Zeitlyn, & Holtom, 2014; Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002b; Kofman, Phizacklea, Raghuram, & Sales, 2000; Momsen, 1999; Parreñas, 2012; Sassen, 2002a, 2002b). Saskia Sassen, reflecting on the increasingly significant role that migrant women play in providing financial support to families and communities in poor countries has referred to 'survival circuits' and the 'feminization of survival' arguing that "not only are households, indeed whole communities, increasingly dependent on women for their survival but so too are governments" (Sassen, 2002a, p. 265).

Although taking on a role as breadwinner or provider clearly has the potential to enhance migrant women's economic and social status and standing (Batnitzky et al., 2012), it also binds women into networks of obligation. These often have very gendered dynamics as migrant women are expected to perform as dutiful daughters, wives and mothers (Barber, 2000; Lai, 2011; Williams, 2010). Research thus suggests that, while the migration of women and the role that they take on as economic providers can have the potential to contribute to the transformation of gender relations both in home communities in the women's countries of origin and in migrant communities overseas, this process is far from straightforward (Lai, 2011). George, for example, in her study of a group of female nurses who moved from Kerala, India to the United States reveals the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of changes in gender relations and status within the immigrant community in the US, and the way in which these interacted with, but were not replicated in their home communities (S. M. George, 2005).

Research into the experiences of migrant domestic workers – and the families they leave behind – suggests that, for women who are mothers, the relationships sustained with families back home can be particularly intense as, despite the geographical distance that separates them, they continue to play an active role in bringing up their children – what Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila have referred to as 'transnational motherhood' (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). A number of studies have explored the impact that migrant domestic work has not only on the women themselves but also on their children, and the ways in which both mothers and children negotiate these often emotionally difficult relationships. Such studies emphasise the way in which, rather than the fathers left behind taking on greater responsibilities for childcare, migrant women often attempt to continue to perform intensive parenting and emotional work from a distance despite their physical absence, sometimes drawing on the use of new technologies – in particular mobile phones – to do this (Madianou & Miller, 2011; Parreñas, 2002, 2005a, 2005b).

Parreñas, in her research with Filipina migrant domestic workers and their families, has suggested that the use of mobile phones by mothers to communicate with their children contributes to the expectation that mothers will continue to perform care work from a distance, and has thus supported the persistence of traditional gender expectations and inequalities (Parreñas, 2005b). However, research by Madianou and Miller suggests that being able to use mobile phones to maintain contact with their children, and, in doing so, reconstruct their role as

parents – often to the extent of micromanaging their children's daily activities – "allows mothers to be able to deal with the ambivalence that is deeply engrained in their decision to migrate" (Madianou & Miller, 2011, p. 467) and as such may have a value for them. My own research similarly points to the significance of mobile phone technology for the women in my study, who, like the women studied by Madianou and Miller, Parreñas and others, maintained close relationships with family at home. These relationships, like those discussed in the literature, had complex economic, social and emotional dimensions. Although not all the women were mothers, for all of them mobile technology was important in maintaining and negotiating the nature of their contact with family in India and Nepal as well as elsewhere. My research in particular highlights the role that literacy practices associated with sending and receiving SMS messages played in mediating relationships with families, and negotiating the tensions entailed by contact with 'home'. It suggests that the use of written text messages facilitated processes of distancing – while maintaining connections – and of positioning, as the women used text messages to establish their literate identities in their communication with family.

## Domestic worker experiences: vulnerability, power, agency and constraint

That migrant domestic workers are particularly vulnerable to forms of exploitation and abuse has been well documented (see, for example, Albin & Mantouvalou, 2012; Bridget Anderson, 2000, 2009; Clark & Kumarappan, 2011; Cox, 2006; Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002b; Lalani, 2011; Mactaggart & Lawrence, 2011; Momsen, 1999; Poinasamy, 2011). Analysis conducted by the Non-Governmental Organisation Kalayaan, which supports migrant domestic workers in the UK, revealed that over half the workers who registered with them between January 2008 and December 2010 had suffered psychological abuse from their employer, and almost 20 percent had experienced physical abuse. Meanwhile nearly two thirds described working seven day weeks without a day off, and more than half received £50 or less a week in wages (Lalani, 2011, p. 12). Other studies similarly suggest that exploitation in the form of long hours and lack of time off or privacy, as well as physical, emotional and sexual abuse are common experiences for migrant domestic workers (Bridget Anderson, 2000; Cheever, 2002; Cox, 2006; Näre, 2011, 2014; Wadhawan, 2013).

Research suggests that the hidden nature of domestic work within private households – which may be exempt from normal processes of labour regulation – makes domestic workers particularly vulnerable to such exploitation (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002a; Mactaggart & Lawrence, 2011). Moreover, a number of researchers have argued that the nature of the household space, and the contradictions entailed between the home as both an intimate private space and a workplace lead to often complex and sometimes emotionally charged relationships, entailing asymmetrical – and gendered – power dynamics, between the employers and domestic staff (Constable, 2002; Cox, 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2002, 2007; Lan, 2002; Momsen, 1999; Näre, 2011, 2014; Rao, 2011). Cox (2006), for example, points to the tensions entailed by live-in domestic work as "domestic workers can be poorly paid and unappreciated but they can also be close to their employers and emotionally attached to their families" (p. 123). A number of studies have focused on the way in which the relationship between domestic

workers and their (female) employers may be characterised by 'maternalism'. This refers to a process through which employers may seek to establish close personal relationships with their domestic workers, presenting them with gifts (for example old clothing or household items) and claiming to treat them as 'part of the family', in a way which both obscures the asymmetrical nature of the relationship between them and acts to exert pressure on them to work longer hours or for lower wages than would otherwise be considered acceptable (see, for example, Bridget Anderson, 2007; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007; Rao, 2011).

Meanwhile, research by Hondagneu-Sotelo suggests that, in the particular context of Latina domestic workers in Los Angeles, while maternalism characterises some domestic worker/employer relationships, it is increasingly being replaced by attempts by employers to maintain distance from their domestic employees, and, in doing so, deny them "even modest forms of social recognition" (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007, p. 11). Näre, in her study of domestic workers in Neapolitan upper-class households, similarly found that employers "developed several kinds of boundary-making practices, through which the distance between the maid and the madam was created", including uniforms or not letting the domestic worker eat meals with the family (Näre, 2014, p. 369). Näre's analysis draws on the notion of intersectionality (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Crenshaw, 1991; Yuval-Davis, 2006), to explore the way in which different axes of power around gender as well as ethnicity, social class, race and immigration status, play out in the formation of subjectivities and negotiation of positioning within the contact space of the household. She reveals how migrant domestic workers are used to "embody and reproduce their employers' class habitus as a status symbol", and in doing so, are expected to manage their own bodies in order to conform to the 'moral order' of the household (ibid, p. 377).

Both maternalism and the enforcement of boundaries described by Hondagneu-Sotelo and Näre can be understood as mechanisms through which employers exert control and exercise power over domestic workers' time and bodies. Anderson, drawing upon extensive research with migrant domestic workers in London (Bridget Anderson, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2007, 2009), suggests that this control is central to the role played by domestic workers in the reproduction of their female employers' status. Drawing on Marxist theory, she argues that paid domestic workers "reproduce people and social relations not just through what they do, but also in the very doing of it" and asserts that in employing a domestic worker "the employer is buying the power to command not the property in the person, but the whole person" (Bridget Anderson, 2000, p. 113). Her analysis of the experiences and employment conditions of live-in domestic workers, and the inequalities and processes of exploitation that these can entail – including physical and sexual abuse, imprisonment, being 'sold' to other employers, and having food and wages withheld – lead her to argue that "the commonly accepted transition from traditional to modern, from un-free labour to free labour is incomplete" (ibid, p4). She thus makes a direct comparison between paid domestic work and slavery.

Anderson's work, like much of the research discussed above, emphasises migrant domestic workers' marginal positioning within structures of power and inequalities mediated by gender, class, race and ethnicity at both a global and a household (workplace) level, thus highlighting

their vulnerability. However, a number of studies question the extent to which migrant domestic workers can simply be characterised as 'victims' and emphasise the agency of domestic workers to resist exploitative working conditions and develop strategies to cope with the challenges of work overseas. They also point to the potential for migration to represent, for some women, a process of liberation from restrictive family control or gender norms and the opening up of new opportunities (see, for example, Anthias, 2012; Barber, 2000; Ismail, 1999; Lai, 2011; Pappas-Deluca, 1999; Stasiulis & Bakan, 1997; Williams, 2010). For example, Pappas DeLuca's (1999) study of the experiences of migrant domestic workers from rural areas of Chile, who move to live and work in urban Santiago, explores the way in which for many young women working in the city was associated with freedom and excitement and the opportunity to escape constraining relationships with parents and the boredom of rural life (ibid, p.105). Her research suggests that the social and economic mobility that they gained through migration to Santiago "provided many women with the ability to transcend some of the same gender-based social and economic constraints that originally limited their opportunities in rural areas" (ibid, p.107). Barber (2000), meanwhile, in examining the experiences of migrant domestic workers from the Philippines, points to the diversity of their experiences and argues that the migrant Filipinas with whom she has worked "are unwilling to construe their lives in ways that match up with international discourses of victimized domestic workers" (ibid, p. 407). She therefore suggests the need to move away from a focus on victimisation in order to consider how "practices are changing in several locations, how they reinforce and conflict, and how changing culture and power relations are used by social subjects with agency" (ibid, p. 405).

A number of empirical studies exploring the experiences of migrant domestic workers have suggested that the relationship between liberation and agency on the one hand, and slavery and exploitation on the other is, in fact, an extremely complex one. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas' (2001) detailed study of the experiences of Filipina domestic workers in Rome and Los Angeles, for example, which draws on macro, intermediate and post-structural analysis to explore the way in which migrant domestic workers' experiences of migration are embodied in dislocations – including emotional as well as social and economic dislocations – explicitly tackles the tensions entailed between constraint and agency in migrant domestic workers' lives. By exploring domestic workers' shifting subject positions in 'multiple migrant institutions', and examining the social processes of migration "from the point of view of the subject to identify the formations of subordination – or dislocations – elicited within these processes", she suggests that domestic workers' "marginal location in multiple discursive spaces of race, gender, nation and class" leaves them 'decentred' and 'fragmented' subjects (Parreñas, 2001, p. 32). However, despite the fragmentations imposed on them by structural processes, Parreñas' research suggests that migrant domestic workers can and do take action to attempt to ease and resist the dislocations they experience. In order to do this, she suggests that they often turn to their transnational social networks, and, in this case, configure the Philippines as 'home' in order to counteract their marginal status and quasi-citizenship in their place of work. However, she claims that these actions do not necessarily result in "concrete benefits in their lives" (ibid, p. 254) and

indeed, may play a role in the maintenance of inequalities particularly with regard to "the system of global structuring in which their constitution as subjects is situated" (ibid, p. 254). She thus argues that while migrant domestic workers do have agency, that agency is not only highly constrained but may in fact be binding rather than liberating.

Similarly, Briones in her (2009) study of Filipina experiences of domestic work across Paris and New York makes an attempt to conceptualise the relationship between agency and constraint in migrant domestic work at a theoretical as well as an empirical level. She argues for the need to move beyond polarised understandings of domestic work as representing either "slavery or work", claiming that the narratives of the women in her study "point to no conclusive evidence to support one or the other" but instead show how "the issue of gainful employment is of central importance to these women – so much so that they would endure slave–like conditions to keep open the possibility of gainful employment" (ibid, p.177). She is concerned to understand how migrant domestic workers "continue to practise agency despite structural constraints" even in situations from which they cannot "readily walk away" (ibid, p25).

In order to explore this at a conceptual as well as empirical level, Briones develops what she has termed the 'capable agency' concept or approach, drawing on both Gidden's sociological concept of agency, as articulated in structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), and the notion of capability, as set out in the capability approach (Nussbaum, 2000a, 2000b; Sen, 1999). For Briones, *agency* is understood in terms of the "capability to do but not necessarily to be", whilst *capability* relates to the "freedom to make agency capable to do and be" (Briones, 2009, p.166). She suggests then that the concept of 'capable agency' relates to the "meeting of capability in agency (intended actions) with capability (valued ends)" (ibid, p166). Applied to the experiences of migrant domestic workers she considers that such a conceptualisation enables an understanding of the way in which migrant women, as agents, make active decisions to take on and stay in domestic work in order to achieve their objectives (valued-ends) – which often relate to securing economic livelihoods, both for themselves and for their families – even though doing so may entail enduring abuse and exploitation. She suggests that, in doing this, a migrant domestic worker is able to draw on the resources of what she has termed the 'Female Overseas Domestic Worker Institution' – the transnational community of other migrant domestic workers – in order to overcome victimization, and either "transform her structure and empower herself... or go on as planned to achieve her valued-ends" (ibid, p. 167).

Briones' analysis is useful in highlighting the complex nature of the interaction between agency and constraint in the lives of individual domestic workers, and how this relates to their connectedness to transnational social networks of migrant domestic workers. What it seems to underplay, however, is the extent to which these goals – or what Briones, drawing on the language of capabilities, describes as valued-ends – may themselves be shaped by gendered norms concerning responsibilities to family including, as discussed above, the sense of obligation to continue to provide for family at home through the sending of remittances (see, for example, Rao, 2011; Williams, 2010). This may lead individual migrant women to feel that they

have little choice but to continue as domestic workers, so as not to withdraw this financial support, even if this means sacrificing their own well-being or personal aspirations (Rao, 2011).

In fact, while a number of empirical studies also suggest that the way in which migrant domestic workers are able to draw on their social capital and connections to other domestic workers, as well as on organisations supporting migrant domestic workers (such as Kalayaan in the UK) can be critical in supporting them to resist exploitation, escape from abusive employers, or find new work (see, for example, Bridget Anderson, 2001; Bridget Anderson, 2009; Parreñas, 2001, 2012), others have pointed out that the relationship between individual migrant domestic workers and the transnational diasporic communities within which they are located are not always beneficial. Parreñas' study, for example, suggests that while domestic workers often provide invaluable support and advice to each other, which enables them to engage in collective acts of resistance, the relationships between them may also be characterised by distrust and competition over the accumulation of capital (Parreñas, 2001). Meanwhile, research by Lai (2011), which looks at the experiences of migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong, suggests that, although migrant activist organisations perform an important role in enabling the mobilization of political activism through "the discursive construction of a collective identity on which a common struggle can be based", in doing so, they also tend to reinforce migrant women's gendered identities as sisters, daughters, mothers or wives, and may reinforce the normative demand that they "continue gendered sacrifices for the family back home" (p. 570; see also, Yeoh & Huang, 2000).

My own research, in emphasising the complexity of domestic workers' experiences , like the studies by Briones and Parreñas, suggests a value in moving beyond dualisms characterising migrant domestic work as representing either slavery or liberation, to consider the ways in which migrant domestic workers attempt to deal with the tensions or dislocations entailed by both migration and domestic work, and in doing so, exercise agency 'in constraint' (McNay, 2000, 2008, 2010; North, 2013). How, and the extent to which they are able to do this may be affected by a number of different factors, some of which are identified within the empirical research studies discussed above. These include the connections that individual migrant workers are able to develop with diasporic networks of other migrant domestic workers and the extent in which these social relationships function as a form of support. They also include the nature of the relationship that domestic workers have with their employers, and the nature of their work – in particular whether they are live-in or live-out: the dependence of live-in domestic workers on employers not only for their salary but also for their accommodation, means that they experience little or no privacy at their place of employment, and are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, often working excessively long hours. The relationship that domestic workers have with the state with regard to their immigration status is also important. Anderson, for example has pointed out that live-in domestic workers' vulnerability is increased when they don't have formal immigration status, and so face arrest or deportation if they leave their employers (Bridget Anderson, 2000), or are on tied visas, which prohibit them from changing employers, as is currently the case in the UK for migrant domestic workers who entered the country since

2012, when the visa arrangements for domestic workers were changed (Kalayaan, 2012, 2014)[6].

Although, as I explore in the section below, literacy and learning[7] has only received limited attention within the literature on migrant domestic work, my research suggests that the learning and literacy experiences of the domestic workers themselves may also play some part in affecting their experiences, relationships and identities as migrant women and domestic workers navigating between the private and the public sphere and between work, official and social spaces.

## Domestic labour, learning and literacy

The body of literature that is explicitly concerned with both literacy *and* migrant domestic work is much smaller than the two substantial bodies of research concerned with literacy and domestic work taken separately. When discussing the experiences of migrant domestic workers, a number of studies underline the fact that many women who migrate for domestic work are relatively highly educated in their home countries, and thus, in undertaking domestic work, many experience processes of downward mobility (see, for example, Abrantes, 2012; Ismail, 1999; Lutz, 2011, 2008; Pratt, 1999). In doing so they consider the way in which the educational experiences or qualifications of Migrant Domestic Workers are often not recognised or valued in the countries and households in which they find work. However, it is clear that there is considerable diversity with regards to the educational background of migrant domestic workers. Anderson (2009), for example, when discussing migrant domestic workers in London, notes the contrast between well educated Filipino migrants "with a specific migratory project" coming to London with employment agencies via the Middle East and Indian migrant domestic workers who had come to the UK with wealthy Indian employers and who "themselves were rural to urban migrants, often with little English or education" (ibid p. 68). Despite this, few studies from within the literature on migrant domestic work include any specific consideration of the experiences of migrant domestic workers with little formal education. Nor have many studies engaged in an explicit exploration of the ways in which a migrant domestic worker's educational background or engagement with learning may interact with their experiences of domestic labour. There has therefore been limited analysis of the impact of educational and learning experiences of this group on the extent to which they may be able to practise agency in order to negotiate or mitigate the tensions or dislocations entailed by the migratory process.

One exception to this is research by Nitya Rao (2011), which considers the experiences of adolescent girls from a rural village in Jharkhand state and their experience of migrating to work in private households in Urban Delhi. Rao explores the way in which these girls exercise agency in dealing "with the contradictions they face between earning incomes, acquiring markers of

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[6]The current visa, which was introduced in 2012, ties domestic workers to the employers with whom they entered the country, meaning that they are unable to legally change employers even if they are experiencing abuse.

[7] Including formal learning through schooling or participation in adult education classes as well as non-formal literacy learning

status and gaining respect across the urban and rural worlds they straddle" (ibid, p. 758), and considers how this is affected by their previous engagement with formal schooling. Her findings reveal that the way in which the domestic workers in the study view their relationship with education is complex and often contradictory. She suggests that although, for girls in the village, formal education may contribute partially to "fulfilling parental and community aspirations in the construction of a respectable identity" (ibid, p. 770), as well as being associated with the possibility of moving into professional, white collar employment, for domestic workers it does not provide many of the skills and attributes – including proficiency in mainstream languages, the use of technology and qualities of loyalty and submissiveness – which are valued highly by employers and associated with employability. However, despite this, schooling prior to starting work does contribute to enhancing some skills considered desirable in the households in which they work – including fluency in Hindi and the ability to maintain simple accounts or record messages (Ibid, p. 770). This confers respectability and contributes to improving the ability of domestic workers to engage in workplace negotiation and enhance their terms of employment. Her research also emphasises the importance of being able to build networks, share information, and manage personal emotions, all of which are developed through informal life experiences rather than formal learning.

A few studies conducted by literacy researchers have considered the learning experiences and literacy practices of migrant domestic workers as a specific focus and examined the implications of these for their lives and identities as migrant women. Sondra Cuban for example, has conducted research firstly with domestic workers in both New York and a suburban city in the Bay Area (Cuban, 2007) and secondly with female migrants working in the care industry in Cumbria in the UK (Cuban, 2008). Together these studies highlight the difference that cultural and social capital makes to experiences of migrant care and domestic work, and the complex ways in which this interacts with experiences of learning for educated and non-educated migrant women.

In the study of migrant carers in the UK (2008) the focus is on highly educated migrant women, and Cuban shows how their "educational qualifications, academic resources, and sophisticated language and literacy practices... are either not factored into the labour equation at all, or, are viewed deficiently" (ibid, p. 82). This means that despite the contributions they make to their local and global communities as they engage in new educational opportunities, use literacies to negotiate workplace cultures, and form networks to help them adjust, they have few opportunities for upward mobility. In contrast, in the first study (Cuban 2007) the focus is on a group of migrant domestic workers some of whom had low levels of education. In exploring their participation in community-based literacy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programmes, Cuban focuses on the women's agency, their participation strategies and learning needs. She points both to the challenges to their learning arising from their employment as domestic workers – including unpredictable work schedules resulting in intermittent attendance, and workplace health problems making participation difficult – and to the workplace literacy demands they encountered. While she gives less attention to the way in which the women's experiences of learning and the literacy skills they gain through the programme interact with the

way in which they experience domestic work, she argues that "women participate and persist in community-based literacy and ESOL programmes as part of a self-determination strategy to cope with the strains and stresses of low paying demanding work in the service sector, like cleaning and caring" (ibid, p. 4).

For the domestic workers participating in the programmes discussed by Cuban, engaging in literacy learning is seen "as a way to move out of the private domain of the home and 'be somebody'" (Cuban 2007, p. 5). This echoes the findings of Rockhill's earlier research with Latina domestic workers in Los Angeles, discussed above, which highlights the symbolic value placed on literacy as representing the possibility of escape from domestic labour and the confines of the private sphere. Rockhill's work, like research by Papen (2007, discussed above), which includes a consideration of the literacy practices of domestic workers in Namibia, and Nabi's research into the experiences of domestic workers in Pakistan (Nabi, 2009), also points to the way in which domestic workers' engagement with and perceptions of literacy are tied up in the nature of their work in the private sphere, which both isolates them – limiting their opportunities for learning – and renders invisible, and thus de-values, the literacy practices they do engage in. Taken together these different pieces of research highlight the way in which the demands, isolation and complex power relations entailed by domestic work affect the sometimes contradictory ways in which both learning and the literacy practices of domestic workers are viewed and valued.

The literature on domestic work as a whole, alongside the few studies which have focused more specifically on the literacy practices of domestic workers, suggest that the relationship between learning and literacy, and the way in which women experience migration and domestic work is a complex one. Although Rao's research suggests that having some formal education may contribute to increased power of negotiation within the workplace, the research literature more broadly suggests that having higher literacy skills or qualifications does not automatically translate into better working conditions – or alternative career options outside domestic work – for migrant women. Cuban's (2008) study of carers, like the studies of highly educated migrant domestic workers, suggests that this is, in part, a result of the way in which the qualifications and skills of many migrant women lose value when they move between contexts as they leave their countries and professions of origin. However it can also be associated with the way in which the literacy practices of domestic workers themselves are made invisible – and their skills are devalued – within the private sphere of the household as a workplace. Despite this, the symbolic value that migrant domestic workers themselves – particularly those who have little formal education – place on learning is clearly significant. This is supported by findings of my own research which points to the symbolic as well as practical value that the women in my study attribute to their literacy learning.

The literature on migrant domestic work emphasises the transnational nature of migrant domestic work, and the significance of the transnational connections that migrant domestic workers build and maintain with other domestic workers and with their home communities. Both Rao's and Cuban's research, point to the significance of understanding how the extent to which

migrant women are able to draw on their educational capital is affected by the way in which, as migrants, they move between different contexts and social, cultural and geographical spaces. However, within the literature that brings together concerns with literacy and migrant domestic work more generally, there is little consideration of the implications of the transnational nature of migrant domestic workers lives for understanding their learning and literacy practices. My own research is explicitly concerned with exploring this relationship, and thus contributes to filling this gap. It suggests that the transnational nature of the lives of the women in the case study group, and the way in which they maintain connections with friends and family in Nepal and India and interact with transnational social networks of other migrant domestic workers in London and access the globe, has a significant impact on the way in which they engage in particular literacy practices, and with different forms of literacy learning. It also points to the role that their emerging literacy skills and practices play in affecting how they maintain these transnational connections and position themselves within them.

Despite few studies specifically addressing the overlap between concerns with literacy and concerns with migrant domestic work, in reading across the literature reviewed here relating to both bodies of work, it is clear that there are a number of themes which repeat across both fields, or which re-emerge in different ways under different guises and with sometimes conflicting meanings and significance: Power is central to analyses of both literacy and domestic labour: literacy practices are seen as embedded in relations of power, which mediate access to literacy resources or 'powerful literacies', while literacy, and literacy learning may also represent a threat to power or be associated with 'empowerment'. Complex power relations associated with gender, class, ethnicity, nationality and immigration status that resonate within the private space of the household as a workplace, and underpin the unequal relations between the global North and South, are seen as central to understandings of migrant domestic labour and the experiences of domestic workers. Agency, too, often appears as a central theme as research considers how agency might be enabled or enhanced by forms of literacy practice, or drawn upon in responding or resisting dominant literacy regimes. The literature considers the relationship between agency and constraint in the lives of migrant women undertaking domestic work under often difficult and exploitative conditions. Finally, particularly within the literature concerned with literacy as a social practice, there is a concern with individual and group identities: what it means to adopt a literate or non-literate identity and how literacy learning may impact on notions of identity. While the term 'identity' is not used within the literature on migrant domestic work to the same extent, concerns with notions of identity are apparent in the way in which Parreñas (2001), for example, discusses migrant domestic workers' shifting subject positions, or in the tensions that Lai (2011) identifies between the development of collective diasporic identities and (the resistance) of gendered identities associated with migrant domestic workers' roles as sisters, daughters, mothers or wives as well as economic providers. Cutting across these themes is a concern with the global, as well as the local, and with the nature of the transnational space.

My own research grapples with these themes as I draw together concerns with both understanding literacy as a transnational social practice *and* with understanding the lives of the

domestic workers in the group and the way in which their literacy practices and engagement with learning interact with their experiences as migrant workers navigating across different contexts. I examine how the women's engagement with literacy and learning affects and is affected by the ways in which they position themselves within these multiple spaces as they negotiate the tensions and dislocations their lives as migrant domestic workers entail. In doing so I am concerned understanding the complex ways in which literacy is threaded through the social, material and symbolic realities of their lives and the ways in which agency, power and identity are manifested within them. In exploring this, my research engages explicitly with some of the unresolved tensions raised in the literature relating to both literacy and migrant domestic work: it is concerned with understanding the consequences of literacy and different forms of learning - associated with participation in English and literacy classes - for migrant workers moving between spaces; with what this means for understanding the relationship between empowerment, agency and constraint in domestic workers' lives, and the way in which literacy may play out within it; and with how to conceptualise 'context', the 'local' and the 'global' with regard to literacy.

In doing so, this research reflects on the way in which understanding the significance of literacy in the women's lives, and the complex ways in which literacy interacts with agency and 'empowerment', means paying attention to processes of both movement and of connection and disconnection. My study highlights the importance of considering movement between contexts and how what literacy means or does may change as individuals shift between different transnational spaces in which they are positioned differently in relation to others. However it also points to the need to examine the way in which literacy is involved in the connections and disconnections that are created between spaces as migrant domestic workers establish and connect with transnational social networks or domestic worker institutions, using literacy in ways that both draw them closer to and push them away from their home countries and communities. My analysis of the ways in which the women in the group draw on their emerging literacy practices in English as they negotiate the multiple identities and emotional and symbolic dislocations (Parreñas 2001) that migrant domestic work entails suggests a need to move beyond the dualisms – between agency and constraint, or between the local and the global – that characterise some of the discussions within the literature on both domestic work and literacy. Instead it suggests a value in considering the way in which migrant domestic workers may exercise agency 'in constraint' as they navigate across and between multiple transnational and translocal contexts, and engage in literacy practices with complex transcontextual dynamics.

# Chapter 3: Methods

## Introduction

In this chapter I discuss my approach to collecting and analysing my data. The chapter is divided into three main sections. In the first, I explain my involvement with the group of women who form the case study group for this research, and how my initial work with them influenced not only my research interests and questions but also the nature of the methodological approach I adopted. The second part of the chapter is concerned with my approach to collecting my data. I discuss the way in which my methodological approach was informed by ethnographic studies of literacy practices, and, in describing the approach I took, and the data I collected, I consider the differences between classic ethnographies involving in-depth, long term immersion in 'the field' and my use of an 'ethnographic approach' (Green & Bloome, 2004) to studying literacy through a focus on the weekly group literacy support sessions. The final part of the chapter is concerned with my approach to working with and analysing my data. I discuss in particular the use of the concept of the literacy event as a methodological and analytical tool. Drawing on debates in the wider literacy literature, I describe how I used the concept to consider literacy events occurring within the group sessions, and the ways in which these connect out to other contexts and events in the women's lives. I also discuss how I drew on a narrative approach in order to situate my discussion of literacy, and my analysis of literacy events, within a broader understanding of the women's lives and the different transnational spaces they inhabit. Finally I discuss my approach to analysing and writing up my data, through a focus on themes, events, and narratives and how these come together at the level of the group and the individual.

## My involvement with the group

The research discussed in this thesis took place at the MRC in London, a centre which is open to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to receive advice, learn English or computer skills, meet with others, and come together to share ideas and concerns about issues that affect them. As part of this work the MRC was involved in supporting learning in a number of different ways. As well as providing computer training and group ESOL classes, which are taught by qualified ESOL teachers, it also ran a 'mentor' scheme, which sought to link migrants looking to improve their skills in aspects of English, with volunteers able to support them. Volunteers were not necessarily expected to have a background in teaching or adult education. Unlike the group ESOL classes, 'mentoring' sessions were often held on a one-to-one basis, although they sometimes involved larger groups. In 2007 I started collaborating with the MRC under the mentor scheme and began supporting a range of different migrants who had specific concerns with improving their literacy. In May 2008 I was introduced to Sudha, Nhanu and Priya, three migrant domestic workers from Nepal, who were to form the core of the group on whose experiences this research is based.

Sudha, Nhanu and Priya had been referred to the MRC by the NGO Kalayaan, which works to support migrant domestic workers in the UK. Kalayaan provides advice and support to migrant domestic workers regarding their employment rights and immigration services[8]. It also facilitates access to English classes on Sundays which it runs specifically for migrant domestic workers. Priya had previously attended such classes and had recommended them to Nhanu and Sudha. However when they approached Kalayaan the appropriate classes were all full, and they were pointed in the direction of the MRC. When Nhanu and Sudha met with the education coordinator, accompanied by Priya, they explained that their principal concern was with improving their written English rather than simply focusing on conversation, and so, knowing that I had a personal interest in literacy, he referred them to me. In the weeks that followed I met with Priya, Nhanu and Sudha every Wednesday afternoon, and started exploring with them their learning needs and the ways in which I could help them to develop the literacy skills in English that they felt were important for their lives in the UK. Although Nhanu and Sudha were then offered and took up places on the Sunday English course, they continued to also meet with me, explaining that they valued our focus on literacy as well as the opportunity to meet as a small group. Through my initial meetings with the three women I started to become aware of the complex nature of their engagement with literacy. I was keen to understand more, and to explore what literacy meant to them as migrant domestic workers living and working in London. I spoke with Sudha, Priya and Nhanu about the possibility of documenting our experiences together as part of piece of research, and they were supportive.  The foundations for this research began to take shape.

Meanwhile the composition of the group started to change. While their work commitments meant that all three women could not attend the sessions every week, they started telling their friends about the literacy support group, and often new women, friends of Sudha, Priya and Nhanu, would turn up. Some of these women attended one or two sessions only. Others came regularly over a period of time.  In total eleven women attended the group between 2008 and 2011. A core of eight women attended the group on repeated occasions and formed the case-study group for this research. With the exception of one woman, who was from India, all of the group were Tamang women from the same North Eastern region of Nepal. While the different nationality of Jyothi, the participant from India, meant that some of her views and perspectives were slightly different to those of the rest of the group who had shared experiences and social networks connected to their background as Tamang women from the same region, I decided not to exclude data relating to Jyothi when collecting and analysing my data. This was in part due to the difficulty of separating out data relating to activities in which several women participated and to which the interactions between them form a central part of my analysis. However, it was also clear that Jyothi had much in common with the other women in the group. Like the others she was currently a live-in domestic worker for an international family in London, had started domestic work young, and had little experience of formal schooling. In addition, the

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fact that all the other women in the group had spent time working in India before coming to the UK, and many had friends and family there, meant that, despite coming from a different country and geographical area, they shared many common social and cultural references which informed their interactions within the group sessions as well as their engagement with literacy more broadly.

As a self-selecting sample, this case study group cannot be seen as a representative sample of either migrant domestic workers in London as a whole or Nepalese (or even Tamang) migrant domestic workers in London more specifically. Indeed, the very fact that they were able to attend our sessions at all reflects an ability to negotiate time-off work which is not possible for many domestic workers. However, as I explore in more detail in chapters 4-6, I considered that the case study group – both as a whole and in terms of the individual women within in it – could be drawn on as a 'telling case'. Mitchell coined the term telling case to describe cases which "serve to make previously obscure theoretical relationships suddenly apparent" (Mitchell, 1984, p. 239). In the case of this research, I considered that understanding the ways in which the women's engagement with literacy interacted with the transnational nature of their lives as migrant domestic workers, was valuable in shedding new light on the complex, and debated, dynamics of literacy understood as a local, translocal, and globally situated practice in the context of migration. At the same time I felt the way in which the group's engagement with literacy interacted with their experiences as migrant domestic workers would provide a useful contribution to the literature on domestic work, and the debate around its conceptualisation as entailing processes of exploitation, servitude and vulnerability or conversely, agency and empowerment.

As my research proposal and initial data collection developed in parallel with my direct work in supporting this group of women's learning, so too did my relationship with the women as 'mentor', teacher, and researcher, as well as friend. These multiple roles had clear implications for the sort of research I was able to carry out as it presented both challenges and opportunities with practical as well ethical and analytical dimensions.  My active role as a teacher/mentor providing literacy support for example meant that, as I explore in more detail in later sections and chapters, I was able to gain an in-depth insight into the extensive range of ways in which the women in the group used and hoped to be able to use different forms of literacy.   In the classroom, they brought in texts and documents that they wanted help reading or responding to, and articulated their particular learning needs both as a group and individually. However, I was also aware of the way in which my own ideas about literacy that I brought with me into the sessions as I developed activities and resources may also have influenced the women's own views and practices, particularly as for many of the women I represented their main or first source of formal literacy support in the UK. My role as mentor/teacher thus meant that reflexivity around my own practice, and the influence that I had in shaping the sessions themselves and some of the ways in which the women engaged with literacy within and beyond them, was essential when thinking about how I collected and worked with my data.

My responsibilities in the classroom also affected the ways in which I was able to act as a researcher, and collect data during the sessions themselves. For instance, the need to focus on my teaching role and respond to the learning needs of the women present in each session meant that taking detailed notes during the sessions themselves was difficult. The fact that the women in the group came to the group looking for literacy support from me, rather than as research participants, also clearly raised ethical issues particularly around the nature of consent. I was alert to the need to ensure that the women participating in the sessions understood the nature of my research and their own role in it. The changing composition of the group as new members joined added a layer of complexity to this, meaning that consent had to be continually renegotiated as new members joined the group. Moreover, the very interlinked nature of the sessions and my research, meant that although separating one from the other was not straightforward, it was essential that it was clear to participants that participation in my research was entirely optional, and was not tied to participation in my sessions or the use of other services at the Migrant Resource Centre. Open and on-going discussion with the group members about the nature and purpose of my research, over the course of the time we met together was therefore important. This was helped by the informal and participatory nature of the group space itself.

## Data collection

### Developing an ethnographic approach

Both my research interests, and the relationship that I established with the women in the group influenced the sort of methodological approach I sought to use for my research. My interest in the meanings and values that the women in the group placed on literacy, and the ways in which their engagement with forms of reading and writing were situated within the context of their particular lives and experiences as migrant domestic workers, located my research firmly within the tradition of the New Literacy Studies, and an approach to literacy as a social practice, as is discussed in more detail in the literature review. Scholars concerned with understanding literacy as a social practice have often argued for the need to take an ethnographic approach to researching literacy in order to situate their examination of literacy practices within an in-depth understanding of the wider social context within which they are located. Since Street's seminal publication, 'Literacy in Theory and Practice', in which he drew on his own ethnographic research on literacy practices in North East Iran conducted during the 1970s (Street 1983), a wide body of literacy research drawing on ethnographic approaches has emerged (for example, Aikman, 1999; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Chopra, 2001, 2004; Heath, 1983, 1996; Kalman, 2005; Maddox, 2005; Robinson-Pant, 2001).

Green and Bloome have defined ethnography as involving "the framing, conceptualizing, conducting, interpreting, writing, and reporting associated with a broad, in-depth, and long-term study of a social or cultural group" (Green & Bloome, 2004, p. 183), and, while what is meant by, or counts as ethnography is contested, ethnographic research tends to involve the researcher immersing themselves in the field over an extended period of time, in order to make sense of social and cultural norms that shape interactions, behaviour, values and beliefs in that

particular community or local setting. Street, applying the notion of ethnography to literacy more specifically, has suggested that an ethnographic perspective "involves making the invisible visible; theorising 'context'; paying greater attention to local meanings and uses; and describing real practices in everyday life, in the context of literacy involving such 'real' materials as credit slips, notes, notices, waterslides" (Street, 2004b, p. 57). Ethnographic studies of literacy then have sought to examine the ways in which groups or communities use and relate to literacy in multiple aspects of their everyday lives through detailed, often long-term qualitative studies of the particular local settings in which literacy occurs. These have drawn on a range of ethnographic research methods often including extended periods of participant observation, combined with additional forms of data collection, such as interviews, community mapping and the study of texts.  Some studies have sought to link this directly to an examination of literacy programmes, using ethnographic approaches to studying the programmes themselves, and situating them within an in-depth examination of the social context within which such programmes occur (Kalman, 2005; Robinson-Pant, 2001; Rogers, 2005). Kalman, for example in her study (2005) of the experiences of a group of women learners in Mexico, drew on observation of women participating in group learning sessions, and the collection and analysis of writing samples, documents, photos and interviews relating to these sessions, as well as developing a community portrait to explore the presence and use of written language in local homes, and conducting an analysis of literacy texts available within the community. In doing so she attempts to look beyond the literacy class itself and develop 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1994) of the surrounding community and the social and cultural context in which it is located.

My own research differs from the forms of classic ethnography discussed above. Unlike studies such as Kalman's, the women in the group were not located in a geographically defined community, which would be amenable to researching through long-term immersion in their day to days lives. Rather, their lives as live-in domestic workers meant that, (when not attending sessions or other classes), they were physically scattered across private households in wealthy parts of London. Moreover, the nature of their lives as migrants meant that, as I discuss in detail in chapters four to six, they often moved, both physically and through forms of communication, between very different cultural and geographical spaces, including not only the wealthy London households in which they lived and worked, but also their home communities in Nepal.  Not only was it not possible for me to travel to Nepal with members of the group, but the nature of their work meant that although one participant, Priya did invite me to her employer's house on one occasion when her employers were away, their often difficult relationships with employers meant that it would not have been appropriate to expect them to negotiate for me to access employers' households. As a result, with the exception of Priya, I was not able to collect direct observation data relating to their lives and engagement with literacy outside the sessions.

Despite this, in developing my approach to collecting and working with my data through the group sessions themselves, which I use as an entry point to understanding the wider contexts in which the women's literacy practices are located, I draw on elements of what Green and Bloome have described as an "ethnographic approach", and make use of "ethnographic tools" (Green & Bloome, 2004, p. 183), including participant observation supported by individual

interviews and the documentation of informal discussions. Although, my active role as a teacher/mentor meant that I did not take on the silent participant-observer role sometimes adopted by ethnographers (Heath & Street, 2008), but was actively involved in shaping the sessions, my immersion in the group and the intensive nature of the sessions themselves provided me with an opportunity to make detailed reflective observation notes following each session. My dual role also enabled me to draw on my observations and discussions with the women in developing materials and activities for the sessions, as I discuss in chapter six. I thus drew on ethnography as a learning resource as well as a research approach (Hamilton, 1999). The time period of more than three years over which I collected my data also meant that I was able to get to know the women in the group well as individuals and was able to share in significant moments in their lives including the celebration of birthdays and news of receiving indefinite leave to remain in the UK, and take time to listen to their personal stories of migration and learning. Like Chopra in her research with women literacy learners in India I therefore also sought to draw on the "practice of ethnography as a means of listening to learners" (Chopra, 2004, p. 35) in order to place their own views and reflections at the centre of my research.

## Observation, texts and interviews

My primary focus for data collection was the documentation of the literacy support sessions. Between July 2008 and June 2011, I documented a total of sixty-three group sessions. Each session lasted approximately two hours and was attended by between one and five women. Although I was not able to take detailed notes during the sessions themselves, I sometimes noted down key words or ideas in the form of jottings (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011) in order to help me write up the detailed reflective notes that I made immediately after each session. When I began this process these detailed notes were handwritten. However after a number of weeks I developed a prepared electronic template which enabled me not only to take notes more efficiently after the sessions, but also to ensure that my observation notes enabled me to gain as broad an insight as possible into the multiple ways in which the women in the case study group drew upon and engaged with literacy in different aspects of their lives.

To help me do this I developed a number of key headings or sections which shaped my observation notes. These included a specific section concerned with a description of the literacy activities that took place in the sessions themselves as well as a section in which I documented any literacy related activities that the women mentioned which occurred outside the session space. I also included a section in which I documented the ways in which the women spoke about their life experiences and life histories, which included both their current experiences of life as domestic workers in London and their earlier experiences both in their home communities in Nepal and of migration to other locations, as well as a section for 'gossip', in which I noted anything that the women shared with me relating to their connections to others in the group and their wider social networks. These latter two sections were important in enabling me to build a fuller understanding of the women's lives and the different contexts which framed their engagement with and understandings of literacy. In line with common practice within

ethnographic research, particularly that associated with anthropological research[9] (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2001; Emerson et al., 2011; Van Maanen, 2011), these sections were largely concerned with description, rather than interpretation or reflection. However, the active way in which I interacted in the sessions themselves meant that separating description, reflection and interpretation was not always straight forward, and my accounts in these sections inevitably involved processes of interpretation and, in places, included reflections regarding my own role in the activities described. Meanwhile I also included a separate section at the bottom of the observation notes which was explicitly concerned with my own reflections: these included reflections relating to my research interests, including initial ideas regarding the nature or significance of the data itself and particular themes that appeared to be emerging, as well as reflections that related more specifically to my practice as a teacher/mentor.

In addition to documenting the sessions themselves, I made copies of the texts used and discussed during the sessions for the majority of the documented sessions: as shown in table 3.1 below, copies of at least some texts were made for forty three of the sessions. This entailed photocopying work produced by individuals during the session, taking photographs of group work produced on the white board, keeping copies of resources used in the session and making copies of other documents that participants brought with them to the sessions where appropriate. I only copied documents once explicit permission had been obtained from participants, and I did not make copies of documents containing personal, private or confidential information. When I made copies of documents I coded them according to the session, participant and type of text and activity they related to and referenced them in the corresponding observation notes. An example of completed observation notes with associated texts from one of the sessions can be found in appendix 1.

For the first eighteen months of my research – from 2008 until the end of 2009 – I documented every group session. Over this time, I started to assemble a list of key themes that reappeared often suggesting that they were particularly significant for understanding the way women in the case study group engaged with literacy. Drawing on this emerging initial process of analysis, after this period I streamlined my approach to data collection and only documented sessions that were of particular interest, either because events in the session seemed to speak directly to one of these emerging themes, or because they seemed to present something new. This pattern of data collection through the documentation of sessions and copying of texts can be seen in table 3.1 below. Full details for each session can be found in appendix 2.

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[9]Though note that it is generally recognised that the nature of fieldnotes vary and that they may take different forms.

| Month | Number of sessions documented | Participants in attendance | Copies made of texts? |
|---|---|---|---|
| July 08 | 3 | Sudha, Priya, Nhanu, Ramita | 3 sessions |
| August 08 | 4 | Sudha, Priya, Ramita | 3 sessions |
| September 08 | 2 | Sudha, Priya, Nhanu, Ramita | 1 session |
| October 08 | 4 | Sudha, Priya, Ramita, Nhanu | 2 sessions |
| November 08 | 4 | Sudha, Nhanu, Sunita, Deepa | 4 sessions |
| December 08 | 3 | Sudha, Sunita, Nhanu, Ramita | 2 sessions |
| January 09 | 3 | Sudha, Sunita, Ramita, Deepa, Nhanu, Priya | 3 sessions |
| February 09 | 4 | Sudha, Sunita | 4 sessions |
| March 09 | 3 | Sudha, Sunita, Jyothi | 4 sessions |
| April 09 | 4 | Sudha, Sunita, Jyothi | 1 session |
| May 09 | 4 | Sudha, Sunita, Jyothi, Nhanu | 3 sessions |
| June 09 | 4 | Sudha, Sunita, Nhanu, Jyothi | 2 sessions |
| July 09 | 3 | Sudha, Jyothi, Jyothi | 2 sessions |
| August 09 | 3 | Sudha, Jyothi, Sunita, Ramita, Neeru | 2 sessions |
| September 09 | 3 | Sudha, Sunita, Jyothi, Nhanu, Ganga | 1 session |
| October 09 | 4 | Sudha, Nhanu, Sunita, Jyothi | None |
| November 09 | 3 | Sudha, Nhanu, Sunita, Jyothi | 1 session |
| January 10 | 1 | Sunita, Jyothi | 1 session |
| October 10 | 1 | Sudha, Kalpana, Sunita | 1 session |
| January 11 | 1 | Sudha, Purngi, Kalpana | 1 session |
| June 11 | 1 | Sudha, Purngi, Sunita | 1 session |
| July 11 | 1 | Sudha, Kalpana | 1 session |

**Table 3.1: Sessions documented through observation notes, and the copying of texts**

My concern with ensuring that my analysis of the women's engagement with literacy, as documented through the group sessions, was situated within a wider understanding of their lives and experiences meant that, in addition to the documentation of the group sessions themselves I also collected more detailed data relating to individual experiences and personal stories. I was not able to carry out this more detailed individual research with all the group members. Rather, as I discuss in more detail in chapter four, I chose to focus on the three original group members, Nhanu, Sudha and Priya, considering that their stories, both individually and taken together, represent a useful telling case.

I took two approaches to collecting this data for the three women. For both Priya and Nhanu, I conducted individual life history interviews. These were both conducted outside the MRC and the group session space. I interviewed Priya in December, 2008 shortly before she was due to return to Nepal. At the time she was waiting for her visa to come through, and until it did she wasn't sure whether she would be able to come back to the UK after her trip. After being unable to attend the group sessions for a couple of weeks she had called me specifically to ask me to come and meet with her in her employers' house before she went back to Nepal. At that point it was not clear whether we would have further opportunities to meet and speak and so Priya agreed to my request to be interviewed. I interviewed Nhanu in May 2013 after I had completed the rest of my data collection. Like Priya, at the time of the interview Nhanu was due to return to

Nepal, and although she was planning to return, and had the necessary visa to be able to do so, she was not sure when this would be and so when we would have another opportunity to speak. At the time of the interview, Nhanu was living in a small bedsit in a shared house, together with her husband and her two year old daughter, and I interviewed her in this shared room. Her daughter was with us for the interview, playing in the background. I did not record either of the interviews with Priya or Nhanu: Priya had not been comfortable with the idea of her voice being recorded, and although Nhanu was happy to be recorded, her small daughter seized my voice recorder when I got it out of my bag, thinking it was a mobile phone for her to play with, and did not relinquish it for the duration of the interview. However I took very detailed notes during both interviews. Following Priya's interview, she requested that I gave her a typed up copy of her story based on the notes that I had taken. When I gave this to her we read it through together which enabled me to verify that I had documented her experiences accurately.

I did not conduct a formal interview with Sudha, but instead documented the often extended informal discussions I held with her over the entire period of this research. As I note in chapter four, Sudha was the most regular attendee in the group, attending sixty one out of the total of sixty three sessions that I documented. She tended to arrive before any of the other participants, and over a period of several months, at her request, I met with her early, half an hour before our group sessions started each week. Some of this time was used to help Sudha with particular aspects of reading and writing she was finding difficult, often related to the English classes she attended on Sundays. However we also used the time to simply chat and catch up, and during this time Sudha often shared stories about her experiences both in the UK and before coming to London with me, which I documented in my notes for the session. In April 2013, shortly before my interview with Nhanu, I also attended an informal catch up with Sudha, Priya and Nhanu, which was held in the Sudha's bedsit which she was then sharing with her teenage son. This provided an opportunity for me to hear from all three the women regarding what they were then doing and how life had changed since I had last seen them for the literacy support sessions.

| Name | Number of sessions documented | Other data collected |
|------|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Sudha | 61 | Copies made of 52 individual texts (linked to 32 separate sessions)<br>Notes made following informal meeting/catch-up on 210413 |
| Priya | 12 | Notes made following phone conversation on 260109<br>Notes made following phone conversation and meeting on 100209<br>Notes made following phone conversation on 171208<br>Notes made following informal meeting/catch-up on 210413<br>Interview conducted on 231208 |
| Nhanu | 25 | Copies made of 4 individual texts<br>Notes made following informal meeting/catch-up on 210413<br>Interview conducted on 010513 |

**Table 3.2: Data collected relating to Sudha, Priya and Nhanu**

Over the time period during which I conducted this research I got to know the three women well, and when interviewing Priya and Nhanu, and when speaking with Sudha, I was able to draw on what I already knew about their lives from what they had told me in the group sessions. I tried to encourage them not only to fill in the gaps, or explain more about particular events that had been unclear, but also to share their own reflections on what different events or experiences meant to them, and how these related to one another and to their on-going experiences now. This included reflection on particularly significant moments in their lives: for example, leaving their communities and starting work for the first time; coming to London and starting work here; leaving or escaping from bad employers; marriage or the birth of children; initial experiences of learning English. In some of these – for example their reflections on opportunities for schooling in their home communities – literacy was a specific focus. However I was also concerned with understanding more about their life experiences more broadly, beyond moments that had a clear and direct link to aspects of literacy or learning.

## Analysis

### Studying literacy events

Like many other ethnographic studies of literacy, my research drew on the notion of the literacy event as a both a methodological and an analytical tool.  The term 'literacy event' is often attributed to Shirley Brice Heath, who used it in her detailed ethnographic study of the way in which language is used in two communities in South Eastern USA (Heath 1983). Heath's study sought to understand how children "are socialised as talkers, readers and writers" (p. 6) in each community, and the effect that this has on their experiences and engagement with formal school literacy learning and explored the range of communicative practices – written and oral – that occurred within the communities. By documenting literacy events – situations in which social activity involving different forms of communication, including writing or reading, occur – Heath was concerned with exploring not only the different ways in which reading and writing were used in each community, but also the social nature of these activities, which often involved talk as well as text (Heath 1983, p. 196):

> "***Literacy events*** in Trackton which bring the written word into a central focus in interactions and interpretations have their rules of occurrence and appropriateness, just as talking junk, fussing, or performing a playsong do. The group activities of reading the newspaper across porches, debating the power of a new car, or discussing the city's plans to bring in earthmoving equipment to clear lots behind the community, produce more speaking than reading, more group than individual effort." (my emphasis 1983, p. 200)

For Heath, it was important not only to understand the social interactions (involving talk) that occur around the written texts, but also the rules that govern these interactions: it was by documenting and analysing a number of different literacy events within each community that she was able to unpack these rules and reveal how different the forms of literacy practices that

existed within the communities she studied were from the formal literacy activities that took place in local schools.

Since Heath's study, the notion of the literacy event has been drawn on as a methodological and analytical tool by a number of different researchers. Barton, for example, drew on the notion of literacy events in his study of literacy in a community in Lancaster, England, defining literacy events as "the particular activities in which literacy has a role" (Barton, 1991, p. 5). This research was developed in much more detail in the book 'Local Literacies', co-authored with Mary Hamilton (Barton & Hamilton, 1998), in which Barton and Hamilton examined a number of different sorts of events, in order to understand the ways in which literacy features in people's everyday lives in this particular community. These included events involving a number of participants and often complex forms of social interaction, such as meetings, as well as "regular, repeated activities" (ibid, p. 7) often involving one participant only, for example using recipes when cooking a pie (ibid, p. 8), in which the focus on the social interactions that take place during or around a literacy event, is less apparent.

While Heath is concerned with understanding the rules that govern particular literacy events embedded within particular social contexts, for Barton and Hamilton it was the link between literacy events and literacy *practices* that was particularly critical to their analysis. Drawing on Street (1984), they considered literacy practices to be "general cultural ways of utilising written language which people draw upon in their lives. In the simplest sense literacy practices are what people do with literacy. However, practices are not observable units of behaviour since they also involve values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships" (Barton and Hamilton 1998, p. 7). They thus attempted to move analytically between the notions of events and practices to understand how literacy was used, talked about, and understood in the particular focus community. They argued that events – which are empirical and observable – arise from practices, and therefore practices may be inferred from the study of events (ibid, p. 14) that occur within different spaces or 'domains' of community life. Taken together, studying multiple events enabled them to attempt to draw out some of the common ways in which reading and writing were used, understood and culturally constructed in a working class Lancaster community.

In both Heath and Barton and Hamilton's work, the documentation and analysis of literacy events was directly linked to understanding literacy practices within a particular context associated with the notion of a community, which could be physically – as well as socially and culturally – demarcated. As I discussed in the section above, for the group of women who form the basis of this research this notion of 'community', and the definition of 'context' is much more problematic as their lives are characterised by movement between different physical, social and cultural spaces. Some scholars – engaged in or drawing on the increasing debate around the global as well as local dimensions of literacy, which I explored in the literature review –  have questioned the extent to which a focus on literacy events is adequate for taking account of such movement: Baynham and Prinsloo (2009), for example, have suggested that the focus on the literacy event implies "some distinct set of activities that can be readily distinguishable, having a

schematic structure" (ibid, p. 11), and point to the difficulty of using an approach based on the notion of literacy events to address questions of temporal and spatial discontinuity in literacy activities such as, sending a text message in which "literacy activity spills over particular time/space coordinates" (ibid, p. 12).

However, some researchers have attempted to incorporate a consideration of movement in their focus on events. For example, Gemma Moss' (2007) research, which looks at the literacy practices of 7-9 year old boys and girls in UK schools, suggests that through paying attention to the relationship between texts and contexts, as well as readers/participants when documenting literacy events, it is possible to consider how they move between, and may be recontextualised in, different contexts. For example, she describes how a large format children's atlas kept by the blackboard in one classroom, and clearly designed for use as a reference text in "whole class settings" was popular in quiet reading time and used by groups of children to play a guessing game they had invented – clearly not the publisher's original intention (Moss, 2007, p. 97).

Kell, meanwhile, in her study of literacy practices in a house building project on the outskirts of Cape Town's black townships in South Africa (Kell, 2006, 2008, 2009a), developed a methodological approach involving participant observation in multiple domains in order to track the trajectories of texts as they move between different contexts. She focuses on "meaning making trajectories"– consisting of sequences of events mapped across space and time – in which texts are tracked as artefacts that can form joins between one context and another (Kell, 2009a). These included literacy events, although Kell suggests that, in fact, literacy events may form a very small part of these sequences and therefore argues that there is a need to look at any event, including those not directly related to literacy, relating to the trajectory, whether or not they involve written texts.

In my research the concept of 'movement' does not just apply to the movement of texts, but also to the movement of people between contexts. However, the emphasis that Kell, in particular, places on tracking movement between spaces, clearly could be adapted to consider the movement of the users of texts as well as the texts themselves. While, as I discussed above, there were both ethical and practical reasons why doing the sort of 'ethnographies of process' and long-term participant observation in multiple domains conducted by Kell was not possible, as my access to different areas of the women's lives was limited, understanding how multiple events are connected to each other across space and time, and in analysing and making visible the connections between events and how one event may lead to or be related to another was central to my research. Finding ways to track and analyse the connections between multiple events occurring across contexts therefore formed an important part of my approach to working with my data. In the paragraphs below I discuss how I attempted to do this through a focus on the literacy events comprised by and occurring within the group sessions themselves.

### The group sessions as literacy events

The group sessions through which the women came together for literacy support, and through which I collected the bulk of my data could themselves be seen as constituting literacy events, understood in Moss' terms of involving participants, texts and a particular immediate context (Moss, 2007). Each session was also comprised of several smaller events. These included both learning activities (either initiated by me or by the women themselves) as well as much looser or more informal discussions and engagements with a range of texts that took place during group sessions.

The sessions took place within a particular kind of literacy context, within which these literacy events could be located: the women came together specifically for literacy support and learning, in a centre offering a range of educational (and other support) services to members of migrant communities. However, the sessions themselves, the nature of the group that came together in them and the interactions between them, as well as the way in which the content of literacy learning that took place was negotiated between the different participants (including myself as teacher/mentor/researcher), means that, as I explore in chapters five and six, they also brought other 'contexts' into the session space. For example,  the interactions and discussions between participants who came from the same network of Nepali migrants in the UK, and often also from the same villages, region or extended families in the UK, often hinged around what was happening within these different 'communities', including discussions of friends and family they have in common (here and in Nepal), visits back to Nepal and memories of life in Nepal or of working in India, or community events or parties that they had been to or were planning. Meanwhile, the informal nature of the sessions meant that, although I often came prepared with ideas for the group, accompanied by learning materials such as worksheets and books, members of the group also often brought in specific texts from 'outside' which they needed help reading or responding to. These related to a variety of aspects of their lives, and included for example, letters from the bank, job or visa application forms, their employers' children's books, text messages received from friends or from the mobile phone company, words to songs associated with community events, and work they had been given in other English classes they attended.

This meant that the literacy events that took place in the group sessions, and the discussions that occurred around them, were often clearly connected to other events which took place outside of the classroom space. In some case, these events as described – or remembered – by participants, were clear examples of other literacy events, also involving text, context and readers/writers. However, like some of the events discussed by Kell in her study, in other cases they did not always explicitly involve literacy/texts, but nonetheless still had a bearing on the way the women used or understood literacy. These included events relating to activities that they carried out as part of their jobs as domestic workers, which did not involve literacy but affected the way in which they engaged with literacy activities within our sessions – for example their work preparing meals and food for parties for their employers played out in the way in which they engaged with the development of a recipe book in group session time – as well as

events that occurred earlier in their lives which affected their perceptions of themselves as learners, for example their memories of leaving home and beginning domestic work for the first time.

The ways in which the women brought other contexts into the group sessions – and the literacy events occurring within them – meant that the observation and documentation of the literacy events in the sessions, with close attention not only to the text itself and the direct context in which it was being used, but also to the discussion that takes place around it, provided an entry point to tracking (some of) the different external contexts in which the women engaged with literacy. Examining the connections between these observed and documented literacy events – in which I was often a direct participant – and the related events described, discussed and remembered by the women in their conversations with each other and with me therefore enabled me to piece together a more complete picture of the place and role of literacy in their lives as migrant women. The group sessions therefore provided an opportunity not only to examine the women's engagement with literacy within the specific context of the group itself, but also to try and understand how this connected to the wider, shifting context(s) of the women's lives, which were framed by the different spaces, groups and communities they inhabit and with which/whom they interacted. This can be seen clearly in the extract below, which describes a literacy event which occurred during one of the group sessions. We had spent the session, which was attended by the three women mentioned in the extract, practicing filling in forms, which was a specific learning need that had been identified by the group:

*Something that everyone wanted help with [when working with the practice forms] was writing their dates of birth, and this generated quite a lot of discussion. Sudha's and Deepa's dates of birth seemed fairly straight forward. Both were familiar-ish with the way that dates are represented numerically though Sudha got all the numbers quite muddled – we managed to untangle her date of birth as 21st April 1964, whilst Deepa's is 22nd April 1970. Nhanu's however was more complicated. Nhanu said she was born on 16th May 1977. However her date of birth on her passport is 1970 (1st January which is the date she says they always give), and she showed me this on what looked like a bankcard from Hong Kong (1970 was written in English numerals, the rest I couldn't read in Chinese). She said that this was because when she first got a passport she was too young and so they needed her to seem older – I asked whether this was because she had left Nepal to work... [She explained that] when she was 11 she first left her village for Kathmandu where she worked in a carpet factory for 3 or 4 years. Then she went back to her village before going to India as a domestic worker when she was 15 she thinks... She said she thinks it's really stupid having a passport with the wrong date of birth and wishes she didn't and doesn't like people to think she must be much older or being confused that she looks so young compared to the age she is meant to be, but as it is the date in her passport it is the one she needs to use on forms and so she wanted to learn how to write it. The others agreed [with her] that it was important that she should focus on learning to write her 'official' date.*

> *Deepa then told us that the date of birth on her passport was actually wrong as well, though it makes her seem younger rather than older (by 3 years). She said that it was normal in Nepalese villages for babies not to be registered straight away and as her parents can't write they would have to have waited for someone who could to register her.*

<div align="right">**Extract 3.1: My session notes 171208**</div>

This literacy event, as recorded in my observation notes from the session, tells us something about literacy *within* the context of the group sessions, as well as about the literacy skills that the group members were developing in being able to write their dates of birth in different formats. However it is clear that it also does more than this, as it connects out to very different contexts and moments in the women's lives, and the way in which they engage with or have been affected by literacy within them. The discussions around Deepa's and Nhanu's dates-of-birth both point to the way in which they experienced processes of (il)literacy, in their home communities in rural Nepal, which affected how their births were registered. They also highlight the lasting consequences that this had as they now need to engage in filling forms and 'official' forms of literacy here in the UK as they negotiate the bureaucracies around, for example, immigration, and they are tied to using their invented dates of birth when doing so. The discussion of Nhanu's experience also point to significant moments or events in her life as she left her community and started work at a young age, while her presentation of her bankcard connects us to her experience of life in Hong Kong – which clearly entailed new forms of literacy in Chinese as well as English – and processes of engagement with these.

This particular literacy event provides fragmented glimpses into different moments and spaces in the lives of the women in the group, and the way that literacy plays out within them. Taken on its own it therefore cannot be seen as representing a single literacy practice. Rather it gives an insight into a few of the multiple ways in which women engaged with or were affected by different forms of literacy, the interconnections between these, and the ways in which these were situated in or affected by a number of different contexts. This meant that, while my lack of direct access to the different external contexts entailed and discussed means that there will inevitably be gaps, when multiple events such as these were documented over an extended period of time, and analysed together, it became possible to start to piece together a much fuller picture of the women's engagement with literacy across the range of different contexts among which they moved. In this research, in drawing on the notion of literacy events, and, in seeking to identify and interpret the connections between multiple events occurring across very different contexts, my focus is on understanding how the ways in which the women in the case study group value, engage with and are able to draw upon literacy as social and cultural capital is affected by changing social relations as they move and make connections between different spaces. Each of these spaces might entail different notions and configurations of 'community', with implications for the way in which literacy is understood, what it means and what it does.

**Bringing together events, narratives and themes**

As I developed and wrote up my final analysis I took a three pronged approach to working with my data, moving between a focus on selected literacy events occurring within group sessions, life history narratives that I developed in relation to Priya, Sudha and Nhanu, and themes that I identified through the observation data from group sessions. These three areas of analysis were conducted in parallel to each other, allowing me to move backwards and forwards between them as I developed my overall argument and shaped the three data chapters presented in this thesis.

The example of a literacy event described in the extract above, points to the way in which the women's relationship with literacy is framed not only by their current experiences as migrant domestic workers living, working and learning English in London, but also by each of their personal life histories, beginning with their early childhood memories of life in their home communities (or events that they had been told about by older adults in the community), and their early engagements – or not – with forms of schooling, and passing through particular moments in their lives as they migrated out of these communities in order to find work. It was therefore clearly important to situate such events within a more in-depth understanding of the women's lives – not only in relation to the present – but also in relation to their earlier experiences.

In order to do this, I drew on a narrative approach to working with the data I collected in relation to Sudha, Priya and Nhanu. Through bringing together the experiences of an individual actor into a coherent whole, narratives enable "meaning making through the shaping or ordering of experience", as well as the exploration of the way in which "individual moments or events, and the value or meanings attached to them, may be connected through time" (Chase, 2011, p. 421; see also Polkinghorne, 1995). Thus the focus is not so much on trying to construct an accurate timeline of a person's life, but with seeking to understand how the participants themselves talk about, interpret and attach meaning to particular moments or events as well as their experiences as a whole. In drawing each of the women's stories together, I was therefore alert to the ways in which they themselves reflected on and spoke about significant moments in their lives. However I was also aware of the difficulties of doing this. All the interviews and discussions were conducted in English and, although all three women, and Priya and Nhanu in particular, had good spoken English, English is not their first, or even second language, which inevitably affected both their expression and my interpretation of the often rich, complex and nuanced stories they shared with me. Moreover, in the way I constructed their stories, as well as in the questions I asked the women in seeking their stories, and my use of prompts to elicit their reflections on particular aspects of them, I was aware of the role that my own interests played in shaping the form they took. Chopra, when reflecting on her own experience of working with ethnographic narrative to tell the stories of women literacy learners in rural Indian communities writes: "my ethnographic writing, though claiming to be the outcome of 'participatory research' intentions, remains implicit in denial of voice as my research subjects – Naj Jamal, Ajimun, Tulsibai and Sakina – are spoken for. Their interviews have become 'my stories-as-her-stories'.

Their Hindi words have become English words and their voice, in the first person, becomes third-person as the linearity created to project a 'complete' ethnographic narrative is based on a series of interpretations and translations..." (Chopra, 2004, p. 54). Although, as I note in chapter four, in drawing on the close relationship I was able to develop with the women, and through being closely attentive to their own reflections I hoped to present narratives that the women themselves would be happy to identify with, it is clear that my own research was similarly reliant on processes of interpretation, and translation of ideas and meanings, if not of language. My engagement with the data relating specifically to Priya, Sudha and Nhanu's experiences, and the way I worked with it to assemble their life stories in the form of narratives, enabled me to identify not only significant moments and spaces – or contexts – which framed their engagement with literacy but also some of the key points of tension that have characterised their experiences of migration and domestic work, and the contradictory opportunities and constraints – including around literacy and learning – that these have presented them with.

The process of identifying key themes across my data was initiated during the period of data collection itself, as I began assembling a list of emerging key issues during the initial period of field research.  Once the data collection phase was completed I then returned to my raw data from all the documented sessions, in the form of large files of observation sheets for each individual session with accompanying copies of texts. In searching through these I was guided by the themes that I had already identified during the course of the data collection. However, this process of reviewing and re-engaging with the observation data was an iterative one. Through it I was able to further refine my list of themes and categories for analysis, as I identified recurring issues and patterns across multiple sessions and individual literacy events.

At the same time, when working through my data from the sessions, I was able to identify individual literacy events which I considered would be particularly useful to throw light on some of the ways in which the women's engagement with literacy across these different contexts played out during specific moments during the sessions in more detail. Through paying attention to the ways in which participants engaged with and spoke about texts during a range of such events I was able to focus in on the interconnections between different contexts, forms of social interaction, and the role and meaning that literacy and engagements with particular types of texts took on within them.

In working with my data in this way, across themes, events, and narratives, I moved backwards and forwards between the language used by the participants as they identified significant moments in their lives or particular topics of concern to them in their conversations and writing – for example the importance of sending and receiving text messages with friends and family across the globe,  difficulties they were experiencing with their employers, or shared experiences of travelling back to Nepal –  and my own analytical categories, which spoke to the transnational nature of their lives and the way in which their literacy practices interact with the dislocations in time, space and language that they experience as migrant women moving between different spaces. Through this process I sought to move from a focus on description – describing what happens in the sessions, or what the women do with literacy –  to developing a

"language of enactment" (Moss, 2001), as I sought to conceptualise and understand the ways in which literacy plays out in the tension points created by migration and domestic work, and how the women in the case study group drew on their emerging literacy practices in English to help them negotiate the opportunities and constraints they experienced in migrating to the UK, in the workplace and in their transnational networks that connect them to family in Nepal and across the globe. This involved bringing my data into dialogue with the literature, in particular that concerned with literacy as a social practice, but also a body of work concerned with the nature of migrant domestic work. I therefore drew on the theoretical insights from the New Literacy Studies to prise out the ways in which the women's literacy practices were situated within particular social and cultural contexts and the relations of power that these entailed, whilst at the same time using data to speak back to the theory, disrupting the localist focus that has often characterised the perspective of literacy as a social practice. Meanwhile, through situating my analysis of literacy within an understanding of the women's experiences as domestic workers I was able to engage with a body of literature concerned with the conceptualisation of migrant domestic work and the tensions between exploitation and vulnerability, and agency and empowerment that it entails, and highlight the role that engagement in literacy and learning may play in negotiating these.

The analysis in the thesis is structured around three chapters. In each chapter I explore themes that I identified as cutting across my data both in relation to the individual experiences of Sudha, Nhanu and Priya, and in relation to literacy events occurring within the group sessions. However the focus of each chapter, and the emphasis regarding the way in which I draw on the data, is different. Chapter four presents Priya, Sudha and Nhanu's stories of migration and domestic labour. Here I am primarily concerned with their narratives: focusing on their experiences and reflections, I consider the way in which as migrant women they move among different transnational spaces, in which they occupy different social positions, and draw out the tensions between the opportunities represented by migration versus the constraints of the long hours entailed by domestic work in a context where they are tied to networks of obligation to their relatives at home. Chapter five looks at the way in which literacy, and the women's engagement with it, plays out in these different transnational spaces and how women across the case study group draw on their emerging literacy practices in English to help them negotiate some of the tensions identified in chapter four, as they move from one space to another. Here the emphasis is on following the connections across time and space that the group respondents draw on in each literacy event in order to consider the way in which literacy events occurring within the sessions shed light on their literacy practices in the multiple contexts that they move between. Finally chapter six focuses in on the women's experiences of learning within the session space itself, as well as in their Sunday English classes. Here the focus is on the literacy events represented by the sessions and the different learning activities occurring within them themselves, as I examine the women's engagement with different forms of literacy learning within them, and the way in which they articulate the sort of literacy support they want and need. In doing so I draw on the analysis of the transnational nature of their lives and literacy practices

as migrant domestic workers moving between multiple spaces developed in chapters four and five.

Running through all three chapters is a concern with understanding and tracking the connections between the ways in which the women speak about, use and draw on literacy as they discuss their life stories or engage with literacy events within group sessions and the transnational nature of their lives as migrant domestic workers. In analysing these connections between the literacy events within the group sessions themselves and the wider – and multiple – contexts with which they connect and within which they interact, I was concerned with understanding how, as they move and build connections between different spaces, they position themselves in relation to others, experience particular configurations of power, and are able – or not – to exercise agency in negotiating the tensions and dislocations that their lives as domestic workers entail.

# Chapter 4: Life Stories

## Introduction

In this chapter I explore the experiences of the women in the case study group, in particular in relation to education, domestic work and migration. I focus in particular on the stories of the three original members of the group: Priya, Sudha and Nhanu.

All the women in the group – except for one, who was from India – came from Nepal, a country with high levels of illiteracy, particularly among women: according to the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report, between 2005 and 2008, only 45% of adult women over the age of fifteen were considered literate (compared to 71% of men) (UNESCO, 2011). Most – including Priya, Sudha and Nhanu - were Tamang women from the hill and mountain regions in North and East Nepal. Ethnographic studies (Devries, 2012; March, 2002) suggest that Tamang women enjoy relatively high levels of mobility, autonomy and status within their communities, compared to women from other ethnic groups in Nepal, and highlight the importance of friendships and collaborative work between women in Tamang society. However Tamang women also experience high levels of marginalisation and discrimination, relating to their gender and low caste status, within Nepalese society more widely (Devries, 2012, p. 49). The women are part of a growing body of female migrants leaving Nepal to participate in global labour markets. Female migration from Nepal was illegal between 1998-2003 (O'Neill, 2007), and remains restricted: although a ban on the issuing of labour permits to women under the age of 30 seeking to migrate to an Arab State as a domestic worker was lifted in 2010, it was reinstated in 2012 (Department of Foreign Employment, 2014). Despite this, and although the vast majority of official labour migrants from Nepal remain men, in the last few years the number of women being issued permits for labour migration has risen dramatically, increasing by 239% between 2008/9 and 2013/14, when 29,154 permits were issued to women (Department of Foreign Employment, 2014). Significantly, these figures do not take into account unknown numbers of women who migrate across the open border into India, or the significant numbers of women who draw on informal networks to facilitate undocumented migration into the Gulf (O'Neill, 2007).

Most of the women in the case study group knew each other before joining the group, and some were related through birth or marriage. However, despite coming from similar backgrounds, they do not represent a homogeneous group: they each had slightly different experiences and were at different stages with regard to their age, employment or immigration status. Some were married, mothers and grandmothers. Others were still single or returned to Nepal to get married during the period over which this research was conducted. While all had come to the UK as domestic workers working in private households, one had since obtained work as a hospital cleaner. Another was quick to point out that she was now employed as a nanny – not a housekeeper – which carried with it higher status. While the others all worked as live-in domestic workers /housekeepers at the time the research began, their working conditions and

the relationships that they enjoyed with their employers differed: some had 'better' employers than others. The time that they had spent working in the UK when they joined the group ranged from three to ten years. During this time one had obtained a British passport, others held domestic worker visas and were hoping to obtain indefinite leave to remain in the UK, whilst another (Priya, discussed below), did not hold a valid work visa. In terms of their experiences of education, they all had little formal education. However, here too there were variations within the group: one member had completed primary school in Nepal, and had been able to develop reasonable literacy skills in Nepalese, three others had attended primary school for a short time, whilst the remaining members of the group had never attended school, and said that they had not been able to learn to read and write at all in Nepalese.

The diversity within the group means that Priya, Sudha and Nhanu's narratives cannot be seen to be representative of the experiences of the group as a whole. Rather, I have chosen to focus on them due to the depth and richness of the data that I possess in relation to each of their stories and experiences. As I explained in chapter three, Priya, Sudha and Nhanu were the three original members of the group when it started in 2008, and with whom I was able to catch up in 2013. They are therefore the only group members for whom I have data spanning a total of five years. Over this time period I was able to get to know each of the three women well. As well as sharing in their literacy learning, I was able to spend time with each of them discussing their wider lives and experiences. For Priya and Nhanu I was able to conduct interviews to supplement notes that I have relating to sessions they attended. Sudha, meanwhile, was the most regular attendee and longest term member of the group, and often arrived early for sessions. As such she was the group member for whom I was able to collect most data, and whom I came to know the best over the duration of our sessions. The nature of the relationship I was able to establish with each of the three women, as well as the extended period of time over which I was able to collect data for them meant that I was able to track changes in their lives, and reflect on these with them at different moments during the research. This enabled me to gain an in-depth insight into the different ways in which each of them experienced, understood and responded to processes of migration and domestic labour, and negotiated and contested their role, position and status within the distinct (transnational) spaces between which they moved and made connections.

The focus in this chapter is on the women's stories or narratives, rather than their literacy practices, which I explore in later chapters. Thus, while I consider how each of the women relate their experiences of education and learning in the past to their experiences of domestic work and migration, I do not discuss their current engagement with literacy in detail. Rather, I hope through their narratives to explore the way in which their experiences as domestic workers with little formal schooling, moving between different transnational spaces, have entailed processes of opportunity and constraint that I consider to be essential to understanding their literacy practices and their engagement with learning.

As set out in chapter three, the stories or narratives developed below draw on observation notes from our sessions, including stories and reflections that the three women shared with me during,

before and after the sessions themselves, as well as extended interviews conducted with Priya and Nhanu in 2008 and 2013 respectively, shortly before each of them was due to return to Nepal, and conversations I held with all three when I was able to catch up with them in 2013. In developing and presenting them I attempted to pull together different aspects of their stories, which were shared in different ways and at different moments in time, in order to construct a coherent narrative of each of their lives and experiences. Doing this inevitably involved a process of screening and data reduction: I was not able to include everything that each of the women told me or discussed during interviews and group sessions in their narratives. In selecting data through which to tell their stories I have thus tried to do two things. I have sought to include data that was particularly useful for presenting the women's life stories in a logical way and, in doing so, illustrate the complexity of their experiences as domestic migrant workers and the tensions and dislocations they encounter and negotiate as they move and make connections between different spaces. At the same time I have attempted to stay faithful to what the women themselves told me was important to them and tell a story that I hope each woman would recognise and feel comfortable identifying with as their own. Ensuring that I paid close attention to the three women's own reflections about what they told me was an important part of doing this.

## Priya

*My life would have been easier if I learnt to read and write before. My father is very proud that I have learnt to read and write here. That's why I am forcing my nephews and nieces to go to school, paying their school fees.*

**Priya - interview 231208**

Priya, in her mid thirties, had been in the UK, working as a domestic worker for eight years when she first started attending the group in July 2008. She is married but does not have children. Over the period that she attended the group sessions her husband was living in India where he worked as a driver.

During group sessions, and when I interviewed her in December 2008, shortly before she was due to return to Nepal, Priya shared and reflected on her memories of life in Nepal and her experiences of migration and domestic work. Unlike many of the members of the group, who had no experience of formal education, Priya explained that she did attend school, but for a very short time:

> *My father was so poor. My mother and father can't read, but my father, he wanted me to go to school, he told me "go to school for your future". He bought me pencils and paper so that I could go to school and learn. But at that time we didn't really know what reading and writing meant. In my family we are nine brothers and sisters and I was the only one who went to school. I was learning very well at school. But one day I don't know what I had done, I don't remember what it was, but my teacher slapped me very hard on my hand. My parents had never slapped me and I was very angry and upset*

> *and I walked out of the school and I went home. I said to my father I didn't want to stay in school, and he said "it's up to you my daughter, I don't want to force you. But you are going to either have to stay here or go and make your future yourself. I can't give you any money".*

> *So I decided to go to the city, that was when I was eight or nine. And suddenly I was working, working. I sent a little money back to my father* (interview 231208)

Her first experiences of working as a child domestic worker in Kathmandu were difficult ones. On one occasion she described how her employer shaved her head and hit her (my session notes 160708), and on another she described being locked in the bathroom:

> *... My first employer, when I first went to the city in Nepal, the husband was very nice. I can still remember his name. But the wife slapped us and locked us in the bathroom... I was so scared, I would pee all the time, I remember how my pee would go everywhere because I was so frightened* (interview 231208)

After working in Kathmandu for five years, she returned to her village, before going to work in India, again as a domestic worker:

> *Then I went to India after five years. 2 years later I went to visit my family in my village and I met my husband and we married. But my husband's family was also very poor. There were five brothers. So again I had to go back [to India] to work. There was no chance for reading and learning* (interview 231208)

She explains that she came to the UK in 2000, from India through a recruitment agency and initially found herself working for "very bad employers":

> *They had card parties all the time and sent me to other people's houses to clean and do the ironing. I was only paid £100 a month and they hid my passport from me* (interview 231208)

In 2005 she was able to change employers, finding work with a European family, and managed to get her passport back, but, despite spending large amounts on lawyers' fees, had not been able to resolve the issue of her visa:

> *I have tried to get lawyers to help me – I paid £1500 to the first lawyer and have paid £700 to this lawyer I have now but still don't have a visa* (interview 231208)

During her time in the UK Priya not only mastered spoken English – she speaks extremely well – but also learnt to read and write quite well. She was one of the most proficient readers/writers in the group and an important source of support for others. She explained that prior to joining our sessions, she attended English classes on Sundays, which she accessed through the migrant domestic worker support organization Kalayaan, for 3 years:

*Everyone else could read and write, there were lots of Filipinos, and Indians and I was the only one who couldn't read. I went because I wanted to be able to read and write, I didn't mind so much about speaking because I had already learnt to speak English a bit in India...*

*The teacher sat with me and really helped me to read and spell words. I really appreciate the help from that teacher, I was very proud when I took the exam. I got two certificates. The last exam I failed as I couldn't read the questions, it was too difficult* (interview 231208)

However, in the context of the long hours and lack of privacy that working as a domestic worker in a private household entails, finding time for learning is not easy. She explained: "Now I have too many things to do to learn and practice more." (interview 231208)

Despite the many years that she has spent working abroad it is clear that Priya maintains close ties – social, emotional and financial – to her family and community. In part, she has done this through the establishment of a wide social network with other Nepalese immigrants in London. She told me that although she didn't know anyone when she first arrived, after eight years she estimated that she knew 200 other Nepalese people living in London, of whom 60 or 100 came from the same region as her.

In sessions, Priya spoke often – and fondly – of her family at home, and brought in photos to show me. These included pictures of her husband in his priest's robes, her 96 year old father, her village and the valley in which it is located (my session notes 200808). She also sends a considerable proportion of her earnings home in the form of remittances. She told me that she has paid for her nieces and nephews to be educated, explaining that this is so they can get better jobs and don't have to become domestic workers like her:

*If they [my nephews and nieces] can read and write they will find a nice job in a hotel or in an office, they won't have to be housekeepers* (interview 231208)

She also persuaded and paid for her husband to attend literacy classes. Moreover she told me proudly that, thanks to the money she has sent home to her husband and family, she was able to invest in property in Nepal and India for her husband and family and support her community as a whole:

*I give a lot of money to charity. I send back money from my earnings here to my village and family – I have built a temple in my village. When I go back I want to take gifts for the women in my village... I have also built a house for my brother and for my father in the village and have built my own house. I have bought a flat in New Delhi in India (where my husband lives). It has three bedrooms, two bathrooms* (interview 231208)

She recognised that this is clearly a significant achievement and when she spoke to me, both during sessions and in the individual interview, she was reflective about her experiences, her engagement with education, the choices she has been able to make and the implications that

these have had for her own life as well as the lives of family members. She explained that she felt that "life would have been easier if I had learnt to read and write before" (interview 231208) and often reflected on how different things might have been for her if she hadn't left school so young and therefore had to become a domestic worker. Like other members of the group, she explained that "no one wants to be a housekeeper" (interview 231208). However, she also recognised that if she hadn't become a domestic worker, with all the difficulties and sacrifices it has entailed, she might not have been able to provide such extensive financial support to her family and community.

When I interviewed Priya at the end of 2008 she was waiting for her visa to come through, which, if it arrived, would enable her to return to Nepal with the security of being able to come back to the UK. However, after years of struggling to obtain a new work visa and regularise her immigration status it was clear she was growing increasingly impatient and despondent. She called me in December to explain that unless her visa suddenly came through she was planning to return to Nepal in January in time for Nepalese New Year, and without a visa would not be able to return to the UK. After eight years away from her husband and family she explained she now couldn't wait any longer, saying "it has been too long, I have been dreaming of my village, my father and my mother, speaking to my husband every day…" (phone call 171208). In the end she waited and obtained her visa in February 2009. By the time it arrived her passport had expired and she had to travel to Liverpool and pay £500 to have it transferred into her new passport. She told me that even though it was expensive, the certainty of being able to go home, and then return to continue earning money had made it worth it.
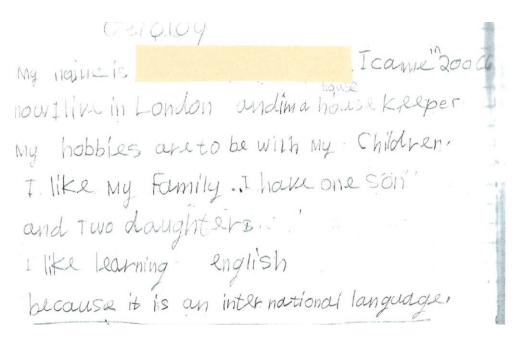
When, at that time, I asked Priya about her hopes for the future she explained that she looked forward to the day when she could go back to Nepal and spend six months relaxing in her village. She then hoped to live in Delhi with her husband in the flat she has paid for there, but also to be able to continue with the learning and literacy journey that she has begun, paying for a private teacher to teach her to read and write in Nepalese as well as in English:

> *When I go back to Nepal I will get a teacher, I will pay someone to teach me to write in Nepalese and in English. Here it is too expensive to have a private teacher...*

> *...When I go back maybe I would like to spend six months in the village, with my parents and then I will go to Delhi with my husband where I have the flat. I hope to have some time to relax but also I like to work. I hope I can get a job working five days a week only* (interview 231208)

In 2013 I was able to meet with Priya again. She was back in London after having spent some time – and all of her savings – in Nepal tending to her husband who had had a serious accident falling off a ladder, and she now had a 'live out' cleaning job. When we met again she seemed less certain of her plans for the future – she said she worried that after so many years in the UK she would find it hard to adjust back to life in Nepal or India. She said she still missed her husband and family but continued to maintain close contact with them, now using Facebook as well as calling them on the phone.

**Sudha**



My name is [redacted] I came in 2006 now I live in London and Im a housekeeper My hobbies are to be with my children. I like my family. I have one son and two daughters. I like learning english because it is an international language.

**Extract 4.1: 'About me' – Sudha's writing from session 030609**

In her mid forties, Sudha was the oldest member of the group and also the most regular attender, rarely missing a session. She also took on the role of unofficial group coordinator: if I wasn't able to attend one week I could call her and she would let all the others know. Similarly, if she knew that several of the group weren't going to be able to make it she would call me in the morning to let me know that I could have the afternoon off. She tended to arrive earlier than other members of the group, sometimes bringing with her documents – often worksheets from the English class she attended on Sundays through Kalayaan – that she wanted my help with before the others arrived. Some weeks we just used the time to chat and catch up.

One of eleven children, three of whom died in infancy, Sudha told me that she never went to school and, despite speaking five languages, did not have a chance to learn to read and write in any language before coming to the UK. She explained that she started working as a domestic worker 'young' before marrying and starting a family when she was 19 and working in India. She had two daughters followed by a son. She told me that her husband and mother-in-law had wanted to have more children in the hope of having more sons but that she had refused.

Sudha had been working in the UK since 2006, following a period working in Spain, and initially worked for an Indian family. Like Priya, her first employers in London were not good employers. She described how they only paid her £200 a month and locked her in – even setting an alarm to prevent her escaping while they were on holiday – so that she was unable to the leave the house for over a year. She explained that one day she escaped while pretending to throw out the rubbish and got a taxi to her cousin's home on the outskirts of London. With the help of her cousin and friends she managed to confront her employer and got her employer to relinquish her passport. When she joined the group she was working for better employers, who were from the Middle East.

Work however was not easy. Sudha often complained about how busy she was, and said that she was regularly required to work extended hours until late at night when her employers had parties. She also described being treated badly and disrespectfully by her employers' adult sons, although on one occasion she explained how she would make one of the sons clean up after himself, laughingly describing how assertive she was. Like others in the group she had Wednesdays as her day off, and proudly told me on several occasions that, unlike other members of the group who often missed sessions when their employers required them to work extra hours, she wouldn't give in to her employers if she was asked to work Wednesday afternoons, explaining that she must come to her class. She had a good relationship with her employers' teenage daughter, describing her as "a nice girl" who sometimes cooked her lunch when she was busy with work as well as, on occasions, helping her with her writing.

Sudha had separated – acrimoniously – from her husband and, in sessions described him on several occasions as "a crazy man" or a "bad man" (my session notes 211008, 040209, 240609), who "should be in the garbage" (my session notes 170609). She explained to me that he no longer sees or supports his son or daughters, even though he also lives in Delhi and that she no longer sends him any money from her earnings. However, she maintains a good relationship with her mother-in-law who lives in a house that she built for her in Nepal and is looking after her small grandson. On several occasions during sessions she commented that friends had suggested that she should find a new man or boyfriend here in London but that she is quite happy on her own, explaining that she prefers to spend time with her friends and sister and pointing to the freedom that her sister – who never married – has. She would also tease younger members of the group as they discussed going back to Nepal to get married, saying that once they had husbands – and children – life would become much more complicated as they would be expected to support them as well as other family members.

Despite this, her family connections were very important to Sudha. In sessions she talked often – and proudly – about her son, a teenager, who, at the time of the literacy support group sessions, attended a private school in India, paid for by her wages. She told me that the thought that her son was proud of her, was one of the reasons she was so happy to have learnt to read and write in English. She also spoke about her two daughters, who, both in their twenties, were also working as domestic workers, as well as sisters employed in domestic work in Egypt, India and London.

> Before I came to
> London I lived in Spain for 6 months
> I worked in a Hotel then I went back to
> my country to see my family because
> I was feeling bad then I was feeling
> very good and happy.

**Extract 4.2: 'Before I came to London' - Sudha's writing from session 240609**

Being away from her children was a particular sadness for Sudha. In extract 4.2 above she describes feeling "bad" when away from her family and then feeling "good and happy" when she was back with them and this reflects similar comments she often made during our sessions. Her children were also a source of worry – in one session she said she felt very tired as she had been up all night worrying about her daughter who had just left her job in Dubai and was moving back to India – and this worry was evidently compounded by the distance she felt from them. However she also often commented that she had to leave her country and become a domestic worker in order to be able to support her family, in particular her son, whose school fees she was paying. When we discussed the future and hope for our lives going forward, unlike some of the younger members of the group, who spoke of hoping to get better jobs – enabled they hoped by obtaining indefinite leave to remain in the UK – or of getting married, Sudha always spoke of her children and her hopes that they would lead happy lives. In 2010 she was able to return to Nepal and India to visit her children and other family members before returning to her job in the UK.

> In the future I want my children to have a good future. I want my son to get married and enjoy himself. I want my daughter to enjoy herself and after get married to a good man. This is their mother's dream.

**Extract 4.3: 'My hopes for the future' - Sudha's writing from session 010709**

Like Priya, Sudha had developed a strong social and support network in the UK, and in particular enjoyed spending time with her sister whenever she had time off. She said that, unlike Priya, she had been able to get her UK visa easily, and she seemed to have a strong understanding of the UK immigration system and visa regulations: in one session she shared her concerns about how this might change if a conservative government was elected[10], and expressed her hope that she would be able to secure indefinite leave to remain before that happened. While, like Priya, she said that in the future she hoped to return to Nepal – to relax – perhaps after ten years, she first hoped to be able to apply for a visa for her son to be able to join her and be educated in the UK. When I met with her in 2013 she had achieved this, having also obtained indefinite leave to remain for herself. Like Priya, she had managed to get a live-out cleaning job, while her son was studying at a local college. She was living with her son in a small room in a shared house, though she said that she hoped one day to return to her village.

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[10]Which happened, and resulted in damaging changes to the domestic worker visa, as discussed in chapter 2

**Nhanu**

> I come from Nepal. I live In
> London. I'm a house Keeper.
> I'm Looking after three Children and
> cooking and shopping and Cleaning
> I like to learn English
> and computer and writing
> and driving and motor bike.

**Extract 4.4: 'About me' – Nhanu's writing from session 030609**

Nhanu, had been working in London for about three years when she joined the group in 2008. She was not married at that time, though in 2009 she went back to Nepal to marry, before returning to the UK. Like Priya, she was in her early thirties when she started attending sessions. Although she was born in 1977, she explained that her date of birth on her passport is 1970. She said that this was because when she first got a passport she was too young and so they needed her to seem older so that she could travel and start work. She explained:
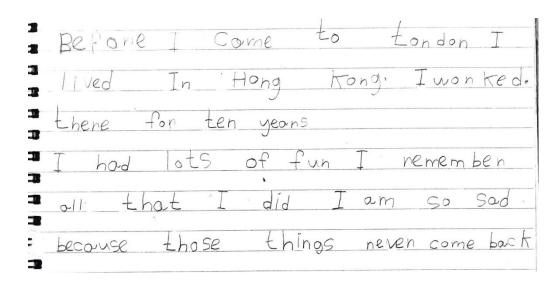
> *My parents didn't force me to go to school. None of my brothers and sisters went to school. When I was 11 I went to make carpets, like these ones [indicating the floor], in Kathmandu. Then I went to India when I was 15 working as a domestic worker. I was still a child then, I hadn't even got my period but I was working. With my employers I look after children who are 12 and I have to do everything for them, but I was already working [at that age].* (interview 010513)

In one session she remembered how she had cried when she first got her period while working in a house in India. She recalled that her employer had told her it was "something that happens to all women and now it will happen every month", and "that is how it was" (my session notes 240609).

From India she went to Hong Kong, where she worked for ten years. She remembered her employers there as good employers:

> *I worked for a nice family in Hong Kong. They followed all the rules and paid me a good salary but I had to work very hard* (interview 010513)

Nhanu often spoke fondly of her time in Hong Kong and brought in photos to show me. Many of these depicted groups of young people – men and women – out enjoying themselves and at parties, and it is clear that, despite working so hard, her time in Hong Kong was a happy one, during which she was able to establish a social life with a strong network of other migrants from Nepal. She obviously sometimes missed this time, reflected in her writing below:

Before I come to london I
lived In Hong Kong. I wonked.
there for ten yeons
I had lots of fun I remember
all that I did I am so sad.
because those things never come back

**Extract 4.5: 'Before I came to London' - Nhanu's writing from session 010709**

Nhanu explained that while she was working in Hong Kong she twice came to London with her employer there. The second time she said to him that she wanted to stay here as salaries were so much lower in Hong Kong and he agreed to let her stay, helping her find a job with a cousin of his.

When she joined the group in 2008 she was no longer working for this employer and instead was employed by a family which was related to Sudha's employers. Nhanu did not have an easy relationship with these employers and clearly found her working life stressful. She would often come to sessions late – or not at all – and in sessions shared how difficult her employers made it for her to attend classes. She often contrasted her employers with Sudha's who she saw as "good employers" as they respected her days off and did not make her work bank holidays. She said that she was expected to be in the kitchen at 7a.m. and often didn't finish work until 10.30 or 11p.m., comparing these long hours with the much shorter ones worked by the (Polish) nanny employed by the same family. She sometimes described arguments she had had with her employers, and of being shouted at by them, and was anxious that she might lose her job. This was a particular worry to her after she married and was trying to apply for a visa for her husband, something she felt she would not be able to do without her employers' backing. This fear meant that she said that she did not want to antagonise her employers by standing up for herself: in one session when Sudha described how she would tell her employer and their children off if they didn't keep the kitchen clean, Nhanu said how she could never risk doing the same with her employers.

Nhanu's anxiety around work, and the long hours she worked, appeared to have a detrimental impact on her health. She often described getting terrible stress headaches or migraines and in one session when she arrived, Sudha commented on how thin she looked. Nhanu replied that she knew she was too thin and people told her she looked "like a dead person" (my session notes 211009), but she didn't really have enough time to eat properly.

While all the members of the group had worked in more than one country, Nhanu stood out as being particularly well travelled, not only travelling to work in Hong Kong and London, but also having travelled extensively as part of her work. When she brought in photos from Hong Kong she also showed me pictures of Mongolia where she had been with her then employers, who also took her to Thailand, Shanghai and Singapore. Since coming to London she said she had travelled to France, Greece and Italy, and often went with her employers to their weekend house in the British countryside.   She explained that she didn't enjoy this travel, as she had to work even harder than when in her employers' London house and it also took her away from friends and meant that she had to miss our sessions and her Sunday classes – she was often away for weeks at a time. These long absences meant that she was the group member who found making progress with her literacy learning the most difficult, as after every period of time she spent away, she struggled to remember the things she had learnt and the skills she had developed before leaving. Unlike most of the other members of the group it also meant that she rarely managed to attend English lessons on Sundays through the organisation Kalayaan as she was often away at the weekend. Her slow progress was a source of frustration to her, and was also damaging to her self-esteem – she often commented that she thought that her "brain wasn't any good".

Like Sudha and Priya, Nhanu maintained close links with family in Nepal and sent home remittances.  She described how her parents took out a small loan from a money lenders and, as a result of all the interest that accumulated over the years, found themselves in considerable debt. She helped them pay it off and said she has also bought property, and paid for all her brother's children to go to school.  She told me that although she knew there were other people who don't worry about sending money home to their families and say "this is the 21st century, things have changed" (my session notes 240609), she couldn't not support her family. However, she acknowledged that she sometimes got fed up with requests for money from members of her extended family.

In 2009 she returned to Nepal to get married, to a "boy" her family had selected for her. After the wedding, which was held in Kathmandu – as she said she hadn't lived in her village for a long time – and attended by 500 guests, she returned to London. Her husband stayed in Nepal, although she said that she spoke to him every day on the phone. After a number of months, she managed to obtain a visa for him to join her in London and she found him a job working in a hotel.

Around the time her husband joined her in London, Nhanu stopped attending our sessions, explaining that she was too busy to come. However, in 2013, I was able to see her again and

she told me a little about what had happened since. Like Sudha, she had managed to obtain indefinite leave to remain in the UK and, on becoming pregnant had left her employers and got a live out cleaning job with her old employer from Hong Kong. When we met she was sharing a tiny bed-sit room – which cost her £600 a month – with her husband and their two year old daughter, who she took to work with her. She was planning a trip back to Nepal with her daughter to visit family, while her husband stayed working in London. While, initially the plan had been to leave her daughter with grandparents in Nepal while she returned to London to work, she wasn't sure that she would be able to do this. I asked her about her plans for the future. She said that she didn't know how much longer she would stay in London:

> *I don't know. I am thinking about staying in Nepal because here what will I do when [my daughter] has homework, I can't help her with it and it is too expensive to get a private tutor but I don't want her to not have help. In Nepal my brothers' children are big now and they have been to school so they could help her* (interview 010513)

## Discussion

> *Maybe if we had a good education we could find a nice job but we don't, we didn't get an education we can't read and write, all we can be is domestic workers*

> **Nhanu - my session notes 240609**

The way in which all three women, Priya, Sudha and Nhanu spoke about their experiences of becoming domestic workers makes clear that none of them considered becoming domestic workers a choice that they were able to make. In all cases they talk about having to start working – either directly as domestic workers, or, in Nhanu's case first making carpets before moving into domestic work – young. They linked this directly to their lack of education as well as poor economic opportunities in their own communities, and the need to support their families, despite only being children themselves. Although Priya, when recounting her decision to leave school suggested that it was her that decided to leave and recounts her father telling her "it's up to you", it is clear that, aged eight or nine, deciding to leave school in order to avoid physical punishment can't be seen as a choice she was able to make freely in any meaningful way. And, as she herself acknowledged when reflecting on this decision, at the time she had no idea of what the implications of that "choice" would be. Similarly Nhanu, when talking about her own lack of schooling says that her parents "didn't force" her to attend. Significantly she doesn't suggest that she was either encouraged or enabled to attend school, and the implication instead is that it was expected that she would start working from a young age.

In our sessions women in the group recognised that, unlike them, many domestic workers are well educated – something that was borne out by Priya's experience of attending Kalayaan classes, and which is supported by the literature that suggests that domestic workers are, in fact, often highly educated (Abrantes, 2012; Bridget Anderson, 2000; Barber, 2000; Ismail, 1999; Lutz, 2008; Momsen, 1999). However, despite this, both Priya and Nhanu felt that had they been more educated they might have been able to get a different sort of job, Priya

comparing herself to friends who had office jobs. The strong association that they make between not being educated and having to take on domestic work appears closely linked not only to their own efforts to learn to read and write themselves, but also to the way in which they talk about supporting the education of others: while Sudha has seen her two daughters follow her into domestic work, she is doing everything she can to support the education of her son, although it is not clear what the gender dynamics of this are. Priya and Nhanu similarly were explicit in their hope that, thanks to their support of their education their nephews and nieces would be able to make other choices – for example to work in an office or a hotel – and would not have to become domestic workers like them. Other women in the group similarly spoke about what they were doing to support the education of other family members.

This negative view that all three – like other members of the group – share of domestic work, is clearly shaped by their own experiences, and, in each of their stories, the exploitation and vulnerability that they have experienced is clear. At times all three women have experienced conditions of slavery, and some of their experiences appear to clearly exemplify Anderson's characterisation of domestic labour as the buying of not just the worker's labour power but their 'personhood' (Bridget Anderson, 2002, 2004). This is perhaps most dramatically illustrated by Sudha's experience of being held captive in her employer's house for a whole year, as well as by Priya's description of being lent out to friends of her first employers in London, and having her passport withheld. It is also apparent in the way in which Nhanu found herself forced to give up her days off and bank holidays to travel with her employers, despite the negative impact that this had on both her health and her ability to engage in her own learning, and in the way she continued to put up with poor working conditions and verbal abuse from her employers for fear of upsetting her employers and jeopardising her immigration status and ability to obtain a visa for her husband. Even when working for 'good employers', all three women experienced the long working hours and lack of privacy or control over their own time which are well documented as being common experiences for migrant domestic workers (see, for example, Bridget Anderson, 2000, 2007; Cheever, 2002; Cox, 2006; Wadhawan, 2013).

However, it would be over simplistic to simply characterise the women as 'victims' and certainly, it is clear that none of the women conform to any stereotype of 'ignorant' or 'oppressed' third world women. All three were confident and articulate women and were knowledgeable about their rights, even when they were not able to ensure that these were respected by employers. And all three had, at times, been able to contest or change their conditions of employment, Nhanu negotiating a move from Hong Kong to the UK in order to improve her earning power, and both Priya and Sudha managing to leave the poor employers that they initially found themselves working for in the UK. Although it is clear that in doing so their alternative options were limited to finding other domestic work, they were able to move to 'better employers'. For Sudha, this meant that although working conditions remained difficult, she, in contrast to Nhanu did hold some power of negotiation within the household within which she worked, reflected in her ability to come to group sessions and negotiate visits back to Nepal, and she was clearly proud of the way in which she stood up to her employers. Over time they were all also able to regularise their immigration status, and achieve indefinite leave to remain in the UK, although

for Priya this was a long, drawn-out and expensive process. Doing this opened up a range of new opportunities for them as it meant that they were no longer officially tied to working as live-in domestic workers (a requirement of the domestic worker visa that they initially held), and could obtain live-out jobs. For Nhanu this meant that she was able to successfully bring her husband over to the UK, and find work for him. Meanwhile, for Sudha it meant that she was able to achieve her dream of educating her son in England.

The stories of all three women confirm the importance of their social capital in the form of the social networks that they have been able to establish in London in providing them with support and enabling them to change their circumstances, as has been documented for other migrant domestic workers (Bridget Anderson, 2009; Briones, 2009; Parreñas, 2001, 2012). Sudha and Priya both drew on these networks in escaping their abusive employers, and all three valued the day to day support and friendship that they received from each other and others in their extended network of friends and family in London, something that Nhanu missed when forced to travel with her employers. Priya and Sudha in particular also obtained support from Kalayaan through which they were able to attend English classes and meet other migrant domestic workers. However their social networks were not confined to other migrants living and working in the UK: their stories also reveal the significance of the transnational links that they maintained with family both at home in Nepal as well as in other countries, in Sudha's case including India, Egypt and Dubai, and, in particular, the role that all three women played in supporting family at home was clearly considerable.

Like many domestic workers (see, for example, Bridget Anderson, 2002; Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002b; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007; Kofman et al., 2000; Sassen, 2002a) – and other Tamang migrant women (Adhikari & Deshingkar, 2015) – Priya, Sudha and Nhanu all sent a proportion of their earnings back to Nepal as remittances, which enabled them to pay school fees, invest in property, buy gifts and even, in Priya's case, build a community temple. This is clearly a significant achievement, and while it is Priya who recognised this most explicitly when she spoke about her relationship with her family at home, all three spoke proudly about the way in which they were supporting their families. As discussed in chapter two, research regarding the way in which the migration of women may impact on gender relations both in their diasporic and home communities, as well as contributing to enhancing the status of the women themselves, suggests that this process is often complex and contradictory (S. M. George, 2005; Lai, 2011; Parreñas, 2005b). While the nature of this research means that I have very limited information about the realities of life in the women's home communities, beyond what they themselves told me – and bearing in mind that some had not been able to return to their communities for many years – Priya's description of the way in which everyone in her community was waiting for her return, suggests that, as an economic provider, she enjoyed considerable status within her village. This is clearly contrasts to the low status that she, like the others, held within the household in which she worked. Meanwhile, Sudha's migration to the UK, and the breadwinner role that she had been able to assume within her family – in particular in relation to her son and her mother-in-law – appears to have made it easier for her to separate

from her unsatisfactory husband, and achieve economic security for herself[11]. Thus, in contrast to the position they hold in the households in which they work, where they are expected to do low status and highly gendered work cooking and cleaning, work long hours, and their powers of negotiation are limited, it appears that their positioning with regard to their home communities and members of their family in Nepal and India is very different. Their stories suggest that, thanks to their global positioning as migrant workers, and, the financial capital they hold in the form of remittances in hard currency, here they are held in high regard, and hold some influence over the decision making of family members, for example encouraging them to go to school or take classes.

However, it is also important to understand the way in which the continued financial support that they provided to their families and communities was bound up in a strong sense of obligation to provide for others – which their stories suggest they carried with them from a very young age – and the personal cost that this entailed. Both Nhanu and Sudha suggested that having to provide for family was something that they sometimes resented – illustrated in particular by Sudha's warnings to younger group members that once married they would simply have more people they would have to provide for and send money to, and Nhanu's complaints about family members pestering her for money. Moreover the continued obligation to provide for others – to keep paying school fees, or to support ageing parents – clearly constrained their ability to consider leaving domestic work and return home. Thus, while the economic status they have achieved through becoming migrant domestic workers in relation to their families and communities might be seen as empowering, it is also binding. The relationship between migration, access to economic (and social) capital and status, and empowerment is therefore not a straightforward one for any of the women.

The three women's stories illustrate the very global nature of their lives. They are stories of movement: they all reveal the way in which they move – physically and through forms of communication, and in the way in which they narrate and reflect upon their lives – between different transnational spaces. These include the wealthy households within which they work in London; their own immediate families – in India, Nepal and elsewhere; and their home communities and villages. They also include many spaces in-between: the places they worked in before coming to the UK – Kathmandu, Hong Kong, Spain –; the network of Nepalese in London with whom they socialise, and draw on for support, in London; the official spaces they have had to negotiate as part of the process of migration – immigration officials, passport offices. As they move from one space to another they adapt to cultural and linguistic differences, and adjust to their changing position and status, and the changing nature of social relations within each space.

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[11]Although note that, according to March (2002) divorce is common in Tamang society, although it is usually expected that the children stay with their father, so divorce for a Tamang woman means leaving her children – see March, 2002 p.50-52

When, Parreñas (2001), writing about the experiences of Filipina migrant domestic workers, describes them as "embodied in dislocations" (p. 3), she refers not only to physical dislocations but also to dislocations associated with changes in status, including the experience of "contradictory class mobility", and to emotional dislocations, which include the pain of family separation (ibid, p. 12). While the experience of Priya, Sudha and Nhanu are different to those of the educated Filipina women studied by Parreñas, it is clear that all three have also experienced similar forms of social and emotional dislocation. These vary for each of the women. In Priya's narrative the pain of separation from her husband and parents, compounded by the uncertainty she experienced due to her difficulties obtaining a visa comes through particularly strongly. For Sudha, the distance she felt from her children, was particularly difficult. Meanwhile in Nhanu's narrative there is not only a strong sense of nostalgia for friends that she had made – and then been separated from – as she moved to Hong Kong and then on to London, but also sadness at the loss of her childhood, and the experience of leaving home so young. For all three women finding ways to lessen the impact of these dislocations, through linking into a community of other Nepali migrants in London as well as maintaining transnational connections with family and friends at home and in other countries was important, and, as I discuss in chapters five and six, this plays out in the way in which they engaged in and used their literacy and learning. Indeed, it is clear that, despite the success of all three of them in realising their hope of obtaining indefinite leave to remain, and for Nhanu and Sudha, in bringing over their husband/son to the UK, all three continued to struggle with the dislocations entailed by migration and the experience of domestic work, which is reflected in their apparent ambivalence and lack of certainty when speaking about their future plans and whether they would stay in the UK in the longer term.

In the literature review (chapter two), I examined how some studies of migrant domestic work either emphasise the oppression suffered by migrant domestic workers, describing them as victims, and conceptualising migrant domestic work in terms of slavery, or highlight the agency of migrant domestic workers, and the potential for processes of migration to be empowering to women migrants. However, like the narratives of the Filipina women who were considered by Briones (2009) and Parreñas (2001), the stories of Priya, Sudha and Nhanu suggest that, in fact the nature of the relationship between agency and constraint, power and vulnerability in their lives and experiences is a complex one, as their lives as migrant domestic workers, and their experience of transnational spaces are characterised by tension points[12] in which contradictory opportunities and constraints play out.

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[12]E.g. exploitation/unfair working conditions, but prestige gained through remittances; separation from family and friends, but able to make distance work to their benefit, obligations and freedoms to and from community ties at home.

In chapter five I consider the way in which their engagement with literacy practices plays out in this relationship as they move between the different spaces that they inhabit as Nepali women living and working in international households in London.

# Chapter 5: Literacy practices

## Introduction

The previous chapter was concerned with the lives of three of the women in the case study group, and their experiences of leaving their home communities in Nepal and becoming migrant domestic workers, now living and working in London. For all three women, like the other women in the wider case study group, coming to London opened up new opportunities for engaging in literacy and learning which had not been available to them in Nepal. However, their lives in London have also entailed encountering new literacy demands, and they have had to engage in new and different forms of literacy practice in order to negotiate their personal, social and working lives. This was often challenging for them: although the level of the women's literacy skills in English varied, at the time of this research none of them found reading and writing easy.

This chapter is concerned with the literacy practices of the women across the case study group. By analysing some of the literacy events that took place in the group sessions – and the talk that took place within them – as well as what the women in the group told me about their lives and experiences of literacy in conversations and interviews, I examine some of the multiple ways in which they use and relate to literacy in their lives outside of the learning space. In developing my analysis I draw upon the dominant understanding of literacy practices within the New Literacy Studies as referring to "general cultural ways of utilising written language that people draw upon in their lives" (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 6) which are located in particular social and cultural contexts and involve values, attitudes and social relationships as well as the ways in which people talk about and construct discourses of literacy. I therefore consider not only what the women in the group do with literacy but also what literacy means to them and how this interacts with particular relations of power and forms of identity. However, as I have discussed in previous chapters, the transnational nature of the women's lives and networks means that the ways in which they engage with literacy crosses contexts and cultural boundaries. Identifying and delimiting context or shared cultural understandings of literacy is therefore not straightforward. As a result, my analysis necessarily encompasses the range of ways in which the women draw on and engage with literacy both as a group and individually across multiple social, cultural and geographical contexts.

In chapter four, in considering the life stories and experiences of Priya, Sudha and Nhanu, I identified some of these contexts, as I highlighted the way in which, as transnational migrants working in private – and international – households they move between different spaces, including the households in which they work, the official spaces associated with processes of migration, and their extensive social networks both within London and globally. The chapter considered how in each space they occupy different positions of power or vulnerability in their relations to others and are able (or not) to exercise different forms of constrained agency. In analysing the literacy practices of the women in the group, this chapter focuses on four key forms of literacy that the women engage with as they move and build connections between

these different spaces. These forms of literacy relate to four interlinked domains or spaces that my analysis of the texts that the women brought to the sessions and of the way in which they spoke about their experiences outside them suggests hold particular significance in shaping their literacy practices.  They are: literacies associated with the official space, including those associated with immigration, travel and visas, as well as with banking and financial transactions; the literacies associated with the workplace, in particular the private households in which most of the women still work; the literacies associated with the social networks that the women move within as they maintain and negotiate relationships with family and friends in London, in their home communities and across the globe; and the personal literacies that the women engage in during the often brief moments of time that the women have by and for themselves.  I do not discuss the women's engagement with literacy in the other classes they attend, as this will be dealt in chapter six.

In analysing the ways in which the women use or engage with these different forms of literacy as they move between official, work, social and personal spaces, I discuss the ways in which they navigate and negotiate the literacy demands they encounter and consider how what literacy and 'being literate' means differs as they move from one space to another. In doing so I explore how in each space the women's literacy practices, and the ways in which they are able – or not able – to draw on their emerging literacy skills in negotiating their position and relationships with others, interact with the way they experience migration and domestic work, and the complex and sometimes contradictory processes of exploitation, agency and empowerment that these entail.

## Official literacies

In negotiating their position as immigrant workers in the UK, all the women found themselves being required to engage with and respond to a range of elite forms of literacy associated with official bureaucracies. These include literacies associated with visas and immigration as well as banking. I refer to these forms of literacy as 'elite' due to the real and symbolic power that they represent, particularly for migrants such as the women in the group. As Denny Taylor (1996), notes in the book 'Toxic Literacies', although the forms and questionnaires associated with official documentation and procedures are developed and administered by bureaucrats, they draw directly on the laws and regulation decided by "the most powerful" (ibid, p.10). They thus may be associated with the maintenance of social hierarchies and inequalities in access to power and resources.

Literacy practices associated with visas and immigration status were a particular concern of almost all the group members. Most, with the exception of Priya, who as discussed in chapter four, did not hold a valid visa when she joined the group, and Kalpana, who had already obtained indefinite leave to remain, held domestic worker visas at the time of joining the group. They hoped, in time, to be able to apply for indefinite leave to remain, and, at least initially, this was one of their major motivations for improving their literacy skills in English. This is clearly

illustrated in the extract below, in which Sudha and Nhanu explained why they came to the MRC asking for literacy support:

> *Sudha and Nhanu started talking about their learning, what and why they wanted to learn etc. They explained that after 5 years in the country they can apply for indefinite leave to remain but to do that they have to take an exam, that would be in two years for Sudha, so reading and writing is important for that. Nhanu has only been here a year so has 4 to go still but still said that she thought reading and writing was most important for her which is why it is what she asked for when she went to the MRC.*
>
> **Extract 5.1: My session notes 011008**

Since that time most members of the group have managed to obtain indefinite leave to remain. Doing this required meeting the English and Citizenship requirements in force at the time: either passing the 'Life in the UK' citizenship test – a multiple choice test taken on the computer – or, for applicants with lower levels of English, completing an 'ESOL and Citizenship' course in lieu of the test (Simpson, 2015). One of the group members, Ramita described doing a written exam, presumably the 'Life in the UK' test on the computer, explaining that she had to take it three times before she managed to pass. However both Sudha and Nhanu described doing oral English tests, following their Sunday ESOL and citizenship courses. Nhanu explained:

> *I had to do an exam, I went to Liverpool Street for classes like Sudha. I did a spoken exam but I also had to fill in a form. I managed to do that because of what I learnt from the classes with you.* (interview 010513)

However, for Nhanu, as for other members of the group, the procedures involved in actually obtaining her visa went far beyond simply filling in a form and passing the test. She described to me the complex negotiations she had to carry out with current and previous employers in order to be able to produce the financial data required to satisfy immigration authorities.

Rockhill, in discussing how immigrant women in the U.S. negotiate the literacy requirements of official bureaucracies, writes that "the series of interactions that immigrant women in particular have with bureaucracies is much more complex than "filling in the blanks" on an information sheet", and describes "the multiplicity of interlocking, ambiguous, bureaucratic regulations with which they must be familiar" (Rockhill, 1993, p. 165). The experiences of the women in the case study group, of negotiating their way through complex immigration bureaucracies – and the engagement with literacy that this entailed – were similar.

This was most powerfully illustrated by the experiences of Priya whose long drawn out process to obtain firstly a valid domestic worker's visa, and then, eventually, indefinite leave to remain involved engaging with a range of complex literacy demands. These included negotiating official correspondence regarding her immigration status: at the end of 2009, when she was still waiting for her visa to come through, she showed me a letter she had received from the home office, via her local MP, which explained that her case was going to be treated as a priority, and that it

would be dealt with as soon as possible. She was able to read the letter to me, though she had difficulty reading the word 'soon', and told me that when it had come she had had to ask her employer for help with some words. It also entailed negotiating a range of literacy demands entailed by the delay in getting her visa: when her visa eventually did arrive, the time that had lapsed meant that the visa appeared in her old passport which had since expired and been replaced by a new one, and getting it transferred into her new passport required a trip to the immigration office in Liverpool. Although this wasn't an official requirement, Priya wanted to do this before travelling back to Nepal. However she was concerned about getting to Liverpool and dealing with the literacy demands that the journey entailed. She asked me to help her get the train from Euston as she was worried about getting on the wrong train or buying the wrong ticket. When I met her at the tube station she showed me the form that her lawyer had helped her fill out, requesting the transfer of the visa into her new passport, and asked for my help in identifying her passport number in her passport so she could add this to the form. At Euston she brought a return ticket, and checked the details on the tickets with me, found 'out' and 'return' and 'London terminals'. She was worried about getting a train back from Liverpool and asked me to show her on a timetable which trains she could get.

Priya's journey to Liverpool ultimately was successful – she rang me when she was back at Lime Street Station in Liverpool – delighted that she had got her visa transferred – and about to get on the train back to Euston. However it is clear that the literacy demands of the journey itself, as well as those entailed by the years of extensive engagement with lawyers and Home Office officials, that had led up to it, over a period of several years, had not been easy for her. Despite her relatively strong English literacy skills, in navigating these she relied on help from literacy intermediaries including me as well as her employers and her lawyer. In negotiating this help – and identifying the aspects of literacy that she needed help with – she drew on the extensive oral knowledge about the process that she had developed over the extended period of time that it took her to get her visa, helped by the advice she obtained from Kalayaan, and by learning from the experiences of others in her social networks of other domestic workers and Nepali migrants. For the other members of the group the process of obtaining visas, and eventually, indefinite leave to remain appeared to have been more straightforward. However, despite this, they still had to negotiate complex forms and correspondence, which, for all of them involved drawing on others for support, including their employers, friends and Kalayaan.

Although their formal immigration status was a major concern for women in the group, the ways in which they engaged with forms of literacy associated with immigration were not confined to obtaining visas. Most of the women travelled back to Nepal before returning to the UK during the period over which this research was conducted, and doing so entailed engaging in literacy in a range of ways. In a number of sessions the women explained how stressful travelling alone could be and described the feeling of getting nervous, knowing that they would be asked to fill in a form on landing or worrying that they might not be able to read signs or departure boards. In dealing with such literacy demands they said they often had to rely on strangers as literacy intermediaries, something that they clearly found problematic:

> *Sudha, Jyothi and Sunita again talked about how difficult travel is when you can't read and write – not just filling in the forms, though that is a big thing but also reading signs, boarding cards etc and always having to ask people the way. Sudha said that here people are always really helpful but that isn't true in India where sometimes people don't want to help or send you the wrong way. She also described the trip she made to Spain when she had to change 3 or 4 times, and how in Spain it was so difficult because people didn't even speak English.*

**Extract 5.2: My session notes 250809**

As was the case with Priya's drawn out journey to obtain and transfer her visa, for Sudha, Jyothi and Sunita it was their understanding of the processes involved in these journeys, and their oral knowledge of the literacy practices entailed as they crossed into unfamiliar spaces,  together with their spoken language skills, that enabled them to negotiate the help they needed, even in contexts where such support was not readily forthcoming. As they improved their literacy in English however, for some of the women, managing the literacy demands related to travel and associated official immigration processes, without having to reach out to strangers in this way, became easier. As a result, they described feeling more comfortable and confident about the journeys themselves. When, after a couple of years of attending sessions, Sudha, for example, returned from a trip visiting family in Nepal and India,  she was proud to be able to tell me that she had managed to fill in immigration forms herself for the first time. Her experiences of this however were not straightforward, and the way in which she described the encounter that she had with the immigration official when she left Nepal was particularly interesting. She explained that when she had presented her form, the official had treated her with suspicion, asking her why she had filled in the form in English, and she had responded that the questions were in English as well as Nepalese. She said that he then queried her UK visa status and asked, rather aggressively, what she was doing leaving Nepal and going to the UK. She said that she told him she had to go to the UK as there were no jobs for her in Nepal, but that if he wanted to get down from his chair and give her his job stamping passports then she would be very happy to take it and stay in her own country. She said that after some discussion he let her through (my session notes 190111).

Sudha's retelling of this experience provides a powerful illustration of the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of the relationship between literacy, language, power and status that the women experience as they move between countries and in doing so have to negotiate official spaces and associated elite literacies, and engage in literacy practices across linguistic contexts. In relating the story to me and the others present at the session – Kalpana and her sister Purngi  – Sudha appears to present herself as 'empowered'. She was proud to have been able to both complete the form in English and stand up to the official when questioned. Here, her developing literacy skills in English as well as, importantly, the knowledge that she possessed a valid visa for the UK appeared to have helped to give her the confidence to assert herself in her dealings with the male official, and ensure that she was able to continue her

journey back to the UK. However her telling of the story also appeared, to some extent, to reflect her own ambivalence about her position as a migrant domestic worker as she also drew on the story to remind us of the lack of opportunities she had to learn to read and write in Nepalese and her view that it was this lack of education and of economic opportunities in Nepal that meant that she had to migrate in the first place, something that she wished she hadn't had to do. Moreover, while, her emerging literacy skills in English were sufficient to enable her to negotiate the official literacies associated with the international space of the airport, and she was aware of the status they carried – evidenced by the surprise the official showed that she had completed the form in English –  she was also frustrated by her lack of literacy skills in Nepalese. This is something that she mentioned on a number of occasions, and, as I explore further in the sections below, like other women in the group, she often spoke of hoping to be able to learn to read and write in Nepalese.

Although, as seen in the examples above, much of the women's engagement with official or elite forms of literacy was related to processes of immigration, there were a range of other ways in which they needed to be able to use or understand elite or official forms of literacy. When we spoke about form-filling, for example, they identified a number of different sorts of official forms they had encountered or needed to be able to fill out. These included forms for applying for an oyster card, NHS forms and bank forms. Being able to deal with the bank was considered particularly important. This entailed not only filling forms but also reading letters and statements:

> *They said that reading and writing letters was important, though they didn't seem to use letters for personal correspondence much – more important was reading letters from the bank. Jyothi had actually brought one with her (a bank statement) to ask me to help her read, she wanted to make sure she had the amount she thought she should have.*
>
> **Extract 5.3: My session notes 280709**

The transnational character of their lives, working for international employers, and their role in sending back remittances to Nepal and India were also reflected in their dealings with transnational financial institutions, and the literacy practices that this entailed. On occasions, for example, they discussed and exchanged information about exchange rates during group sessions, and some group members referred to having bank accounts in more than one country. Sudha told me she had a bank account in India, which previous employers had opened for her and paid her earnings into. Accessing the money in this account however had not been straight forward. She explained how she had tried to do this when in India:

> *Sudha said she had been so happy to see her son and her family [on her trip back to India and Nepal] but that she had some stressful experiences. She explained that this was because she had to sort out her bank account. Her account of this was somewhat confusing... She explained that she has a bank account in India which her employers had opened for her to pay her earnings into. However as she uses two names, one that is on her passport, and one that other people call her, her employers had opened it in the wrong name*

> *and so she couldn't get any money out of it as the name didn't match her name in her*
> *passport. So when she was in India, as well as visiting her son's school and meeting the*
> *teachers, she had to sort this out. She said she went to the bank and tried to explain the*
> *problem to them, and explained that her employers had just used her wrong name, and they*
> *said they needed to see something official confirming her identity otherwise she couldn't*
> *access the account. So she said when she was back in her village in Nepal she had to go to*
> *the community leader and get them to write a letter or a document saying who she was and*
> *she said that they stamped this with some kind of stamp. Then she went back to India and*
> *took this document from her village in Nepal back to the bank. She said that they weren't very*
> *convinced by this document, and that it (convincing them) was very difficult, but it seems that*
> *eventually she managed to sort it out, and to access the money in her bank account there.*
>
> **Extract 5.4: My session notes 290111**

Although Sudha's account is a little difficult to follow, her experience provides a fascinating example both of the challenges of negotiating finances – and the literacy practices associated with them – across geographical and cultural contexts and of the way in which texts themselves may take on different meanings as they move between these contexts. Like the grassroots texts described by Blommaert, which lose voice when they travel from the local Congolese context in which they were produced, into a global context (Blommaert, 2008), what was seen by Sudha as a very official document stamped by officials in her rural community in Nepal, was clearly much less convincing to the bank officials in urban India. However, despite this, Sudha appears to have eventually been successful in convincing them to accept it, thus enabling her to access her bank account.

Central to the negotiations between Sudha and the bank officials was the invocation of the concept of the official document, and a shared view of the importance of writing in asserting the facts in the face of the law, despite their different perceptions regarding how such an official document should look or what it might consist of. Thus, this account, like others discussed in this section, in common with other studies which examine migrant encounters with the literacies associated with immigration bureaucracies (for example, Bartlett et al., 2011; Vieira, 2013) highlights the way in which, for migrants such as Sudha, the authority of official texts creates a special status that may regulate and constrain, or unlock and make possible certain kinds of actions and movements. It also provides a powerful illustration of the way in which, despite their low levels of education, the women in the group, were able to draw on their knowledge and initiative and their extended and transnational social networks, as well as their emerging literacy skills in English, and find ways to successfully negotiate complex literacy demanding situations, in which they found themselves facing high status and well educated officials operating across global contexts.

It is, of course, important to realise that these successes, and the women's achievements in managing to obtain visas or negotiate access to bank accounts or other resources, were affected by much more than just their ability to respond to the particular literacy demands entailed. All the women were very aware, for example, that if the visa requirements changed

then being able to speak English or read and write well enough to fill in the appropriate forms would not be enough to guarantee them a successful visa application, and this is something that they discussed on several occasions during sessions, particularly as the general elections approached. Despite this, as the extract below illustrates, knowing that they had the skills to be able to respond to some of the literacy demands they encountered as they interacted with official bureaucracies enabled them to feel increasingly 'comfortable' and confident as they interacted with these spaces:

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*[The group] were talking about exams and visa rules. Sunita said something about how if the visa rules change then all their efforts learning English and to read and write will have been a waste of time. I asked her if there was any other reason that she is happy to have got better at reading, writing and she said "actually yes, it is very good for us" and told us about how she had gone to the bank the other day and had to fill in a form and had been able to fill it in herself rather than having to ask someone else to fill it in for her. She said that that had felt very "comfortable" and put her hand to where her heart is.*

**Extract 5.5: My session notes 060509**

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## Workplace literacies

As explored in chapter five, Priya, Sudha and Nhanu all considered that not having an education or literacy skills, which might have opened up other opportunities for obtaining more desirable 'office jobs' meant that they had little option but to become domestic workers, and this was something that was also emphasised by other women in the group. The implication seemed to be that, although literacy was clearly important in negotiating the official bureaucracies associated with their status as migrant domestic workers, it was not necessary for doing the work itself, and was not something they needed to use in their jobs. This view was reinforced in the literacy activities that took place in sessions. When we discussed the different ways in which they used and needed to use literacy in their day to day lives, the women in the group emphasised the importance of being able to read and write in order to get around in London. Priya for example, explained:

> *Now if someone asks me my surname at least I know how to spell it, if they ask my house number or road I can write it... Now it is much easier to know how to go places... I know the postcodes NW3, NW1… Before I had to get a taxi if I got lost and would be charged so much because I couldn't read the places, the street names to find my way. Once I got lost and I had to get a taxi, and he took me here, and he charged me £5 even though it was just around the corner but I hadn't realised.* (interview 231208)

However, although some women said they received text messages from their employers on occasion, aspects of reading or writing that related directly to their work experiences within their employers' households were rarely mentioned. In some cases, as illustrated by the example

below, when I asked women in the group directly about how they used literacy in their work context they described their own personal engagement with reading and writing in their employers' households, but this did not necessarily relate to literacy practices directly associated with the tasks they were required to perform as part of their jobs:

*I asked [Sudha and Jyothi] if they ever use or need to use reading and writing for their work. Sudha said she only does reading and writing at work when she does her 'homework' for this session and her Sunday class, and that is when she is in her room on her own – so it is time just for her. Jyothi said that sometimes she tries to write shopping lists but she struggles to spell all the words properly. Sometimes her employer tries to see what she is writing and she feels embarrassed and covers it up.*

**Extract 5.7: My session notes 280709**

Research by Nabi (2009) in Pakistan, and by Papen (2007) in Namibia, has highlighted how domestic workers do use literacy in their working lives, for example reading instructions when preparing breakfast, or writing phone messages, but that these practices were so deeply embedded that they were not recognised as literacy by the domestic workers themselves. It is possible that something similar is happening here and that the women in my group used literacy in their working lives in more ways than they recognised in our sessions. Shopping, for example, was identified not only by Jyothi in the extract above, but also as something requiring literacy skills for reading supermarket signs, as will be explored in chapter six. Similarly, on one occasion a group member brought in a piece of paper with the address of somewhere she had to collect her employers' son from written on it to the session. However, the data that I was able to collect suggests that, for most of the participants, using literacy was not considered by them to be a significant aspect of being able to perform the cooking, cleaning and caring duties that their roles as migrant domestic workers entailed.

Despite this, it is clear that the households in which the women worked constituted highly literate environments: all worked for well educated, international families, often with school aged children, although the extent to which these gave rise to accessible literacy materials or opportunities, which the women in the group were able to draw on, appeared to vary. When I visited Priya at her workplace I looked out for written materials. Although in my notes from this visit I record being surprised at not finding more examples of written materials in the house, signs and notes on the kitchen wall evidenced a household in which at least the children were engaged in a range of literacy activities:

> *Priya pointed out the door of her employer's (husband) office to me, but it was the only room she did not show me into. In the Kitchen there was a chart with notes written by the children on it, something to do with homework. When I asked the name of the dog, Priya said "I just call him Prince because I don't know how to say his real name" – and showed me a sign on the door that read 'Puppy Prince Pretzel'.*

**Extract 5.6: My notes from interview with Priya 231208**

In Priya's case, her employer's office, which presumably contained a computer, was not a space she felt comfortable going into, and, despite the presence of school children in the house, she did not appear to be familiar with the literacy activities that they engaged in, or the materials that they were associated with. However conversations that I had with other women, and the texts that they brought to our sessions suggests that some of them had better access to the literacy resources in the households in which they worked. One group member, for example, said that she wanted help learning how to use email, as she was able to use her employer's computer. Others were clearly familiar with a range of their employers' children's reading materials, particularly the storybooks and novels that they read. Sunita was keen to read the novels read by her employers' teenage daughter, whilst Nhanu commented that she had "lots of story books" at her (her employers') house, but said that she wasn't able to read them. Sudha, meanwhile, sometimes copied out extracts of her employers' teenage daughter's books into her exercise book, and on one occasion showed me a drawing of sleeping beauty, with the words 'sleeping beauty' written below in joined writing, that she said her employers' daughter had done for her. The same daughter sometimes helped Sudha with 'homework' that she took away from her Sunday class or our sessions. Thus, for some group members, the literacy environment provided by the households in which they work provided opportunities to access computers and reading materials, as well as, in some cases, some support with aspects of reading and writing.

However, the context of the highly literate households in which they worked also meant that their developing literacy skills and efforts to learn to read and write in English did not appear to be particularly valued by other household members or recognised as significant in enhancing their ability to perform their caring and cleaning duties. Thus, the way in which women in the group talked about their experiences suggest that their engagement with literacy and their emerging literacy skills in English did not have a significant impact on their status or power within their workplace. None of the women suggested that their employers actively and deliberately prevented them from attending classes. However, although, as discussed in chapter four, Sudha was sometimes able to draw on the fact that she must attend 'class' as a way of protecting her afternoon off when negotiating hours with her employers, the experiences of most of the women suggest that their employers did not make particular allowances in order to support or encourage their participation in learning. Moreover, as Nhanu's story, explored in chapter four, illustrates, the nature of their live-in work, and the long hours and little freedom or privacy entailed, constrained their ability to continue to develop literacy skills, as they had little free time to attend additional classes or practise privately. Meanwhile, as we saw in the section above, despite their efforts to improve their literacy skills in English, the women continued to

rely on their employers as literacy intermediaries when, for example, reading a letter regarding their immigration status, which clearly left them vulnerable to exploitation, and constrained their ability to seek out alternative work.

The women in the group recognised that improved literacy skills would not guarantee them better jobs: they often mentioned the fact that they knew that many domestic workers had good literacy skills and were still doing domestic work, which is something they witnessed when they attended Sunday classes with other migrant domestic workers. However, like the women studied by Rockhill, who dreamed of being able to find highly literacy dependent jobs as secretaries or receptionists (Rockhill, 1993), particularly the younger members of the group shared a dream of one day being able to think about doing work outside the domestic sphere.

Developing literacy skills was seen as an important part of these aspirations. Indeed, for the minority of members of the group who had managed to move into employment that was not straight domestic work – Kalpana who worked as a cleaner in a hospital, and Ramita who, while still employed in a private household, held the slightly higher status position of nanny – being able to engage in specific literacy practices directly linked to obtaining or performing these roles was clearly important. Ramita and Kalpana were the two group members who had the strongest literacy skills in English. However, the work related literacy demands they experienced were often difficult for them. This was particularly clear in the case of Kalpana, whose work in the hospital entailed her not only to be able to read relevant signs and notices, but also required her to take a written test, something she was worried she would not be able to do. On one occasion, she was also asked to produce a written statement after a colleague had fallen and hurt herself on the wet floor that she had been mopping. This caused her considerable anxiety. She was worried that she might be sued or lose her job and did not feel confident writing the statement she had been asked for, asking me to help her in one of our group sessions. Ramita, meanwhile, on more than one occasion asked me for help with understanding the particular forms of literacy associated with learning to drive, and, in particular, passing the driving theory test, as holding a driving license might enable her to obtain a higher paid nannying position. She also asked me to help her fill in a job application form that she was struggling with, as shown in extract 5.7 below:

**EMPLOYMENT HISTORY**

| Name and address of present (or most recent) employer and nature of business | Position held | From Month/Year | To Month/Year |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| TEL: | | | |

| Salary: | |
|---|---|
| Grade (If Applicable): | Length of Time in Post: |
| Enhancements/Other Benefits: | Period of Notice Required: |

| Name of previous employers and nature of business (starting with most recent) | Position Held | From Month/Year | To Month/Year | Reason for Leaving |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

**Extract 5.7: Ramita's job application form 120809**

In both cases, Ramita and Kalpana's improved literacy skills may have been helpful in contributing to enabling them to obtain different – and slightly better – work. However in each case it was their possession of valid visas that was a critical factor in enabling them to change employment. At least in Kalpana's case, the fact that she had already been able to obtain indefinite leave to remain and therefore was no longer tied to a domestic worker visa, was crucial in allowing her to move on from working in a private household. Moreover, it is clear that, despite having relatively strong literacy skills, both the women still relied on the support of literacy intermediaries – which included myself, their social networks, and, in Ramita's case, her employers – to enable them to fulfil the literacy demands of this employment. Significantly, although both Ramita and Kalpana, had been able to find different work, with slightly better conditions, they remained 'domestics'. They had not been able to look to different – and higher status – areas of employment, such as the coveted 'office jobs' described by members of the group as the kinds of jobs they dreamed of being able to do.

## Social literacies

*At the end [of the session] Nhanu asked me for my phone number. She then asked me to spell my name and entered it into her contacts. Then she asked Sudha for hers. She started entering it using... Sudha's proper name, and then Sudha said something to her not in English and started spelling [S U D H A] out for her... I asked Nhanu for her number and she tried to send it to me [by SMS] but it didn't come through so she did a missed call. I was really impressed by how Nhanu navigated the phone so fluently, and entered contact details etc when she finds reading even simple words so difficult.*

**My session notes 200509**

The stories of Priya, Sudha and Nhanu, discussed in chapter four, revealed how essential staying connected – both to friends within their extended social network of other Nepali migrants in the UK and to friends and family back home and across the globe – was to the women, particularly in the context of the often difficult and isolating nature of their live in jobs. Some studies of the ways in which women use literacy, including in the context of migration, have emphasised the role played by the writing of letters and notes in maintaining and developing relationships with family or husbands (see, for example, Ahearn, 2001, 2004; Zavala, 2009). However when I asked members of the group whether they ever sent or received letters, their responses suggested that letter writing was not a form of communication that they considered particularly significant: Sunita, for example, commented that "no one writes to us because they know we can't read" (my session notes – 280109). Although further discussion revealed this to be not entirely true: as discussed above, they said they did receive letters from the bank, or the doctor for example, letters were associated only with official information being sent to them. They did not use them actively to maintain connections with friends and family.

In contrast, as documented for other migrant domestic workers (Madianou & Miller, 2011; Parreñas, 2005b), mobile phone technology was seen as an essential part of staying connected: all the women had mobile phones, and some had more than one and they were fully conversant in the range of different phone contract options, and which offered the best deals for calling overseas. Moreover, the forms of literacy associated with mobile technologies were integral to the women's literacy practices. As the extract above illustrates, even Nhanu, who struggled with reading and considered herself "illiterate", was confident navigating her mobile phone, entering names and numbers. Meanwhile, being able to read and send text messages was established early on as a learning priority for all the women, and for some of the women the role that literacy could play in helping maintain their global social networks of family and friends, appeared to be a significant motivating factor in continuing to develop and use their emerging literacy skills.

Although when they started coming to sessions few of the women could send SMS messages, by the time that the research finished most were able to do this confidently. They told me that they used SMS messages to contact each other as well as for keeping in touch with family and friends at home. The extract below, which describes a literacy event that took place in one of our group sessions, is particularly illustrative in revealing the transnational – and translingual - nature of the women's engagement with SMS texting:

*[before the others arrived] Sudha was telling me how Nhanu spent so much time speaking on the phone and that she didn't like to talk on the phone for too long. She said that she thought that this was one of the reasons Nhanu wasn't able to learn reading and writing even though her spoken English is very good. She explained how she (Sudha) practices reading and writing until she falls asleep at night – even if she has had a very long day of work.*

*I asked her about sending messages and she said she now could send simple messages as*

> *well as read the ones she got. She got her phone out to show me a message she had received from her younger sister who is now working in Egypt. The message read "My daer [Sudha] di hi how r u a mainy mainy dashera injoye u ok love u"... She had also received one from her sister in Knightsbridge thanking her for her message and saying happy dashera back. She said she had sent one saying happy dashera (which she pronounced dasheri) – which she said is a Hindi festival they celebrate in Nepal.*

**Extract 5.8: My session notes 300909**

The global nature of the Dashera messages described in the extract is striking. Like many of the SMS texts that women in the group showed me, the text message that Sudha showed me mixed languages, using English script, but some Hindi words. Exchanged between two Nepalese sisters, the message was written in Egypt and read in London, and through it Sudha was able to connect not only with her sister in Cairo but also with a cultural event important to her as a Nepalese woman.

However, in detailing both the way in which Sudha spoke about Nhanu's use of the phone, and the way in which she described her own engagement with the Dashera messages, which involved sending messages herself as well as reading those that she received, the extract above also reveals something about the importance that Sudha attributes to texting, and what this means for the way in which she relates to others. While Sudha clearly could, and did, also use her phone to call family and friends, she speaks disparagingly about the time that Nhanu spends talking on the phone, contrasting this to her own increasing use of SMS. This was not the only time she had spoken about Nhanu's phone use in this way, and on other occasions had linked it to the fact that Nhanu often had headaches. In speaking in this way, she establishes a clear hierarchy between the different forms of communicative practice associated with mobile phones, with sending SMS messages seen as superior to simply talking on the phone. Significantly, as well as texting representing a useful way of maintaining connections with family and friends, by sending messages such as the message described above she is able to position herself as literate in her relationships to others within her social networks.

Indeed, Sudha's participation in the exchange of Dashera texts – and what this revealed about her improved literacy skills - did not go unnoticed, and was remarked on by Nhanu in a group session a few weeks later:

> *When Sudha was reading back over the text [that we had been reading as a group] at the end of the session Nhanu commented on how Sudha knows so much now and how she knows that Sudha can even send text messages now -  her niece had told her that she had received a text message from Sudha saying happy Dashera.*

**Extract 5.9: My session notes 211009**

Nhanu's comment not only reveals how connected both the women were to their extended – transnational – social networks, but also affirms the status that literacy – in this case

represented by the sending of an SMS message – held within this. Both Nhanu and Sudha's comments clearly illustrate the value that they place on texting – as a form of communicative practice – and the way in which being able to send a message is associated with literacy success. Sending a text message was not only associated with communicating the message contained within the text itself – it also identified the sender as someone who had mastered the literacy skills necessary to send the message. For Nhanu, discovering that Sudha had been sending Dashera text messages was a very clear indication of the way in which Sudha had moved forward with her use of literacy.

Comments made by Sudha also suggest that to some extent, the use of SMS texting rather than always speaking on the phone affected the way in which she managed some of the tensions entailed by the long distance mothering discussed by Madianou and Miller (2011) and Parreñas (2005a, 2005b) in her relationships with her children. In one session, for example, she explained that she preferred to exchange SMS messages with her (adult) daughter rather than speaking to her directly as that way they didn't argue, which often happened when they spoke (my session notes 180809). In this context, sending SMS messages thus entailed processes both of connection and distancing. It enabled Sudha to stay in touch with her daughter, to feel connected to her, and to fulfil her obligations as a 'transnational mother' (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997).  At the same time though it also facilitated the maintenance of boundaries, allowing Sudha to protect herself emotionally, as this contact was limited to the exchange of short messages rather than potentially difficult conversations.

While all the members of the group had mobile phones, when they joined the group, far fewer were familiar with, or had access to computers, although, as discussed in the section above, some spoke about being able to access them through their employers. Thus, although in a relatively early session one group member – Ramita – spoke about wanting to send emails, this did not appear to be something that was familiar to others in the group. However, this changed over time, as group members became aware of friends or family members having email accounts, or, joining Facebook. Sunita in particular spoke about wanting to be able to use different forms of social media as a way of keeping up with her friends:

> *Sunita said that she was thinking of getting a laptop, which she wants to bring to class so I can teach her how to open an email account and Facebook etc. She says that people always ask her about her email account and if she's on Facebook, and why not -  if she lives in London she should be, and she says "I just lie and make up that it's because I haven't had time". I said that we could go down to the computer room downstairs – and showed her where all the computers were... she said she'd prefer to just work with me on a laptop, but I explained that we'd need an internet connection. She said that in her employers' house she thinks they have wireless as they are always walking around with the computer.*

**Extract 5.10: My session notes 200110**

Sunita's comments again point to significance that being able to use such forms of technology had not only for keeping in touch with others but also in terms of the status attached to them. As

the youngest member of the group, Sunita moved within a social network including younger migrants, and was evidently familiar with the new forms of social media that they increasingly used to keep in touch with one another.  She was clearly embarrassed by the fact that she could not use Facebook or email in the way that some of her friends did, as she lacked both the necessary knowledge and skills and the access to computers that she would have required to do this. Although we did not spend time looking at computers or social networking technologies in our group sessions which took place between 2008 and 2011, when, in 2013, I met with some members of the group, it was clear that, in addition to SMS messaging, Facebook had also become a way in which the younger members of the group in particular kept in touch with others. Advances in mobile phone technology, and the increased use and availability of smart phones, meant that they did this using their phones, rather than needing to be able to access or know how to use computers. Priya for example showed me how she could look at friends' photos and sometimes uploaded her own to her Facebook account on her phone, whilst Nhanu told me that both she and her husband had Facebook on their phones although she only used it "a little bit" (interview 010513).

Developing the particular literacy skills associated with mobile technologies, was clearly a very important dimension of the ways in which the women in the group maintained, managed and positioned themselves within their transnational social networks, as well as managing their connections to 'home'. This social network which included other Nepalese migrants in the UK as well as overseas also provided them with important literacy support. When speaking about their use of mobile phones for example, some of the women told me that it was Sunita who had first showed them how to send SMS messages.  They also spoke about the ways in which they received help from each other, and from other friends and family members when trying to develop literacy skills in Nepalese. Sudha for example was learning Indian letters with the help of her sister, who in turn had been taught by another migrant domestic worker while she was working in India, highlighting the existence of a transnational literacy support network connecting migrant domestic workers from and working in different countries and continents:

> *Sudha showed me how she is practising "Indian letters"... I asked how she was learning – she said she had a teacher – her sister is teaching her. I knew her sister could read and write in English but also remembered that Sudha said she hadn't been to school.... I asked how [her sister] had learnt to read/write and she said that she had an Indian story book that she used to teach herself and that when she had been working in India as a nanny, the cleaner who worked in the same house could read/write and would teach her every day.*
>
> **Extract 5.11: My session notes 240609**

Despite the status attached to literacy in English, learning to read and write in Nepalese as well was an important aspect of maintaining links to home for many of the women, particularly in the context of trips back, or hopes to eventually return to live in Nepal. Thus, for example, shortly before she returned to Nepal to get married, Ramita stopped attending sessions so she could spend the time improving her written Nepalese, with the help of a private tutor. Their desire to

learn to read and write in Nepalese also reflected a recognition of how things have changed in their home communities. When they spoke about their own experiences in their villages, they tended to focus on literacy as a deficit, emphasising a lack of understanding of literacy and education as they stressed for example the ways in which they had not been encouraged to attend school, or recounted the difficulties associated with registering their births due to their parents and others in their community not being literate. However they also spoke about how they knew that things were now different, drawing on what they had been told by families and friends, as well as, for some of the women, their experiences of travelling back to their communities to visit. Priya, for example, when discussing why she had paid for her husband to have lessons from a private tutor in India explained:

> *In India you don't need [literacy] so much but who knows about the future. In India if I can't read or write or speak English it's not a problem but here you have to. In Nepal it doesn't matter if you can't. But now everyone goes to school.*

> *Now in my village there are lots of signs, in English and in Nepalese. Before there weren't any. There have been lots of changes*. (interview 231208)

Priya told me that her father was very proud of the way in which she had learnt to read and write in English since she had been here. But, in the light of the changes that she knew had occurred in her Nepal and in her own community, she felt learning literacy skills in Nepalese was also important – which is why, as well as supporting her husband's learning, she spoke of hoping to be able to get a tutor herself sometime in the future.

In chapter four we saw how, in contrast to the low status positions they occupied within the households within which they worked, in relation to their home communities the women appeared to be held in high regard, and, despite their geographical distance, had some influence over the decision making of family members, for example encouraging them to send their children to school. Here, their global positioning as migrant workers, and, in particular the financial capital they held in the form of remittances in hard currency, through which they were able to invest in their communities, property and education for family members, is clearly significant. However, an analysis of the way in which in which they engaged with mobile literacies, and, increasingly, social media, in maintaining and managing relationships with friends and family in the UK, at home, and globally, suggests their emerging literacy skills in English also appear to have played a role in the way in which they were able to position themselves in relation to family and community members from a distance. Perhaps more importantly they affected how they felt about themselves as they were able to assume a literate identity when negotiating these relationships. Thus, for example, Priya spoke with pride about the way in which her success in learning was not only recognised by her family but also played out in the way in which she was able to persuade her husband to learn to read and write. Sudha meanwhile was able to use knowledge of SMS texting not only to continue to perform a gendered role as mother and carer through exchanging texts with her children, but to position herself as literate – someone who has been able to learn to read and write in English – in her

communication with family members and friends, something that she clearly felt good about and was proud to be able to do.

## Personal literacies

> *Priya was really happy telling me about how she had enjoyed reading the Wizard of Oz so much: [she said that] she thought it would be hard but she had been able to read it all. She had copied out the page she had liked the most... She said she found the names hard but really liked the story and found it so funny.* (My session notes 170908)

The narratives of Priya, Sudha and Nhanu, discussed in chapter four, pointed to the demanding nature of their working lives, and the long hours that were entailed by live-in domestic work. Free time, for all the members of the group was thus a precious commodity, something that their long working hours meant that they had little of. It is therefore significant that they gave up their free afternoon to come to sessions. As has been discussed in the sections above, this to a large extent reflected their belief in the importance of obtaining English literacy skills in order to be able to obtain visas, negotiate life in the U.K., and use new technologies to stay in contact with family and friends. However, it is notable that the women in the group also spoke about a desire to be able to read books or stories and to spend time reading or writing for pleasure, which, as will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter was reflected in the way in which they engaged in activities such as the collective reading of stories in group sessions.

The way in which the women spoke about reading as a hobby or for pleasure may in part reflect aspirations to be able to imagine themselves leading the sorts of lives whereby they had leisure time and were able to spend it reading. However it also points to the pride they felt in being able to enjoy reading, and in doing so assume a literate identity, and, like other ethnographic studies of women's experiences of literacy and learning in different contexts discussed in chapter two (for example, Kalman, 2005; Maddox, 2005, 2009), highlights the symbolic importance of literacy in contributing to the generation of a new sense of self. Significantly, their descriptions of the time they spent practising and being able to enjoy reading and writing also suggest that it was valued in particular as something they could do by and for themselves. Sudha, in particular, on a number of occasions, referred to her literacy learning as something she was doing for herself, describing how, at the end of a long day working for others, she was able to shut the door to her room and practise reading and writing on her own:

> *When I gave her back the cards that I had borrowed to photo copy... Sudha said how before she started coming to the group she couldn't understand anything, she said to her sister how she was so confused, and then we started working by cutting up pieces of writing and looking at the words and she started to be able to read words "and I became so so happy". She said "I am so happy and so lucky..."She explained that she tries to read and write when she has finished work for the day and before she goes to bed, and how she feels so happy when she can read and understand things.*
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> **Extract 5.12: My session notes 110209**

In contrast to the ways in which their engagement with literacy discussed in the previous section related to how they negotiated their transnational social networks and relationships, here Sudha's excitement about her learning and developing ability to read was very personal. It was associated with the brief moments of time that she had to herself and when she wasn't expected to be working or providing for others, and with her own sense of achievement and enjoyment in finding that she could read and understand things. Being able to draw on their learning and literacy skills in this way in order to carve out space for their own personal reading, learning and interests was particularly significant given the ways in which the lives of the women in the group were so tightly bound up in serving or providing for others – both in terms of the gendered roles they performed in the households in which they worked, and the breadwinner roles they performed for their extended families at home.

## Discussion

The ways in which the women in the group engage with literacy, and how this interacts with the social – and power – relations they encounter in their everyday lives is complex and is intrinsically bound up in the transnational – and multilingual – nature of their lives, and their experiences as migrant domestic workers. Thus, in contrast to women whose experiences of literacy are explored in ethnographic studies focusing on literacy in particular local contexts, where the social contexts which affect and are affected by literacy are often framed in terms of the immediate household or community, the women's experiences highlight the way in which, for them, literacy affects and is affected by social relations in multiple, transnational spaces. How they are able to draw on their new literacy skills in English as cultural capital, and the way in which this is valued, affect and are affected by not only by relationships with husbands and families but also by the nature of their work as female migrant domestic workers and their gendered position within employers' households and their global social networks.

Chapter four highlighted some of the tension points that characterise the women's experiences as they move between these different transnational spaces, which present both opportunities and constraints, as, for example, they endure exploitative working conditions, whilst being able to draw prestige from their support to family and communities through remittances, and experience the pain of separation from their homes and loved ones, whilst being tied into social networks entailing both obligation and friendship and support. The analysis in the sections above suggests that the women actively draw on their emerging literacy as they attempt to negotiate some of these tensions. However, the extent to which they are able to do this changes as they move from one space to another. Thus for the women in the group obtaining basic literacy skills in English does not appear to have had a major influence over their low, and gendered, status within the households within which they live and work, and their vulnerability to exploitation, and for most of them it has not opened up obvious opportunities for them to leave domestic work and move into a coveted 'office job'. Similarly, although their emerging literacies have clearly been helpful as they have negotiated visa applications, literacy was certainly not the deciding factor in enabling them to obtain indefinite leave to remain, and, in negotiating this, they remained dependent on the support of lawyers and employers, as well as vulnerable to

changes in government policy. However, while developing emerging literacy skills in English may not have transformed their life opportunities or their experiences in the workplace, when they move outside of this space as they interact with and manage their transnational relationships and networks of family and friends, travel back to their home communities, or simply seek out time for themselves, being able to adopt a literate identity, and, in doing so, feel confident sending text messages, reading street names, completing travel documentation, engaging in the learning of family members, or reading a book for pleasure, is clearly important.

Understanding the transnational nature of both the women's lives and their literacy practices, and the way in which literacy interacts with processes of power and agency as they move between different contexts, is clearly important for understanding the meaning and consequences of literacy in their lives and the complex ways in which literacy is threaded through their social and material practices. It also highlights the significance of untangling the relationship between the local and the global/trans-local/transnational when considering literacy as a social practice in a transnational context. As discussed in chapter two, Maddox (2007), has suggested that the 'situated' approach to literacy (Barton et al., 2000) may be useful in enabling the consideration of the interplay between local context and global processes in literacy research. He argues that a situated approach "maintains the primacy of social context in shaping and giving meaning to literacy practices" while also enabling "new theoretical perspectives to be explored about the potentialities of literacy and the ways in which large-scale, often global traditions and practices are expressed and experienced within local contexts (Brandt & Clinton, 2002; Collins & Blot, 2003; Luke, 2004)" (Maddox 2007 p255). Here the implication is that global processes may play out in and affect local contexts and practices in particular ways. However, my research suggests that in this case the relationship between the local and the global and how they are expressed in the women's literacy practices is more complex. Indeed, the nature of the women's transnational lives means that even attempting to identify a local context is problematic: the spaces they move between and which shape their literacy practices – the international households of their work, airports and immigration bureaucracies, social networks of migrants communicating across continents – are themselves complex reflections of processes of globalisation which involve the movement of people and finance as well as ideas and technology.

In the women's stories and the ways in which they discuss their lives, a sense of 'the local' can be found both in their relationships to each other, and in the way in which they talk about their memories of life in Nepal, and about their home communities, their villages and the family they left behind. And in this sense, it can also be found in those literacy practices that keep them connected to 'home' - Sudha's dashera message[13] or the other SMS – and more recently Facebook - messages exchanged with each other and with friends, family and partners back in their home communities; or which are central to their experiences of reconnecting to their

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[13]Though note that Dashera, as a Hindi festival, was not traditionally celebrated in their Buddhist communities

communities and families when they are able to travel back to Nepal - Sudha's 'grassroots' certificate confirming her identity, for example. In this way their literacy practices themselves, play a role in maintaining their identities as Tamang and Nepali women, and in connecting them to family and friends from their home communities contribute to the maintenance of an imagined 'local' community (Benedict Anderson, 1991), which exists across multiple transnational spaces. In doing so, they contribute to helping them overcome some of the dislocations they experience as migrant women.

However, as we have seen, these literacy practices, while connected to the women's experiences and identities associated with their home communities have very global or transnational dynamics: the Dashera message was written in two languages and connected women working across two different continents; Sudha's certificate confirming her identity was used in negotiations with an international bank in Delhi. Moreover, just as some of their literacy practices appear to connect them back to the local space of their 'home' communities, so others appear to amplify their distance from this space, as they seek to read 'western' novels; or use their literacy in English to obtain citizenship in the UK. The women's literacy practices thus play a role both in connecting back to the 'local' and moving away from it, in ways that involve processes of renegotiation of status, identity and sense of self, and which contribute to enabling them to obtain some recognition beyond that of carers and financial providers. The multiple and multi-directional connections that the women make between spaces as they engage in literacy practices and navigate their transnational lives point to the way in which, in doing so, they are involved in the creation and negotiation of their own 'dislocated' space as a space in its own right, comprising multiple layers in which identities and practices are nested within one another in complex ways.

Literacy for the women in the case study group is clearly situated within the context of their lives as Tamang and Nepali women and as migrant domestic workers in London. Understanding the transnational character of this context and the way in which the women's engagement with literacy and what it means for them and others shifts as they move between the different social, geographical and cultural spaces that comprise it, is essential to understanding their literacy practices and the complex interplay of the global and the local within them. In the next chapter I consider some of the implications of this for the ways in which the women engage with learning, and how they negotiate the sort of learning support they need within the group sessions themselves.

# Chapter 6: Learning experiences

## Introduction

In the previous chapter, I drew on my analysis of the women's lives, and the ways in which they experience opportunities and constraints as migrant domestic workers occupying different transnational spaces, to consider the way in which they engage with and draw on literacy and their emerging literacy skills in English as they move between and position themselves within these spaces. In doing so, I used insights from the group sessions, in which I was actively involved in the women's literacy learning, to piece together a broader picture of the women's literacy practices as they negotiated life in the workplace and official spaces concerned with immigration, used literacy in their social relations and in maintaining connections with family in Nepal and globally, and as they tried to carve out space to engage in their own personal reading and writing. In this chapter I turn my attention to the group's experience of literacy learning itself, focusing on their participation in our group literacy support sessions and the Sunday English classes they attended. In doing so I identify, discuss and contrast three distinct forms of literacy learning which characterise the range of approaches they encountered in these sessions and classes: technical or autonomous English and literacy learning; functional literacy learning; and what I have termed 'empowering' literacy learning.

My main focus in the chapter is on the detail of the group sessions they attended with me, and I examine how the women engaged with them and negotiated the sort of literacy and other support that they wanted in the light of the complex negotiations going on in their lives elsewhere. However, I also consider literacy learning that they were engaged with as they attended ESOL and citizenship classes on Sundays, reflecting on the way in which they brought learning from those classes into our Wednesday afternoon classes. In the first section I consider how some of the learning that they encountered in their Sunday classes, which focused on grammar, the 'correct' use of English and the specific skills required for passing tests or exams, appeared to correspond to a technical, or autonomous, approach to literacy learning.

I then turn my attention to the more negotiated forms of learning that took place within our own sessions. In doing so, I next consider the 'functional' literacy learning that characterised some of these sessions. Drawing on an expanded conceptualisation of the notion of functional literacy, I consider the way in which, by responding to the literacy needs articulated by the women themselves, many of our activities focused on developing the practical literacy skills that the women considered important to their functioning as migrant domestic workers as they negotiated the literacy demands entailed by their movement between different – often transnational – spaces. Finally I consider literacy learning which, informed by an ideological model of literacy, represents an attempt to build on the existing knowledge and interests of the women. Activities associated with this last approach encouraged the recognition of the women's expertise, and moved the learning focus towards forms of reading and writing for pleasure. I describe this approach as representing 'empowering' literacy learning. As I discuss through my

analysis, this is not intended to imply that the other approaches discussed are not empowering to or valued by the women in the group. Rather it seeks to reflect the explicit way in which activities relating to this approach were guided by a concern with recognising and valuing the significance of the women's experiences and achievements. In moving beyond a focus on specific literacy skills as 'deficit', it thus engaged with the notions of empowerment – associated with processes involving changes in self-esteem or identity –, which are often emphasised in the ethnographic literature on women's literacy learning.

In discussing the women's engagement with literacy learning within our sessions, I pay close attention to the nature of the learning space itself and the relationships that were formed and re-formed within it. In the final section of this chapter, in considering the nature of the relationship between the different participants in the sessions, I discuss the ways in which the particular dynamics of the group enabled not only the development of a supportive space for literacy learning, but also facilitated support which extended beyond concerns with reading and writing. Central to my analysis throughout the chapter is a consideration of the agency of the women themselves and the ways in which they identified and accessed the learning and support they needed, articulated their literacy aspirations, and in the process, positioned themselves as 'deficit' or as knowledgeable in responding to texts or activities.  In addition, I also reflect on my own responses to the women's learning needs and the ways in which they engaged with the sessions. In doing so I trace the way in which, as we moved between the different forms of literacy learning set out above, the nature of my relationship to the women changed as I occupied distinct roles, moving from positioning myself as a teacher to also occupying roles as a learner, facilitator or observer.

## 'Autonomous learning': ESOL and citizenship classes

The literacy support sessions that the women in the group attended with me at the Migrant Resource Centre were not the only experiences that the women had of learning in the UK. All attended – or had attended – other classes on Sundays, generally accessed through the domestic worker support organisation Kalayaan. In some cases these were general English – or ESOL – classes, and in other cases they were the ESOL and citizenship classes that they were required to attend in order to be eligible to apply for indefinite leave to remain in the UK. For several members of the group this was their main motivation for participating in the Sunday classes. Although I did not participate in the Sunday classes myself and was not able to observe any of these directly, their learning in these classes often spilled into our sessions as they brought in homework and other material from their Sunday classes and asked me for help understanding or completing it, or discussed their experiences in these classes during our session time. My notes from our sessions therefore make repeated reference to the ways in which group members reflected on their experiences with their Sunday learning, and to the learning materials, other texts and literacy practices that these entailed. In this section I discuss the way in which members of the group talked about their experiences of learning in the Sunday space, and the ways in which this informed or influenced their engagement in the literacy support sessions they attended with me.

The women in our group did not all attend the same Sunday classes, and some of them changed class several times over the period of this research. The different terms in which group members described their experiences in these classes and the materials they showed me suggest that there was considerable variation in terms of both the content of these classes and the approach to teaching and learning taken within them. On the whole the classes were English rather than literacy classes and therefore, unlike our sessions, did not necessarily have a specific literacy focus. In one session Sunita, when comparing her Sunday classes with our Wednesday sessions explained how she thought it was helpful to come to both because the Sunday class was "more about speaking and not so much writing and spelling" (my session notes 180209). Meanwhile, Sudha understood that one of the Sunday classes she attended (she moved between several different classes over the course of the research period), would enable her to obtain a certificate of proficiency in English by virtue of taking an oral – rather than written – exam. Some of her class sessions were focused on preparing for this qualification which was important to allow her to apply for indefinite leave to remain. Nevertheless, it was clear from the way in which group members spoke about their classes, and from materials that they brought into our sessions that their Sunday classes in fact often made extensive use of written English. During a relatively short period of time the materials that Sudha showed me suggested that the class she was attending had an explicit focus on basic literacy learning. However, most of the classes attended by group members appeared to demand or expect relatively advanced literacy skills. As can be seen clearly in the extracts below, this is something that members of the group often found difficult.

> *Sudha had brought with her the work that she had been given at the Kalayaan class... I decided to abandon the plans for the class that I had and spend time with Sudha looking at this work... which she had not managed to really understand at all – it was quite difficult stuff around use of verbs and required higher literacy skills than Sudha really has...we had a good session trying to break down what the worksheet [she had brought in] was all about into more manageable stages (looking at how verbs change and practicing with examples from Sudha's life)... Sudha was really happy with the class and said that she felt "very well" and it had been so much easier. She had clearly felt quite overwhelmed by it before. She said that the Sunday class teacher had been "a boy" and that she had been the only one that had turned up on Sunday. I was quite surprised he didn't realise she was finding it difficult if she was the only one in class. I helped her fill in the worksheet but asked her to explain to him how difficult she had found it.*
>
> **Extract 6.1: My session notes 121108**
>
> *Nhanu hadn't been able to go to her class on Sunday – she explained that she had had a migraine... But Sudha had [been to her class] and once again came saying how difficult it had been and wanting help understanding what they had done (which we looked at the end – she had copied down "I drive, I don't drive, he drives, he doesn't drive" etc, but clearly hadn't been able to read what was on the board very well as all the letters were muddled and she had no*

*idea what she had written). Sudha and Nhanu then spent a bit of time talking about the [Sunday] classes and comparing them to our group [sessions]... Nhanu said what a difference it made [in our sessions] to have someone going slowly and realising she finds it difficult. Both said that they thought other people in their [Sunday] classes also found it difficult but although I have said many times they should tell the teachers if they are going too fast I'm not sure whether they have. Nhanu said how one person in her class had said not to worry [if she doesn't understand] but just to copy everything down, that that is what they had been doing for five years and now they were just starting to understand. Nhanu and Sudha both said they felt bad when they couldn't read or understand things and Nhanu said that she thought her head was just not good for learning these things... she said how she thought she was like her aunty... who had gone to classes for 5 years but still found it really hard.*

**Extract 6.2: My session notes 031208**

Both Nhanu and Sudha clearly struggled with the literacy demands of the particular classes they were attending at this time. They – like other members of the group – often brought in grammar focused worksheets such as those described in the first extract, and asked me for help with them. Both the format and the content of such worksheets were clearly unfamiliar and difficult for them. They therefore struggled not only with understanding the grammar concerns being addressed through the worksheets, but also found understanding what it was they were expected to do with the worksheets, and how they should complete them very confusing. As a result, rather than trying to fill out the worksheets, Sudha often resorted to simply copying them out into her exercise book, and trying to read and learn the individual words, even those that were not at all relevant to the intended learning focus. Copying things that the teacher wrote down on the board was also a problem for them: on occasions they spoke about the teacher writing too quickly for them to be able to keep up and it was clear that they often struggled to read the teachers' writing. The way in which Sudha had muddled the letters when copying down the words in the second extract above was common in the other writing she showed me from these classes.

From my perspective, it became clear that the way in which some of the exercises were framed, focusing on points of grammar, which did not clearly relate to their own lives and experiences of literacy or (everyday) spoken English meant that, although the words were actually ones that they were familiar with, they simply did not understand what it was they were being taught. My fieldnotes show that in Nhanu's case this meant that, she concluded that her "head was just not good for learning*",* even as she accepted the view of one of the other women in her class that she should just keep on trying to copy things down in the hope that she might eventually understand something. In fact, while in my own role of teacher I was aware that Nhanu struggled more with reading and writing than other members of our group, her spoken English appeared excellent, suggesting that it was not her ability to learn that was the problem. Rather, it seemed that the nature of the classes that she had been attending did not provide space for the recognition of her skills in speaking English, or opportunities to build on these in ways that enabled her to develop her understanding of English as a spoken and written language.

However, despite the way in which the women in the group often struggled with the learning activities that took place in their Sunday English classes, especially when they focused on grammatical concepts that were very unfamiliar to them, it is clear that they also valued – and wanted to engage with – this sort of learning, and the forms of literacy associated with the 'correct' use of English that it represented. This was reflected in the frequency with which they brought work from those classes to our sessions, often prioritising getting help with it over other forms of literacy support. This is illustrated in the extract below, which describes a request by Sunita, in a session attended by her and Sudha, to help her understand how to use apostrophes:

*Sunita told me how she had been doing work on apostrophes in the Sunday class, writing short and long versions of words – which she was finding very difficult. She showed me the homework sheet she had [see extract 6.5 below] where she had to give the short and long versions of different phrases and said that she wanted help understanding it. So we decided to spend some time looking at "I – I'm, he is/he is not – he's/he's not/he isn't... Then we used cards with I/she/he/it/we/you/they/my friend/Sudha/Amy/Sunita and different adjectives etc, and took [it] in turns making sentences, and working out what the short versions would be. It was a good chance to practice adjectives with Sudha, and also get Sunita feeling more confident about her Sunday class work. Sunita got the hang of how to use apostrophes/short versions really quickly – she had obviously been taught in the Sunday class that you use them when a letter is missing, and so with the help of folding over the letter that we were replacing on the cards, got really good at working out how to convert a longer version to a shorter version of the same phrase... Sunita said how this had been her most useful class, how she understood so much better now and how happy she was about that. She then immediately wanted to fill in the worksheet she had from Sunday class.*

**Extract 6.4: My session notes 180309**

**Extract 6.5: Section of worksheet from Sunita's Sunday class 180309**

Although Sunita had found the Sunday class difficult, she considered that being able to use apostrophes correctly was important, and was pleased to have been able to spend time on this work in our session. Having a second explanation of how apostrophes worked, and being able to link this work to words and concepts that she was already familiar with and comfortable using gave her the confidence to go back to the worksheet and complete it, something she was clearly delighted to be able to do. However, it was clear that without this additional explanation and practice time it would have been much more difficult for her to engage with this form of learning in a meaningful way.

I was aware that the view that I got of the groups Sunday learning was a very partial one. Sudha regularly showed me all the writing that she had done in her exercise book, which included work from both our session and from her Sunday classes. However, on the whole members of the group tended to bring work from these classes to our sessions only when they had something they hadn't understood or were struggling with. It was these examples, rather than examples of work that they found easier to engage with, that I was most exposed to. It was also clear that in some cases the classes worked better for them and were easier for them to engage with: for at least some of the time she was attending classes Sudha described having a teacher who "writes things nice and slowly on the board and explains" (my session notes 250209), meaning that she found it much easier to understand what was going on. Similarly, when I interviewed her, Priya described how much she valued the one-to-one support with her reading and writing that the teacher in the Sunday classes she had attended before joining our group sessions had given her. Nonetheless, it became apparent to me that although the women in the group valued and saw their Sunday classes as important for a variety of reasons (that included their

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significant role in enabling them to obtain indefinite leave to remain; because they enjoyed the opportunity they offered to meet other migrant domestic workers; and because they valued the learning space and  the chance to learn 'correct' English that it represented), the classes were not always well matched to their knowledge, experiences and needs as learners.

Some of the women's experiences of their Sunday classes appear to exemplify many of the critiques that both practitioners and researchers have articulated with respect to UK policy regarding ESOL learning and citizenship. These have pointed to, for example, the gap between "national government responses to the language learning needs of adult migrants" and "what actually happens on the ground" (Simpson & Whiteside, 2015, p. 1).  This has implications for teachers and learners.  In particular such analyses have suggested there is insufficient concern with the diversity of learner's needs and experiences, with literacy materials designed for an "ideal learner" (Hamilton, 2008) rather than reflecting the diverse practices, experiences and aspirations of learners.  Moreover the tensions entailed by the requirement for migrants to attend citizenship classes in the face of increasing funding cuts to the ESOL sector mean that classes are poorly resourced and teachers under supported (Baynham et al., 2007; Han, Starkey, & Green, 2010; Roberts et al., 2004; Simpson, 2015). The teachers running the Sunday classes attended by the women in the group were volunteers and the women's accounts suggest that they changed on a fairly frequent basis, meaning that there was little continuity or opportunities for teachers and students to get to know each other over a period of time. I wondered if this might have contributed to the unwillingness of Sudha and Nhanu to tell their teachers when they didn't understand or found something difficult.  It must also have made it difficult for the teachers to get a sense of who their students were, and what they brought to the class in terms of their own knowledge, experience and learning.

When, in developing my analysis, I returned to my notes and the copies of materials that I had made in relation to the women's Sunday classes, it seemed clear that some of the English language – and literacy – learning that the women encountered in these classes, reflected an autonomous approach to literacy (Street, 1984), and that this was in part shaped by the social circumstances in which the classes were held, combined with their patterns of attendance.  The focus of the Sunday classes frequently appeared to be on acquiring technical skills – being able to use commas, complete worksheets or use verbs and adjectives correctly – but often with little sense of how these related to the realities of the women's everyday lives, their experiences of literacy, or the literacy practices they engaged in. While this may have been important for satisfying language and citizenship learning requirements for immigration purposes, it appeared to have been less helpful in terms of building the women's confidence in their language and literacy skills. Such an approach focusing on the technical skills that the women lacked as "deficits" (Crowther, Maclachlan, & Tett, 2010; Hamilton & Pitt, 2011a, 2011b; Larrotta & Serrano, 2011; Tett, Hamilton, & Crowther, 2012), rather than building on their existing knowledge and language skills they brought to the classes, clearly had problematic implications for the ways in which some of the women viewed themselves as learners, as demonstrated by Nhanu's comments about her perceived lack of ability to learn.

## 'Bringing the outside in': literacy learning support sessions

As complements to – rather than replacements for – the classes that the women in the group attended on Sundays, our own Wednesday afternoon sessions were very different. Rather than constituting formal classes, the sessions were established under the mentor scheme at the MRC, which paired migrants wanting to improve an aspect of their English learning with volunteers able to help them. This affected the make-up of the group itself: as set out in earlier chapters, the group was originally formed by three friends, Priya, Nhanu and Sudha, and although the composition of the group changed over time, throughout the three years of its existence it continued to be based on existing friendships between group members, rather than the more diverse make-up of an open class. Moreover, the nature of the mentor scheme meant that the sessions were not associated with any formal testing or certification and did not carry with them an expectation of leading to any form of qualification or with needing to conform to a particular set curriculum. Instead, as the 'mentor' I was expected to be guided by the particular needs and wants of the group members in terms of the learning support I gave them. When they approached the MRC, Priya, Nhanu and Sudha were very explicit in requesting support with literacy learning: although they were happy to be able to also practice their spoken English, they were clear that their main concern was with getting help with their reading and writing. This gave our group sessions a very clear literacy focus and remit, in contrast to the more general English/ESOL focus of their Sunday classes.

Literacy theorists and practitioners working within the New Literacy Studies and drawing on a social practice or ideological approach (Street, 1984) have suggested that literacy education should build on "the richness and complexity of learners' prior knowledge" (Street, 2005, p. 417). Doing this, it is suggested, entails understanding the "range of literacy practices that learners engage with in their everyday lives" (Papen, 2005, p. 5). In some cases developing such an understanding has involved carrying out ethnographic research examining the literacy practices in the local setting in which the literacy programme was situated (see, for example, Kalman, 2005). Although I was not able to do this, my own approach to supporting the women's literacy learning as their mentor was to try quite explicitly to connect classroom activities with their own needs and values in relation to literacy.  In this respect I very much drew on a social practice or ideological model. In our sessions, I tried to find ways to "bring the outside in" (Baynham, 2006; Lytra & Møller, 2011; Simpson & Gresswell, 2012), so that I could ensure that the learning that took place within them drew on and was relevant to the women's experiences outside the classroom.  In developing activities with the women during our session times I therefore tried to notice and then draw on my understanding of their existing literacy practices and put this alongside what they identified as their literacy 'needs and wants'.  This meant that over time, I deliberately developed my conversations with them, often using the texts and materials they brought in to show me as prompts. I also tried to initiate activities that were specifically aimed at encouraging the women to express their own hopes for the learning that they would get from the sessions and to reflect on the ways they used, and wanted to use, literacy in their lives. One such activity aimed at doing this is described in the extract below, with an accompanying text produced by Sudha.

*I put up three headings – I can, I want to and I don't want to and we started discussing different cards that I had prepared with things like "write my name", "read a book" etc on them. The last column was meant to be for things they aren't so bothered about - a "don't mind" column, but straight away they disputed this column and didn't get why I had included it or want to put any of the cards there. Deepa said "of course we want to do all of these things if we could read and write." She said she could put something like "I don't want to work as a housekeeper" or "I don't want to go on holiday" and she wrote these down in her book, "but nothing to do with reading and writing"... As well as the cards that I had prepared – which were meant as examples to try and inspire their own ideas – I tried to get them to suggest others ways they could already use reading and writing or wanted to be able to. It took a while to get them into it... Deepa said something like "we don't know all the things we can't do and would like to do because we can't do them", and the others all agreed with her.*

*I tried suggesting areas and to get them to discuss how they do/need/want to use literacy in different aspects of day to day activities. We discussed travel and they said that reading bus numbers was something they can do (all of them), and things that they need to do for work. Deepa said that she couldn't read signs in aisles in shops/supermarkets and she had to ask for help. Nhanu said that she could read dates (expiry dates) on food as her employer had taught her when she started work for her (she didn't want her to buy out-of-date food). They all said that shopping is a big part of their job....*

**Extract 6.6: My session notes 261108**



**Extract 6.7: Sudha – 'we can/we want to' writing from session 261108**

My aim with this activity was not simply to conduct an audit of a fixed set of literacy skills, but to encourage the women's agency in articulating and negotiating their own learning 'wants and needs', drawing on reflection and discussion regarding their existing literacy practices and the

different ways in which they encountered different literacies in their day to day lives. However, as the extract above illustrates, the women did not respond to the activity entirely in the way I had anticipated.  Initially, rather than engaging in discussion around the sort of literacy practices they were familiar with or hoped to be able to engage in, they contested the activity itself. In articulating their reluctance to suggest other ways in which they might use or want to use literacy beyond those which I had included on the pre-prepared cards, the group members appeared to position themselves as non-literate and "un-knowing" (Klassen & Burnaby, 1993), suggesting a view of themselves as passive learners, who needed to be told what they needed to know and learn. At the time I interpreted this response as an indication that they wanted and expected me to fulfil my role as the 'teacher'. Thus, although I was concerned with trying to encourage the women to discuss and identify for themselves their learning priorities for the sessions, I responded to this by taking on a much more directive role in leading the discussion than I had planned. In doing so, I drew on my pre-prepared cards in order to try to prompt discussion, and positioned myself as the teacher leading and shaping the conversation. However, when I looked back at my notes from this session, it seemed clear to me that the way in which the women disputed the way in which I had organised the columns suggested that they were, in fact, far from passive in their engagement with the activity. Rather, they were very clear in articulating their concern to not limit their literacy learning aspirations to what they already knew. Despite this, as the conversation progressed they did identify some quite specific priority areas that they wanted help with.

### 'Functional' literacies

The literacy 'wants and needs' identified by the women in the activity discussed above largely related to very practical concerns regarding how they needed to use literacy in their day to day lives as migrant domestic workers navigating life in the UK. As shown in Sudha's list (extract 6.7), these included literacies related to shopping as well as form filling and sending text messages. These were concerns that they returned to over the course of time during which we met as a group as part of an ongoing discussion and process of negotiation between them and me regarding their learning priorities. Over the time that we met together as a group I tried to develop activities that responded directly to these concerns, where possible drawing on 'real literacy materials' (Rogers, 1999) that directly reflected the materials and texts that the women encountered and engaged in their everyday lives. Thus, one particularly popular area of work that we developed over a number of sessions focused on shopping and supermarket signs. This involved a series of activities that I developed in response to the way in which the women in the group had spoken about using, or wanting to be able to use, particular literacy practices associated with shopping, which included writing shopping lists and reading signs in shops. In developing the activities I tried to draw on what I know about their existing literacy practices and competencies, as well as respond to specific learning priorities that they had identified.  As part of this work, as well as playing a version of the game 'I went to the supermarket and I bought', we also created a pretend supermarket in the room, using print outs of photos that I had taken of real supermarket signs (extract 6.9):

> *I said that I was going to turn the room into a supermarket and we stuck up all the signs before going one by one working out what they said (and writing the names up on the board). Some they found quite simple – greengrocer they knew was the same as fruit and vegetables. Others were more difficult – toiletries for example. We matched ones that meant the same thing or went together (butcher - meat). Then I divided up the cards that I had made from all the words that the group had listed when we played 'I went to the supermarket..' between the two of them and we worked out where each one would go, sticking them up on the wall around the signs. This went well, and actually took quite a long time, really taking up most of the session. When they were all stuck up Sudha straight away started walking round writing all the words down in her book and told Jyothi that she should do the same (which she did).*
>
> **Extract 6.8: My session notes 080409**



**Extract 6.9: Example of one of the signs we used in the supermarket activity 080409**

The supermarket activity appeared to have been successful in engaging both Sudha and Jyothi: in my notes from the session I commented that it took up most of the session, and reflected on the fact that both Sudha and Jyothi seemed to have really connected well with it. When, several months later, I asked group members which of our sessions or activities they had enjoyed the most, both Sudha and Jyothi referred back to this session, saying that they had found the supermarket activity particularly helpful. For both participants it seemed to play a role in helping to develop their confidence in their ability to read and recognise words, as well as connecting to their everyday literacy practices and some of the literacy demands they experienced as domestic workers on a daily basis. The type of signs that we used to create the supermarket would have been very familiar to both participants: group members had told me that shopping was a big part of their jobs on a number of occasions.  The activity's rootedness in forms of literacy that were so familiar to them seemed to help make it particularly accessible – and

therefore enjoyable – to them. Looking back at my notes, it is also apparent that, for Sudha, the use of cards for individual words was also important in helping her to engage with the activity: we had used this approach in other sessions and she often told me how helpful she found it.

In other sessions, I similarly tried to draw on both what I knew about their existing everyday literacy practices, as well as the specific learning needs that they had identified to support them to develop the practical literacy skills they considered important for their day to day lives. A number of sessions, for example, were spent looking at SMS text messages, a form of literacy that I knew was important to the women as they communicated with each other and with their friends and family across the globe. Others focused on practising filling in some of the multiple forms that they told me they encountered – and often struggled with – as migrants negotiating life in London, and moving between London and their countries of origin. These included forms that they brought to the sessions themselves, and other real life and practice forms (including, for example, photocopies of landing cards and NHS forms) that I collected and prepared for the sessions. We also worked on activities developed around the sorts of vocabulary associated with form filling, discussed experiences concerned with the wider processes of which form filling was a part, and, as a group, invented our own forms. I developed these activities in order to support the women in the group to build their confidence in navigating the forms that I knew they encountered as migrant women, and develop the specific knowledge and skills needed to complete them.

However working with the women in this way also provided an opportunity for me to learn from them regarding how they engaged with particular sorts of literacy practice, and what was important to or valued by them. The extract below which describes a session spent working on forms, for example highlights the significance to group members of being able to sign their names. This is something that came up in a number of other sessions (as, for example, seen again in extract 6.18 below), as something that the women felt was particularly important, and often gave rise to further discussion between them. Other research with women literacy learners has highlighted the importance that they attach to be able to sign their own name as they take on new literate identities. Research by Postles (2010) conducted in Pune, India, for example, suggests that for women participating in literacy programmes, being able to sign their names involved a process "of reclaiming their self-respect and identity" (ibid, p. 74). In our sessions, work around signatures emerged from activities relating to practical concerns with being able to complete forms or engage appropriately when dealing with banks and financial transactions. When I looked back across my notes from different sessions, however, it was apparent that the women attached particular significance to their signatures as being important their own right. This suggests that being able to sign their name – in English as well as in Nepalese script – carried also a symbolic as well as practical significance for them.

*We spent the session today working on forms – another practice/pretend form - and then a enlarged photo copy of a landing card. They were really keen to practise this one, especially as they said that having to fill in these forms while they are travelling and knowing they will have to ask someone else to do it is something that makes them feel very nervous (they all agreed on this). We went through it bit by bit, and they helped each other a lot – for example Sunita pointing out that Sudha hadn't filled her date of birth in right (according to the way they asked for it), and discussing the meaning of the different questions. The question with tick boxes for sex – male and female – caused a lot of laughter as they had never come across the word used in that way – and just thought that it was a "very bad word" (Jyothi's words). When we got to the signature Sudha showed me how she has a signature in "Indian language" that is very complicated... and then when she has to sign her name in English she just writes "Sudha". Sunita said she just writes "Sunita" as she started doing it like that and she knows that your signature has to always look the same.*

**Extract 6.10: My session notes 180809**

The literacy activities discussed above – relating to shopping, texting and form filling – could be understood in terms of representing 'functional' literacy learning, in so much as their primary focus was on supporting the development of practical literacy skills that the women considered important for their everyday lives. Functional literacy has been defined or understood as relating to the improvement of "skills for general functioning" (UNESCO, 1988). However, although this broad definition suggests a focus on everyday literacies, often functional literacy programmes have been much more narrowly focused on skills for income generation or employment (Rogers et al., 2004), and the term itself has come to be associated with a human resource model, that "links literacy directly with economic development, individual prosperity and vocational achievement" (Hamilton & Burgess, 2011, p. 6). The sort of functional literacy learning that the women in the group engaged with was clearly quite different to this reductive version of functional literacy. Although some aspects of the activities described linked to literacies they encountered in their working lives – as seen for example in activities focused on shopping – literacies associated with income generation or employability were not a main concern. Rather, the 'functional' literacy activities that took place within our sessions, in focusing on the literacy skills that the women themselves identified as being important for them, were often linked directly to the particular literacy demands associated with their functioning as transnational migrant women crossing spaces, negotiating bureaucracies and staying connected.

Critiques of functional literacy approaches have pointed to the way in which, like the technical or autonomous learning discussed above, by focusing on skills that adult learners lack functional literacy programmes have often reinforced a discourse that positions learners as 'deficit' or 'lacking'. In doing so, it has been argued, they can contribute to the removal of learner agency (see, for example, Hamilton & Burgess, 2011). However, my notes relating to the activities concerned with 'functional' literacies that took place within our sessions suggest that the

processes associated with these activities in fact entailed very active forms of negotiation. Despite the initial way in which the women seemed to position themselves as deficit, the way in which they identified and articulated what they didn't know and the skills they felt they lacked went alongside the very active way in which they requested and negotiated the sort of support they wanted from me. Over time, they were increasingly explicit in defining the both skills they wanted to develop, and the learning approaches they found most useful, and our activities were directly informed by this, and shaped by the specific requests and materials they brought in with them. Rather than entailing the denial of agency, the focus on practical – or functional – skills that characterised many of our sessions could then be seen as resulting from the agency that the women in the group exercised as active learners and participants.

The way in which group members engaged with – and sometimes changed the shape of – the activities themselves was also far from passive. This can be seen, for example, in the shopping activity whereby Sudha took on a teacher role, instructing Jyothi as she went round the room copying words into her notebook; or in the way in which work around forms catalysed deeper discussion around signatures and language. This meant that while the starting point, and explicit focus of these activities was on the development of functional skills, they were also associated with processes relating to confidence and identity, which highlight the symbolic importance of particular practices associated with 'functional' learning. This is reflected in the way in which the women spoke about the increased confidence they felt, when, for example, travelling back to Nepal as a result of the work we did together practicing filling in forms, or how they described how pleased and proud they were to now be able to send SMS messages to family and friends.

### 'Empowering' literacy learning?

Despite the way in which, in relation to literacy, the women in the group emphasised their lack of skills or knowledge, it was clear from our conversations and their interactions within the sessions that they were in fact both highly knowledgeable and articulate. Indeed, the contrast between the way in which they spoke about their struggles with reading and writing and the way in which they acknowledged some of their other achievements as migrant women providing for families and communities was striking. In addition to the focus on functional literacy skills, I therefore also tried to develop activities that explicitly sought to recognise, engage with and build on these achievements and the knowledge that they entailed. In doing so I tried to not only draw on what I knew not only about the women's everyday literacy practices – which informed the functional literacy activities discussed above – but also learn from and engage with their wider interests and experiences.

One area which women in the group often discussed, and where they clearly shared particular expertise, was cooking. For many of the women this seemed to be the one area of their work as domestic workers in which they felt particular pride, and they often discussed how they prepared complicated dishes for dinner parties or other special events held by their employers. Sudha, for example, when referring to her expertise as a cook explained: "I can't read and I can't write but I carry so many dishes in my head, so many things I know how to cook, I carry

them all in my head" (080409). Taking this expertise as cooks as a starting point, one activity that I suggested to the group was the development of our own cookery book, drawing on their culinary knowledge to develop the recipes. This is something that we worked on over a number of weeks, adding new recipes as different group members attended sessions. Once we had several recipes I typed them out on a computer in the form of a simple calendar and gave each member of the group a print out:

> *... I talked to them about the idea of doing a recipe book, as I knew that Sudha was a really good cook – and Jyothi said that she is too – and as a way of practicing words and also being able to share some of their knowledge. I showed them the 'chocolate calendar' that I had as an example. They seemed quite enthusiastic about this... When we were talking about their cooking and the different foods they make I was really struck by just how international their cooking is. As well as Indian dishes Jyothi listed chocolate mousse cake and cheese cake as two of her specialities. Sudha said she was good at cooking South Indian food as she learnt in Banglalore. She also described cooking Israeli food – "very easy, too rich, too much mayonnaise". She seemed quite surprised when I also asked about Nepali food and she described momos (Nepalese dumplings). They also both said that they can cook Thai curry. They were almost a bit competitive when talking about cooking different recipes – especially Indian recipes – for example when Jyothi said she made a certain kind of biryani, Sudha said – "oh that is very easy but can you make…" and described another kind of biryani "that is very difficult…"*
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> **Extract 6.11: My session notes 080409**
>
> *We were just looking at the book (a commercially produced recipe book) together when Jyothi arrived – I explained what we had been doing/looking at and then suggested that they took in turns to each think of a dish that we would write up on the board together, first the ingredients, then the instructions. It went well I think. Sudha went first and said she would do Shami Kebabs as they are something easy that everybody likes – although Jyothi disputed her describing them as Indian, saying that they weren't Indian, they were things that British people like to eat. I offered to do the writing but Sudha came forward to write the ingredients herself – getting both me and Jyothi to help with spelling, and checking that she had remembered all the ingredients... Then I asked her to think about how she would explain to someone how to make it. She did a great job of talking me through step by step, with Jyothi also offering suggestions and some discussion between them about how they would do things. I offered to help writing this bit. After she had explained each step I spoke it back to her to check we had it right and then wrote it down. Then the three of us read it back together, again to check we had it down right. We did this for the whole recipe and then read through it all together and they both copied it down...*
>
> **Extract 6.12: My session notes 150409**

The two extracts above describing our initial discussions around the idea of a recipe book and first attempts at writing a recipe reflect the very international – and transcultural – nature of their

knowledge and experiences. They also seem to affirm the importance that cooking, and the knowledge that they were accomplished cooks, had for the identity of the two participants, which is reflected in the friendly – but competitive – banter they engaged in when discussing their extensive knowledge of different recipes and types of international cuisine.  My notes reflect a concern that by suggesting that they should write their recipes down, I might, in some way, undermine the value of this expertise and the way in which they had learnt and remembered recipes through experience rather than reading. However, to some extent, the recipe book project, in enabling the women in the group to assume the role of experts, allowed for a quite explicit shifting of roles: while I may have contributed expertise in terms of helping write out the recipes, with regard to the actual recipes themselves it was clear they were very much the teachers and I the learner.

In other cases my attempts to connect with the wider interests and experiences of the women in our sessions entailed a direct engagement with literacy experiences associated with the women's lives and identities as domestic workers in international households, and which connected to aspirations for learning which went explicitly beyond a concern with merely 'functioning'. For example, several women in the group had expressed a desire to be able to read 'stories', sometimes linking this to sorts of books the children of their employers read, as reflected, for example in Sunita's suggestion that she would really like to read some "12-19 age range books, love stories, that sort of thing", like those read by her employers' daughter (my session notes 141009). Inspired by this, one activity that I developed with the group was the collective reading of stories.  At an early stage of our group's formation Priya had asked to borrow some easy stories and I had lent her a selection of books aimed at ESOL learners, most of which she returned saying she had either found them too hard or not interesting. However she had really enjoyed the Wizard of Oz, which she kept. Encouraged by this I tried to identify similar simple texts that would be reasonably accessible – as well as enjoyable – to all the members of the group and found some illustrated versions of classic stories/fairytales. I made copies of individual chapters of each story and during sessions we would take turns in reading a few lines, reading each story over several sessions.

Reading these stories was something that all the group members seemed to enjoy. However they took hold of the texts, and used and engaged with them in very different ways. Sudha, for example, while saying she enjoyed the actual stories – and lent them to her sister who also enjoyed reading them – saw the texts largely  as an opportunity to "practise" her reading and writing by reading and copying out extracts of text until she felt confident that she could both read and reproduce the words. This reflected the very consistent goals and preferences regarding learning strategies that ran through much of her engagement in our sessions. In contrast, Sunita – the youngest member of the group –, as well as requesting that we also looked at teenage fiction, and the sorts of books that girls closer to her in age read – was quick to connect the reading that we did do together with her own experiences, identifying with the central character – a maid – and describing her own journey to the UK as a migrant worker as 'an adventure'. The way in which Sunita made and reflected on these connections inspired me

to suggest group writing of their own adventure stories, something that Sunita in particular was keen to do:

> *... when I was explaining the first part of the story, and reading through bits of it with Sunita she straight away explicitly identified with the character of Peg as the maid/cleaner and said "oh she is like us".... She also asked me what "adventure" meant. I tried to explain – saying something about going somewhere new, doing new things that might be scary, dangerous etc, something to do with being brave… and she said "so that's like what we did when we couldn't even read and write but even so we left our countries and went to work somewhere new, that was brave and an adventure".*
>
> **Extract 6.13: My session notes 141009**
>
> *I reminded them about the Princess and the Pea book we'd read and how it had involved [the central character] going on an adventure, and said how I thought that they might like to write their own experiences... as they had all left their countries and come here.... Sunita immediately agreed with this and said how they had been really brave to leave their families and come here to a place they didn't know at all and thought that it was a really good idea.... Sunita pretty much just got on with [writing] it. At the end [when she had finished her story] she signed off "Good bye, love from Sunita" as if it was a letter she was composing for someone.*
>
> **Extract 6.14: My session notes 181109**

**Extract 6.15: 'My adventure' – Sunita's writing from session 181109**

This example of writing 'adventure stories' was one of several times in which I had encouraged group members to write about their own experiences. For example, in the extract below I describe an activity which took place in an earlier session, attended by Sudha and Nhanu, in which I suggested that they wrote about their experiences before coming to London, and then about their hopes for the future (see extracts of writing in chapter 4):

*...to start them off [I] wrote up on the board "Before I came to London I…" – which we then read together. This... set off a lot of discussion about their lives and experiences... Before actually writing anything they both discussed what they wanted to write and then I flitted between them helping them both with spelling and with thinking of the right word to use in places – Sudha got her English quite muddled in places whereas Nhanu was much clearer about what she wanted to write and what words she wanted to use, although she finds the actual writing/spelling harder... Sudha finished before Nhanu and then set about reading it through to herself. When she got to the end she made a triumphant "yes!" sound and moved her clenched fist down to accompany it. When Nhanu had finished, and had also read hers through (I got them to read what they had written to each other, when Nhanu was reading*

> *Sudha came over and read it too) she borrowed Nhanu's book to copy what she had done.*
>
> *Finally we spent the last 15-20 mins on the "In the future". Most of this was discussion as they really had lots to say and share. However just before the end Sudha stood up and took the pen and said she was going to write on the board and then copy down (I hadn't asked her to do this it was her own initiative). Again she got a bit muddled with the actual sentence - the final sentence "In the future I want my children to have a good future" started "in the future I want to in the future my children to have a good future" and I suggested taking out the additional words, but she was confident writing on the board. Nhanu and Sudha both then copied this down, Nhanu complaining that Sudha's writing was hard to read – to which Sudha responded that it wasn't at all hard to read, it was very clear, only joined writing is hard to read and she doesn't do joined as she "can't read it at all". Nhanu added an extra future before children. Stupidly when reading though it with her I started to cross it out, before she pointed out that it was there deliberately as she doesn't yet have children and so was talking about her future children.*

**Extract 6.17: My session notes 240609**

Although  Nhanu in particular found literacy – both reading and writing – difficult and often expressed doubts about her ability to learn, in this session her confidence in expressing herself orally and the easy conversation that flowed between her and Sudha when discussing their own experiences seemed to help her feel more able to put things in writing. Meanwhile, Sudha's growing confidence as a writer and evident satisfaction in her ability to compose something on paper is clear in her clenching of her fist. In coming up at the end to continue her writing on the board – and in doing so taking on a 'teacher' role – she also appears to be clearly – and proudly – asserting /performing her literate identity.  Indeed, writing about themselves was often the time that even those that struggled the most with both reading and writing seemed to develop confidence in themselves not just as readers but also as writers. It was also a time in which they enjoyed comparing their own particular experiences: these exercises often gave way to quite lengthy discussions.

In discussing a literacy programme carried out with older women in Muthande, South Africa, Millican described how, for many participants the transcription of their personal histories "formed the high point of the project", despite not being something that had been mentioned in their early analysis of local literacy practices (Millican, 2004, p. 199). She suggests that their "value was in their affirmation of a sense of identity among participants and recognition of their personal memories and individual voice" (ibid, p. 199). While the stories and experiences of the women in my group were clearly very different to those in the programme described by Millican, this recognition and valuing of identity and memories was, I think, similarly important. For the women in my group, discussing and then writing their own stories entailed not only a validation of their own memories and experiences of migration and dislocation, and of their identities as Nepali/Indian – and transnational – women, but also an acknowledgement of the significance of their achievements as migrant women who had crossed the world in order to find work and provide for their families and communities.

The activities discussed in this section were evidently quite different from those concerned with functional literacy learning discussed in the previous section, which very clearly drew on, and supported, the women's engagement in literacy practices associated with the first three spaces or forms of literacy - workplace, official and social literacies – that were identified in chapter 5. Like women's literacy programmes in developing countries that have drawn on a social practice approach to literacy, in developing work around recipes, and encouraging the women to engage in the reading of stories and in reflection on and writing of their own experiences, I sought to engage with the women's wider interests and forms of knowledge and facilitate literacy learning that recognised and validated their achievements and identities in a way that I hoped was empowering to them. However, in light of the importance that they ascribed to the personal space, in the context of their on-going obligations and service to others, I also hoped that these activities would support them in developing their enjoyment of reading and writing as something that they could do for themselves, and thus support them in their engagement in the personal literacies that, as discussed in the final section of the previous chapter, were also important to them.

## Teaching together:  A space for learning and social support

The last extract discussed in the section above shows Sudha taking on a 'teacher' role as she goes up to the board to do her writing, which is then copied down by her and Nhanu, the other participant in the session. This is one of a number of times in which, particularly as they grew more confident in their literacy skills – and literate identities – members of the class took on this role, choosing to write in the public space of the white board, rather than directly into their notebooks, or coming forward to explain the meaning of a word, idea or activity to others in the group. Moreover, the direct support that different members gave to others in the group on a one-to-one basis seemed to be a significant feature of the group sessions. Often this was something that occurred spontaneously as women in the group sought out and negotiated help from others. However in some sessions, the challenges of juggling the different learning needs or requests for support with particular concerns – for example their Sunday class homework or a form that they needed help filling in – meant that I also actively encouraged group members to support or seek support from another member of the group, while I helped someone else before moving back to them. Priya and Ramita, who of all the group members were the most confident in their use of written English often took on this role, helping others before asking me for help with their own particular literacy needs. One example of this can be seen in the extract below:

> *While I'd been talking to Sudha [about her Sunday class work that she wanted help with], Nhanu had been showing Priya her exercise book and I could hear her trying to read words to Priya and Priya helping her, so I went over to them next (and suggested that meanwhile Sudha could show Sunita some of the things she was doing)...*
>
> *Later... we... looked at the forms that we had filled in at the end of last year – I encouraged Nhanu to show Priya hers and we read through the different questions and Nhanu's responses together. I was trying to encourage Nhanu pointing out how good it was she had*

> *been able to fill so much in... she said she hadn't been able to practise signing her name... Priya was horrified that she just wrote "Nhanu" as a signature and showed us her quite fancy one. She told Nhanu that the whole point of a signature was to do something that other people can't just copy...*

**Extract 6.18: My session notes - 140109**

In the two events described, Priya had taken on supporting and encouraging Nhanu through looking over work she had done with her, while I was engaged helping Sudha and Sunita with worksheets that they had brought from their Sunday class. In doing so she took on the role of Nhanu's 'teacher', and in doing so was able to perform her own literate identity, illustrated in this case by the way in which, in commenting on Nhanu's signature, Priya was able to proudly show off her own signature. Here my own role was one of a facilitator – rather than teacher or learner – as I tried to draw on my familiarity with the women and their particular needs and skills to suggest ways in which they might be able to usefully support each others' learning. However I was also aware of the sensitivities of doing this: while Nhanu in particular benefited from the direct literacy support provided by others in the group, I was concerned that this support might contribute to reinforcing her lack of confidence in her own abilities, particularly in the light of her comments regarding the limited progress she felt she had made compared to others in the group. Despite this, the way in which the women spoke about the support they received from others suggests that this kind of peer support was important and helpful. That it worked was, to a large extent, due to the nature of the group itself, and the close and long established friendships that existed between the women. It also reflected their already established practices of drawing on each other, as well as others in their extended social network, as literacy mediators when navigating some of the literacy demands that they encountered outside the group space. Our sessions thus reflected existing practices of 'scribing and brokering' (Hamilton, 2006) that took place beyond them.

These friendship based dynamics within the group itself meant that the support that group members provided to each other – within the learning space represented by the literacy sessions – often went beyond a particular focus on reading and writing. Often activities initially focused on literacy learning gave way to wider discussions in which group members shared concerns or offered advice to others. Sometimes, as illustrated in the extract below, these discussions were initiated by the collective reading and analysis of particular texts that individual group members brought in:

> *When Nhanu arrived she asked Sudha... whether she had got "the voucher" and Sudha got out an envelope with a letter in impossible-to-read scrawled writing and a voucher which said £150 and with a picture of an aeroplane on it. She showed me the letter which I helped read as best I could, though the writing was very difficult– she could do a better job than me of deciphering the phone number of the person who had written it. It turned out that they had been at a fundraising party at the weekend organised by different Nepali families/groups... and there had been a raffle. Sudha had bought a ticket and had won the voucher. There was*

> *quite a lot of discussion about the voucher and how useful it was/wasn't, whether it could be redeemed here or in Nepal (Nhanu thought it was just in Nepal, Sudha (who I think was right) said it was here), whether Sudha would be able to sell it on to someone who was travelling soon, why they didn't just give the money which would have been much more useful, how much it would be "worth" – Sudha said that she'd been told she might be able to get £80 but not £150 – Nhanu said in that case "why do they write £150 and not just £80 on it?"…*
>
> **Extract 6.19: My session notes 240609**

Here the discussion that developed encompassed not only the written content of the voucher itself, as well as its potential use/usefulness and value, but also wider issues relating to their lives and experiences as part of a transnational migrant community who maintained links to, and travelled back to their home communities in Nepal. Sudha didn't intend to use the voucher for her own travel, but hoped to sell it on to someone who was planning a trip back to Nepal, and so the conversation moved on to how she might do this. In other cases planned literacy activities, such as those described in the sections above, gave way to discussions in which different group members were able to share information and knowledge on a range of issues relating to their needs and shared concerns and experiences as transnational migrant domestic workers. Thus, for example, the extract below describes how, a session focused on travel documentation moved on to discussing vaccinations and experiences with the health system:

> *[Sudha] asked Jyothi if she had had her injections. Jyothi said no, and that she didn't know she had to have any… Sudha said yes she needed travel injections and that she had had hers today – she showed us how she had two small plasters, one in each arm, and [said] that they hadn't hurt at all. She said she had had A and B (hepatitis A and hepatitis B) and that the doctor had been really nice and looked up everything on a computer with a map, had asked about where she was going and then had said which ones she needed to have and how long they would last. I asked if she had given her a vaccination book – she said she had.... Jyothi didn't seem totally convinced but said she would ring her GPs – she is still registered with a doctor in Wimbledon where she used to work and hasn't told them she has moved. She said that she would ask if she could see a lady doctor as she wouldn't want to see a man. Sudha said it didn't matter if she had a man doctor as all it was was having two quick injections...*
>
> **Extract 6.20: My session notes 281009**

Often these sorts of conversations related to quite practical concerns and exchanges of information. However sometimes they touched on more sensitive issues. Boyfriends, love and marriage were frequent topics of conversation between group members. Generally these were light-hearted in nature entailing gentle teasing and laughter between group members. In some cases however, they involved more serious advice from the older members to the younger ones. On other occasions group members shared concerns and anxieties about their treatment by employers, or about changing employers and implications for visas, or worries about their immigration status or that of a friend or family member, and sought advice from others in the

group. That the women in the group felt free to discuss such issues and share their anxieties within the sessions reflects both the closeness of the friendships between them as well as the intimate and informal nature of the women-only group space itself. Their shared backgrounds not only as migrant domestic workers but also as women coming from the same country and region were also important, and they often switched between English and both Nepalese and Tamang as they discussed issues particularly as conversations got more involved, or if group members who were less confident with their spoken English were present. While I sometimes participated in these conversations, offering suggestions where I felt I had something relevant to add, or pointing them in the direction of people that I felt would be able to offer more informed advice[14], I tended to be peripheral to them. Indeed, often these discussions were times when I took a step back from my active engagement in the sessions, giving the space over to the women themselves.

Other studies of women's literacy programmes have often pointed to the important non-literacy function that such programmes may play in proving a space for women to come together socially and find collective solutions to problems, sometimes linking this to processes of collective empowerment (see, for example, Khandekar, 2009; Millican, 2004; Robinson-Pant, 2001). The close links that already existed between most of the group members, who would often meet each other socially during their time off at the weekend, and the strong social networks that they had established in London, meant that our sessions were not the only opportunity they had to share concerns and advice. However, the vulnerabilities that their lives as migrant domestic workers entailed, the often difficult – and isolating – nature of their work, the way in which they found themselves geographically scattered as they lived with employers located in different wealthy neighbourhoods across London, and their distance from family back in India and Nepal, meant that the additional opportunities to come together in a relaxed and safe environment that our sessions provided were particularly valuable.

## Discussion

It is clear that the different forms of literacy learning described in this chapter – the technical literacy learning that took place in some of their Sunday classes, the functional literacy learning relating to practical skills associated with their needs as migrant women that characterised many of our sessions, and the learning that, building on the women's existing interests and expertise, sought to recognise their knowledge and achievements – were all, in different ways, considered important and valued by the women in the group. However, despite the relative homogeneity of the group members – all of whom were domestic workers, from either Nepal or India, and with low levels of formal education – there was considerable diversity with regards to the ways in which different women in the group engaged with, took hold of and attributed value to these different forms of learning.

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[14]Usually Kalayaan

For all the group members, attending their Sunday classes was seen as essential to enabling them to meet the criteria for applying for indefinite leave to remain. The classes themselves were thus explicitly tied to requirements for citizenship, and – like the official literacies that they encountered as they navigated immigration bureaucracies – were associated with processes of forms of regulation and control  (Hamilton & Pitt, 2011a; Han et al., 2010).  However, how they responded to the actual literacy learning that took place within these classes varied.  Both Sudha and Nhanu, for example, had a vague sense that what they were being taught was important, and so they should keep going until they understood it, but were less interested in the actual content of the classes, which they saw as being too difficult, and a struggle, rather than as something relevant to them. This was in contrast to the enthusiastic ways in which they engaged with functional forms of literacy learning that they saw as highly significant to their lives, or with the way in which they seemed to enjoy the activities that recognised and drew upon their experiences and knowledge as migrant women. Sunita, on the other hand, although she also found the Sunday classes difficult, valued the emphasis placed on learning correct grammar and she was thus keen to bring concerns with 'technical' or 'autonomous' forms of learning into our literacy support sessions. Like the participants in adult literacy programmes in South Africa and Namibia studied by Papen (Papen, 2005), she saw accessing 'powerful' literacies through formal learning as important. However, rather than being seen as something separate to the 'functional' or 'empowering' literacy activities that took place within our sessions, a concern with learning 'correct' written English seemed to link directly to her wider aspirations to be able to read "girl and dog stories" and communicate effectively with her friends through SMS and social media.

Paying attention to the multiple ways in which the different women engaged with different forms of learning, and the meanings and values they attached to them seems to suggest a need to unsettle or disrupt some of the distinctions that are often made between different forms of literacy learning  ('functional' versus 'empowering' / 'participatory' / 'learner centred' / 'critical') within the literature. Instead, it points to a need to consider the way in which different combinations of different forms of learning may be important to support literacy learning that is both useful (or 'functional'), and 'empowering' to particular women. Doing this requires paying close attention to what it is that the learners themselves value, through ensuring that the learning space itself is conducive to enabling them to exercise agency in articulating and negotiating their own learning needs and aspirations.   The women's engagement with literacy learning within our sessions, points to a value in forms of 'functional' literacy learning, which (unlike traditional functional literacy programmes focused on income generation and employability) are attentive to the ways in which participants' particular learning needs are shaped by their lived experiences, practices and aspirations.  However, it also suggests that, for the women in the group, the sessions themselves also held a value that went beyond this. Through the sessions and activities which built on their existing knowledge and experiences, they were not only able to come together as a friendship group, and in doing so, share expertise, recognise achievements, and offer each other mutual support, but they were also able to engage in and enjoy reading and writing for pleasure, away from the pressures and

obligations that their lives as migrant domestic workers providing for families entailed. For the women in the group, both forms of learning appear to have been associated with changes in confidence and identity which seemed to be important to them as they negotiated some of the tensions they experienced as migrant domestic workers and transnational women, managing relationships and navigating between work, social, official and personal spaces.

Some emerging work that has sought to take a social practice approach to ESOL teaching has emphasised the significance of understanding the transnational nature of migrant learners experiences and literacy practices in order to affirm and foster their agency and multidimensional identities (see, in particular, Darvin & Norton, 2014; Simpson & Gresswell, 2012). My research similarly points to the importance of recognising – and seeking to learn from – the transnational experiences and identities of the women in the group in order to support their learning. In contrast to studies of women's literacy in developing countries which, drawing on a social practice model, tend to emphasise the importance of paying attention to women's literacy practices as situated in the local, in our sessions responding to the learning needs and aspirations articulated by the women in a meaningful way entailed an explicit recognition of the complex transnational dynamics of their literacy practices. Thus in our sessions both the activities that were developed, and the ways in which the women responded to them, clearly reflected the transnational nature of their lives and experiences: landing cards and immigration forms were central to our work around form filling; the discussions around the recipe book embraced Indian, Israeli, Thai, Nepali and British cooking; and the writing of personal stories entailed the sharing of memories of migration, experiences of work across multiple continents, and the sadness of separation from family and friends. These latter activities which emphasised the women's own knowledge and experience as transnational women navigating between spaces and supporting families and communities at home were important not only in enabling them to develop confidence in their reading and writing but also in recognising the significance of their achievements and the importance of their continued links to home.

# Chapter 7: Conclusions

When, in December 2008, a few months after first meeting her, I asked Priya if I could interview her to find out more about her life and experiences, she initially questioned why I wanted to know anything more than what she had already told me in our sessions. She said that that she knew that other people had already written things about women like her who "come from very poor countries, work really hard, send money home and try to study" (interview 231208), and suggested that I could simply use what they had written[15]. When I explained more about my research, she was happy to go ahead with the interview, and indeed starting suggesting other friends who also might share their experiences with me. Her initial reticence about being interviewed seemed to stem not from a reluctance to share her story, but from a view that her story was not that interesting, that it was just like that of many other migrant women, and that there wasn't anything significant she could add. As she started to reflect further on her own experiences, however, it became clear that her experiences and her relationships with migration, domestic work, and literacy and learning were much more complex than her initial response had implied.

Indeed, Priya's story and reflections, like those of Sudha, Nhanu and the other women who formed part of the group, reveal the enormous significance of their achievements as migrant women studying and supporting families back home. However, they also point to the cost of these achievements, in terms of the exploitation they have encountered, and the social and emotional dislocations that their experiences of migrating for domestic work have entailed. This complexity of the women's stories and experiences, suggests a need to move beyond conceptualising migrant domestic work as representing either slavery or liberation, and migrant domestic workers as either victims or empowered. Instead they point to the significance of understanding the way in which the women exercise agency 'in constraint', as they manage relationships with employers and family back home, interact with their extended – and transnational – social networks,  attempt to navigate immigration bureaucracies, and negotiate the tensions entailed by migrant domestic work. Their stories suggest that how they are able to exercise this agency is affected by their ability to draw on a range of resources (which include financial capital in the form of wages and the social and cultural capital represented by their social and support networks) and varies as they move into different spaces in which they occupy and negotiate different positions of relative power – and vulnerability – in relation to others.

Education, learning and literacy occupy a significant place in all of the women's narratives. In contrast to the more highly educated women who are often the focus of studies of migrant domestic work for whom the emphasis is on experiences of downward mobility, many of the

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[15]She showed me an article written by her previous English teacher, which argued for the need for continued support for ESOL classes and had been published in the Economist.

narratives of the women in this research emphasise a sense of sadness or regret at lost opportunities for schooling. However they also reveal enormous determination to learn, to attend classes, and to develop literacy skills, despite the struggles that this has often entailed, and pride in their achievements in managing to do this.

It is clear that literacy, the women's experiences of literacy learning and the extent to which they are able to draw on their emerging literacy skills, interact with the wider tensions they experience as migrant women and domestic workers in complex, and sometimes contradictory ways. These affect and are affected by the way in which, as migrant women, they navigate between and position themselves within distinct spaces and, in doing so, encounter and have to respond to official literacies associated with immigration bureaucracies, negotiate their position within the international households in which they work, and build and maintain connections with their transnational social networks of friends and family across the globe. For all the women in the group literacy is clearly important. However, what it means and what it does – and how they are able to draw on their emerging literacy skills in English – changes as they move between different work, official and social spaces, each of which has complex transnational dynamics.

When Rockhill, writing in 1993, reflected on the experiences of the Hispanic immigrant women that she interviewed in Los Angeles – many of whom were domestic workers – she claimed that they "asserted that learning to read and write English was crucial to getting ahead, *and* they said that it was unnecessary, for one could get by alright without it, *and* one could never learn enough for it to make a real difference in their lives" (Rockhill, 1993, p. 163). To some extent, aspects of the experiences and views of the women in my group with regard to their engagement with literacy, reflect similar contradictions and ambiguities. This is particularly apparent with regard to the way they spoke about their engagement with literacies associated with work, and with official bureaucracies and immigration. Their responsibilities as domestic workers included work that meant they encountered particular literacy demands – reading shop signs for example – and their workplaces themselves constituted highly literate environments in which other household members engaged in a range of activities involving reading and writing. Despite this they considered that literacy was not essential to their work as domestic workers – they could, and did, get by without it – and their literacy practices and efforts to learn to read and write were not recognised or valued (or supported) by other household members. At the same time, although they associated a lack of literacy with becoming domestic workers in the first place, they recognised that their emerging literacy skills in English would not necessarily enable them to get different – better – jobs, which often demanded much higher levels of literacy proficiency.

Engaging with the official literacies – in English – which were associated with immigration control and the regulation of movement, on the other hand, was seen as an essential dimension of their literacy practices as migrant women – and, at least initially, was a key factor in leading them to seek literacy learning support. However, despite this, it was clear that they had managed to negotiate immigration processes successfully even where the literacy demands entailed went beyond the skills they possessed. In doing this, they often drew on friends, and

sometimes employers or lawyers, as literacy brokers or mediators, and such reliance on others was not unproblematic, particularly as it increased their vulnerability to exploitation. Their engagement in literacy learning appeared to play an important role in enabling them to develop greater confidence in their interactions with official spaces, although it did not remove the need for them to seek support from others as they navigated the more complex texts and literacy practices that these processes often entailed.

My study suggests that, in contrast to their experiences with literacies associated with the households in which they lived and worked or with immigration bureaucracies, their new and emerging literacy practices took on a very different significance for the women as they negotiated relationships with friends and family across transnational social spaces. In developing the extensive networks of friends and family that they maintained connections with, supported, and drew on for support, the women engaged in the creation of new transnational spaces in which literacy – and their own literacy practices – took on particular meanings and values. 'Being literate' in relation to these transnational social spaces related in particular to being able to send and respond to text messages, something that entailed very different – and more obtainable – sorts of literacy skills to those required to fill out complicated immigration forms or achieve the qualifications that would be required to seek office jobs outside of domestic work. Engaging in these forms of literacy practice affected the way in which they negotiated relationships with others and the way in which they were able to position themselves as literate, and as having mastered English, as they did so. Within the literature on domestic work considerable attention has been given to the importance of transnational social networks in affecting migrant domestic worker experiences (for example, Bridget Anderson, 2001, 2009; Briones, 2009; Parreñas, 2001, 2012), and some work has considered the particular role of mobile phones in shaping relationships with family overseas (for example, Madianou & Miller, 2011; Parreñas, 2005b). However the way in which these are affected by and affect literacy practices associated with mobile technologies has not been considered within the wider literature. My research reveals how the women's literacy practices associated with mobile technologies represented an important dimension of their communicative practices and were significant for the way in which they negotiated their multiple social identities as migrants, as Nepali women, and as mothers, sisters, daughters or wives supporting, providing for and interacting with family members from a distance.

My analysis also points to the significance that the women attributed to their personal engagement with reading and writing, as something that they could do in private. In context of lives that were so tightly bound up in serving others, drawing on their emerging literacy practices to try and read 'stories' or simply practise writing texts copied from the classes seemed to be important for the way in which they attempted to carve out time and space for themselves away from the tensions that their lives as domestic workers entailed. The importance of this much more private engagement with literacy, which was linked to aspirations associated with having the time to be able read as a 'hobby', also reflects the symbolic value that the women in the group attached to literacy and their own emerging literate identities.

It is clear that the different ways in which the women in the group engaged with different forms of literacy were intrinsically bound up with the transnational context of their experiences, and the complex relationships with others, with the associated power dynamics, that these entailed. Like other studies of literacy as a social practice my research reveals how literacy practices are shaped by context, and how texts and practices may take on different meanings and significances as they move between spaces. However it also points to the way in which literacy itself, and the way it is drawn on by the women in the group, was involved in processes involving connection and distancing between different contexts. This was apparent, for example, in the ways in which the women used texts both to connect them to friends and family in Nepal and to protect themselves emotionally from the tensions this contact entailed, or in the ways in which their personal literacy aspirations were associated both with developing literacy skills in Nepali, and with reading the sorts of English language novels that they found in the houses of the elite international families for whom they worked. The women's literacy practices thus play a role both in connecting them with 'home' and moving them away from it, and, in doing so, were implicated in processes of negotiation of status, identity and sense of self.

In arguing for the need to play closer attention to the global as well as local dynamics of literacy practices, some scholars from within the New Literacy Studies have emphasised the way in which global dynamics or influences may affect practices at a local level (for example, Baynham & Prinsloo, 2009; Maddox, 2007; Papen, 2007; Reder & Davila, 2005). However, my analysis of the way in which the women in this study engaged with literacy suggests a need for a more complex conceptualisation of the relationship between the global and the local, which pays attention to the way in which literacy practices are involved in making connections and disconnections between and across spaces and contexts.

Like Kell's work in South Africa, my analysis points to a need to problematicise "the binary concept of the local and the global" (Kell, 2006; p. 166). However, while Kell argued that in her research it was not possible to define the 'global', only the 'non-local', my research suggests that defining 'the local' may be similarly problematic. Certainly the notion of 'the local' as a geographically, socially and culturally defined space cannot be easily applied to the transnational spaces that the women in my study inhabit, and which shape their engagement with particular forms of literacy practice. Indeed the way in which the women encounter literacy, and draw upon their literacy practices, are closely tied up with the way in which they navigate across geographical and cultural boundaries, as they position themselves within international households and transnational communities. These communities of transnational migrants, are to some extent anchored in a symbolic notion of 'home' associated with the (distant) 'local' villages and countries which they have left behind, and the connections to these that they share. However not only do they also encompass other migrant domestic workers who come from very different geographical backgrounds, but they also transcend national borders as they include family and friends who are living and working in other countries across the globe.  My research thus suggests that rather than trying to identify or distinguish between 'local' or 'global' contexts, practices or influences, there is a need to engage explicitly with the transcontextual dynamics of

literacy, and to understand the women's literacy practices as transnational practices, in which global, local and translocal dynamics play out in complex ways.

The way in which the women in the group engaged with the different forms of literacy learning that they encountered in our support sessions, as well as in the Sunday classes they attended, was clearly shaped by this transnational nature of their experiences and existing literacy practices, and the different meanings that literacy acquired for them as they navigated across different spaces. Thus their initial engagement with Sunday ESOL classes was informed by their awareness of their importance for securing their immigration status in order to expand their opportunities for employment, protect their livelihoods and to enable them to be able to travel back to Nepal and return to the UK, and apply for visas for family members. Their initial concerns with forms of functional literacy within our literacy support sessions meanwhile, clearly linked to their understanding of the literacy demands associated with life as an immigrant, in particular the official literacies connected to with travel and immigration bureaucracies, as well as to their desire to be able to use literacy in the ways in which they communicated with friends and family. The ways in which they engaged with other forms of learning in our sessions which linked explicitly to their own experiences, expertise and wider literacy aspirations, also clearly reflected the transnational nature of their lives and identities, and pointed to the particular value in drawing on and recognising the significance of their achievements as migrant women in supporting their literacy learning. Finally the literacy and non literacy support that they gave to each other within sessions appeared to mirror the wider social and support networks of Nepalese migrants and other migrant domestic workers of which they formed a part. It thus highlighted the significance of these networks both in enabling them to navigate the literacy demands they encountered as migrant women in London, and in supporting them as they managed the social and emotional dislocations entailed by the process of migration and their experiences of domestic work.

My analysis of the way in which the women articulated their literacy and learning aspirations and, in doing so, exercised agency as they negotiated the support that they wanted from me, points to the diversity of ways in which different group members valued and took hold of the different forms of learning that took place within the sessions themselves. It suggests that the technical learning that took place in Sunday classes, as well as the functional literacy learning associated with the development of practical skills, and the literacy activities that sought to recognise and build on the women's interests and achievements, were all considered important by the different members of the group. However individual group members engaged with, and prioritised different aspects of learning in particular ways. My research thus suggests a need to problematise the distinctions that are often made between different forms of literacy learning (as 'autonomous', 'functional', 'empowering' or 'critical'), and instead consider how a combination of approaches may be important for particular groups of learners. The experiences from our group sessions points to the importance of engaging with the women's lives and experiences in ways that stretch beyond their immediate context, in order to support their literacy learning in a meaningful way.

Although for the women in the group, developing new literacy skills in English through their participation in the group sessions did not enable them to overcome the structural inequalities in their lives which tie them into migrant domestic work, nonetheless it held both practical and symbolic importance for them. Several of the women experienced improvements in their lives over the period of this research linked to obtaining live-out jobs and better conditions of employment, and being able to visit family back home or make arrangements for family members to join them in the UK. These were possible as a result of their success in regularising their immigration status and moving from a domestic worker visa to being granted indefinite leave to remain, which was largely enabled by their attendance at ESOL and citizenship classes and their ability to demonstrate progression in their spoken English, rather than the acquisition of new literacy skills and practices. However, it is clear that literacy, their experiences of literacy learning, and the new literacy skills that they developed through the group sessions, played out in these processes in subtle ways.

For all the women in the group being able to adopt a literate identity was important, as they travelled, attended classes, and managed their transnational relationships and networks of family and friends, and, in doing so, felt confident sending text messages, reading street names, completing travel documentation, or engaging in the learning of family members. This, like ethnographic studies on the experiences of women literacy learners conducted in developing countries, highlights the potential for literacy learning to be empowering for women, whereby empowerment is understood not just in economic terms but as entailing processes which may involve changes in identity, status and self esteem. However, unlike studies of women's literacy programmes in developing countries, which emphasise the primacy of the local context in which learners' literacy practices are situated, this research suggests that for learning to be empowering in this way for migrant women like the women in the group, it must take into account the transnational nature of their lives. This requires paying attention to the way in which the women negotiate their position and identities as they move between different spaces, and how access to literacy, as well as other forms of social and cultural capital, interacts with this process. It also entails recognising both their knowledge and achievements as migrant workers supporting families and communities from afar, and the constraints and vulnerabilities they experience in this process.

## Areas for further research

The timeframe over which I conducted my research – I met with the women on a weekly basis over a three year period, and was then able to catch up with Sudha, Priya and Nhanu again almost two years later – enabled me to document changes in the women's lives and literacy practices. These related both to changes that could be associated with their developing literacy skills which enabled them to engage in new literacy practices or respond to particular literacy demands, and to external changes beyond these which also affected their relationship to literacy. Some of these were associated with changes in personal or family circumstances. For Nhanu, getting married and then having her daughter had clearly brought about significant changes in her life. These has placed additional constraints on her learning: she told me that

she was now far too busy to be able to even contemplate joining new classes. However they had also brought with them new literacy demands: when I met with Nhanu in 2013 she told me how she was struggling to make sense of child benefit forms, and worried about her daughter's schooling in the future. For Priya, the experience of having to go back to Nepal to care from her sick husband, before returning to the UK had brought with it increased uncertainty about the future – as she worried that she would no longer find it easy to return on a more permanent basis – as well as entailing increased financial responsibilities as she spent her savings on her husband's treatment. Meanwhile, for Sudha obtaining a visa, which enabled her son to come to the UK to join her not only changed the dynamics of her relationship with him, as she moved from parenting from a distance to sharing a small bedsit with him, but also brought her into contact with a new range of literacies associated with his college learning.

In addition to these changes which were individual to each member of the group, wider external factors had implications for the women across the group. Areas in which this was particularly significant were in relation to changing immigration regimes and requirements for citizenship and the impact of new technologies and social media. These changes suggest that aspects of my research and my findings might be different if I started working with a similar group of domestic workers now. They also point to elements that would be of value to explore in a future research agenda.

The changes in the ways in which women in the group drew on and engaged with forms of new technology and social media over the period during which this research was conducted were striking: while all the women had and used mobile phones throughout the research period, initially these were only associated with making calls and sending SMS messages. While some women in the group were familiar with other forms of communication such as email and Facebook, these were associated with the use of computers, which few of the women were able to use or easily access during the main period of time over which I conducted my research. They therefore didn't feature significantly in my data or my analysis. When I caught up with Sudha, Priya and Nhanu in 2013 however, it was clear that, with the increased availability of smartphones, Facebook in particular had become a significant feature of the way in which they used new forms of literacy practice in communicating with friends and family across the globe. This suggests that paying closer attention to the use of social media and digital literacies in understanding migrant women's literacy practices and the way in which they draw on forms of literacy in making connections and positioning themselves in relationships across transnational space would be a fruitful area of future research. This would contribute to an emerging body of work within the New Literacy Studies concerned with digital literacies and multimodal forms of literacy practice (see, for example, Gee, 2010; Gourlay, Hamilton, & Lea, 2014; Lam, 2014; Mills, 2010; Pahl & Rowswell, 2006; Street, 2008, 2012).

While the women's use of Facebook as a way of interacting with friends and families suggests the opening of new possibilities in expanding the way in which they, and other migrant domestic workers were able to engage with and draw on forms of literacy in their lives, other changes had less positive implications. The women in the group who did not have indefinite leave to remain

in UK when I started working with them in 2008, achieved this immigration status during the time period over which the research took place. This was critical in enabling them to negotiate better terms of employment, obtain live-out jobs, and, for some of them, apply for visas for family members. However, during our sessions, they often discussed concerns that immigration rules might change before they were able to apply for indefinite leave to remain, and the group members I spoke with in 2013 were all very aware of the changes in immigration and visa rules that occurred in 2012. While these changes have not directly affected members of the group, they place much tighter constraints on domestic workers who arrived in the country after them. While the domestic worker visas that members of the group with whom I conducted this research had permitted them to change employers, as long as they were able to find alternative jobs as live-in domestic workers, domestic workers who entered the country after the domestic worker visa was changed in 2012 are not legally able to change employers and are not able to extend their visas beyond six months. This has serious implications for their working and living conditions and for the protection of their rights: tying domestic workers to the employers with whom they entered the country clearly increases their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse as if they attempt to change employers they lose their legal immigration status and risk deportation. This is supported by initial research by Kalayaan which reveals higher levels of reported abuse among domestic workers on the tied visa than among those who entered the country before its introduction (Kalayaan, 2015). It is also likely to affect the ways in which migrant domestic workers are able to engage with, and seek to take up opportunities for, English and literacy learning[16]. More in-depth research examining the implications of this visa change on both the working conditions of migrant domestic workers in the UK, and on the extent to which they are able to engage in literacy learning would clearly be valuable.

Since my research data was collected there have also been significant changes in terms of the English and testing requirements for applying for indefinite leave to remain. During the period of this research migrants in the UK seeking to obtain indefinite leave to remain were required to prove they had a sufficient knowledge of English and of 'life in the UK' either by taking the 'Life in the UK test' *or* by attending a combined ESOL and citizenship class, and taking an oral test to show progression in English language skills. However, in October 2013 the regulations were changed and all migrants seeking indefinite leave to remain are now required to take the 'life in the UK test' *and* show progression in English language skills (Home Office, 2013). Passing the 'Life in the UK test', which requires strong reading comprehension and basic computer skills (Osler, 2009), in addition to obtaining an ESOL qualification, is likely to be exceedingly difficult for migrant domestic workers, who, like those who participated in this research, have low levels of formal education and do not have strong literacy skills in English. This is likely to affect both the way in which migrant domestic workers participate in ESOL and life in the UK classes, and the extent to which they are successful in being able to obtain indefinite leave to remain as a result. This points to a need for research that examines the effect of these changes for migrant

[16]Particularly given that the possibility of applying for indefinite leave to remain was an initial motivating factor leading to group members to seek out English and literacy learning opportunities in the first place

domestic workers, and which explores how their engagement with the new citizenship requirements is affected by their previous experiences of literacy, learning and education, and their working conditions and their relationships with employers.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Example of observation notes with accompanying texts

| Code | **WG-240609** |
|---|---|
| Date | 240609 |
| Participants | Sudha, Nhanu (Sunita on the phone) |
| Type | Regular group session |
| Place (incl description) | Usual  MRC downstairs meeting room<br>On the wall: the flipcharts that have been there for months and cut out signs saying "verbs" adjectives" "nouns" etc with words stuck around them.<br>There were also some additional posters – one advertising dancing on Friday evenings at the MRC and another with information about a photo project. One of the white boards had "mentoring is…" written at the top. |
| Resources / lesson plan | Print outs of their "stories" with beginnings of/space for writing in the third person version. |
| Other comments | Spoke with Sunita on the phone during the session |
| Associated documents | WG-240609-M2-C<br>WG-260609-S-C<br>WG-240609-S-H (2 sheets)<br>WG-240609-S-N  (2 sheets) |

| Coding Key | |
|---|---|
| In class | C |
| Resources | R |
| Fieldnotes | F |
| Text produced for class/homework | H |
| Text/material not linked to class | N |
| My materials | A |
| Sudha | S |
| Priya | M1 |
| Nhanu | M2 |
| Sunita | M3 |
| Deepa | M4 |
| Ramita | R |
| Jyothi | J |
| | |

| Code | WG-240609 |
| --- | --- |
| **(Literacy) activities during session** | Sudha was there when I arrived at 2.35, Nhanu arrived just after 3. When I arrived Sudha wanted to show me how she had written out each person's "story" as homework, and read each piece out to me (see accompanying text WG-240609-S-H). The only word she struggled with was "driving" and again – as she and Sunita had last week – she commented on what difficult words Nhanu had chosen. Then she showed me how she was trying to learn to read and write in Hindi – see below (and see WG-240609-S-N).

When Nhanu arrived I got out the sheet with each person's story that I had used with Sudha and Sunita last week, and showed it to Nhanu asking her to remember back to what she had written. She got her own story out and we read through it – she did really well with it. I said how Sunita and Sudha had been commenting on what difficult words she had used and she said "really?" and looked quite pleased. Then showed her how on the the sheet we had everyone's stories and started tryng to explain how we had in first and then third person. I suggested that Sudha should come and sit in my place and that they should read through all the stories together. Nhanu said something like "oh, now Sudha is my teacher" and laughed. I hope she didn't feel unhappy about it – I wanted Sudha to read through with her to give her a role and also because it is good practice for her as well. So Sudha moved into my seat and immediately started explaining to Nhanu in Nepalese/Tamang the difference between the black and red writing. I'm not sure Nhanu really followed, and, as Sunita and Sudha had been the previous week she was keener to read all the stories that worry about the first person third person. They read through them together, Sudha reading slightly fast er and more confidently – so that Nhanu actually a lot of the time was just repeating the words Sudha had said, though I think quite a few she was starting to recognise too.

Nhanu asked Sudha whether the words she was reading were words she just knew, and knew how to write or whether she had to look them up etc. Sudha said "some I know, some I don't, but many I do know". Nhanu commented again on how much Sudha had learnt in a year.

Then to build on the success that they had had in writing their own stories – which I think especially for Nhanu was really useful in getting some of ther confidence back and belief that she can write, I suggested that we think about what Sunita said about writing more of their stories and to start them off wrote up on the board "Before I came to London I…" – which we then read together. This exercise set off a lot of discussion about their lives and experiences which I have documented below. Before actually writing anything they both discussed what they wanted to write and then I flitted between them helping them both with spelling and with thinking of the right word to use in places – Sudha got her English quite muddled in places whereas Nhanu was much clearer about what she wanted to write and what words she wanted to use, although she finds the actually writing/spelling harder.

Sudha, (despite what she had said to Nhanu) actually struggled a lot with spelling even quite easy words. She often muddled up the first letter, confusing the first letter sound with a letter sound later in the word – so thinking that words started with letters that come at the end or half way through words. Nhanu actually seemed to find identifying letter sounds easier. Sudha seemed to find the actual writing harder that she had when she had worked together with Sunita a couple of weeks ago – I think that collaborative work with Sunita who finds English/spelling slightly easier had been really helpful for her.

Sudha finished before Nhanu and then set about reading it through to herself. When she got to the end she made a triumphant "yes!" sounds and |

| | moved her clenched fist down to accompany it. When Nhanu had finished, and had also read hers through (I got them to read what they had written to each other, when Nhanu was reading Sudha came over and read it too) she borrowed Nhanu's book to copy what she had done too (see WG-240609-S-C and WG-240609-M2-C).

Finally we spent the last 15-20 mins on the "In the future". Most of this was discussion as they really had lots to say and share. However just before the end Sudha stood up and took the pen and said she was going to write on the board and then copy down (I hadn't asked her to do this it was entirely her own initiative). Again she got a bit muddled with the actual sentence – the final sentence "In the future I want my children to have a good future" started "in the future I want to in the future my children to have a good future" or similar – and I suggested taking out the additional words. Nhanu and Sudha both then copied this down, Nhanu complaining that Sudha's writing was hard to read – to which Sudha responded that it wasn't at all hard to read, it was very clear, only joined writing is hard to read and she doesn't do joined as she can't read it at all. Nhanu added an extra future before children. Stupidly when reading though it with her I started to cross it out, before she pointed out that it was there deliberately as she doesn't yet have children and so was talking about her future children. |
|---|---|
| **Literacy outside** | Sudha showed me how she is practicing Indian letters/writing (I asked whether it was Indian or Nepalese but she said even though the speaking is different the writing is the same) (see WG-240609-S-N). I asked how she was learning – she said she had a teacher – her sister is teaching her. I knew her sister could read and write in English but also remembered that Sudha said she hadn't been to school. So I asked again whether she (her sister) had learnt in school and she said no – her sister had never been to school. I asked how she had learnt to read/write and she said that she had an Indian story book that she used to teach herself and that when she had been working in India as a nanny, the cleaner who worked in the same house could read/write and would teach her every day and that is how she learnt.

Sudha said that she thinks the Indian language/letters are much harder to read than the English – she showed me how different Indian letters make the same letter combination/sound in English but are slightly different in Hindi as the language is "sing song". She said how her sister learnt to read it so well but for her it is very very difficult – she is not sure whether she can.

We talked a bit more about her "life in the UK" course on Sundays that she goes to in the afternoons (after her English class in the mornings). She was telling me about the different stories she had learnt for that – reciting bits of them " I go to hyde park…" and again complaining that in her exam she hadn't been asked about the same stories she had practised and learnt. I hadn't realised that the exam she had done had been for life in the UK rather than ESOL, but she said that it had. I asked her a bit more about the class, asking her whether it was just speaking and listening or whether they had to do any writing. She said it is just speaking and listening but sometimes it is helpful if you can write things down (this is quite different to some of the other classes she has attended on Sundays). She kept muddling the word "spelling" with "speaking/pronouncing" – which explains my confusion when she spoke about spelling when talking about her exam last week. She said that she has a friend who has taken the exam 3 times but keeps failing because her pronunciation is very bad even though she understands everything. I asked her whether the friend can read and write and she said that she is like Jyothi – she can in Hindi but not in English.

When Nhanu arrived she asked Sudha something about whether she had got the voucher and Sudha got out an envelope with a letter in impossible-to-read scrawled writing and a voucher which said £150 and with a picture of |

| | an aeroplane on it. She showed me the letter which I helped read as best I could, though the writing was impossible – she could do a better job than me of deciphering the phone number of the person who had written it. It turned out that they had been at a fundraising (not sure for what) party at the weekend organised by different Nepali families/groups (different surnames – Lama, Tamangni and one other) and there had been a raffle. Sudha had bought a ticket and had won the voucher. There was quite a lot of discussion about the voucher and how useful it was/wasn't, whether it could be redeemed here or in Nepal (Nhanu thought it was just in Nepal, Sudha (who I think was right) said it was here), whether Sudha would be able to sell it on to someone who was travelling soon, why they didn't just give the money which would have been much more useful, how much it would be "worth" – Sudha said that she'd been told she might be able to get £80 but not £150 – Nhanu said in that case why do they write £150 and not just £80 on it… |
|---|---|
| **Life experiences / life history** | Doing the writing exercises of "Before I came to London…" and "In the future I want…" resulted in both Sudha and Nhanu talking a lot about their past experiences, current lives and hopes for the future.

When trying to get them into/going on the "Before I came to London" I said to Sudha – "you could say something about working in Spain, or in India – where were you before you came to London, what were you doing". So Sudha said again that she had worked in Spain in a Hotel for 6 months but then she went back to India/Nepal before coming here. With some help/encouragement from me she wrote this out (though she struggled more than she had in the original "writing about ourselves" session, I think without Sunita's help/encouragement/feeling of doing it together). She described how she felt very bad being away from her family, and very happy being back with them.

Nhanu said she had spent 10 years in Hong Kong and explained how during that time she came to London twice with her employer there and the second time said to him that she wanted to stay here as in Hong Kong salaries are much lower so she wasn't earning much. He said ok and found her her current job with a cousin of his. In the past she has described her time in Hong Kong as a very happy one and although now she spoke more about hard work and low salaries – and wanting to come to London – when she tried to write about it she clearly wanted to emphasise what a positive time she had had. Sudha questioned her about her last sentence "I am so sad because those things never come back" – and she looked to me for support saying that of course time keeps moving and you can't ever get the things that have happened back again.

Nhanu also explained that before going to Hong Kong she had worked in India for several years, but then got the job in Hong Kong (not with the same employers).

They both spoke about how hard they work – but that they have to as they have to send money home to support their families. This family obligation is clearly a big part of their lives. I asked Nhanu if others in her family were also doing the same and sending money home or whether it was just her. I'm not sure she completely understood the question but told me that she knew there were other people who don't send worry about sending money home to their families and say who say "this is the 21st century, things have changed" but that she can't do that. She described how her parents took out a loan from a money lenders for quite a small amount and then with all the interest over the years it became a big amount. She helped them pay it off and said she has also bought property. She said that sometimes she gets fed up when family are always asking her for money. She said that when she was working in India sometimes members of her family would come to see her to ask for money. |

Nhanu and Sudha both described how they couldn't stay in Nepal as there is no money/ no work. Nhanu said "maybe if we had a good education we could find a nice job but we don't, we didn't get an education we can't read and write, all we can be is domestic workers".

When thinking about the future both emphatically insisted that it wasn't about them it is about their children – even Nhanu who doesn't yet have children. They both said that they were working hard now so that their children could be education and have a better future. Sudha explicitly referred to her daughters and her son (which was interesting as I know her daughters both work as domestic workers and I think have little education) but then specifically referred to her son and paying for his schooling. I mentioned that Nhanu doesn't yet have children and she said that if she doesn't have her own children they will adopt, and that her husband said that is ok, he is happy with that.

Sudha said something about how even though her husband has left her she will do all she can for her children and Nhanu referred to Sudha as being a good mother (and said something about husbands not mattering). Nhanu said that if it wasn't for her children Sudha could get married again but she can't as she has to think of her children. Sudha said – as she has before "I hate her husband" – though whilst on other occasions she has joked about him being crazy/useless/in the garbage, this time she seemed quite sad/subdued about it.
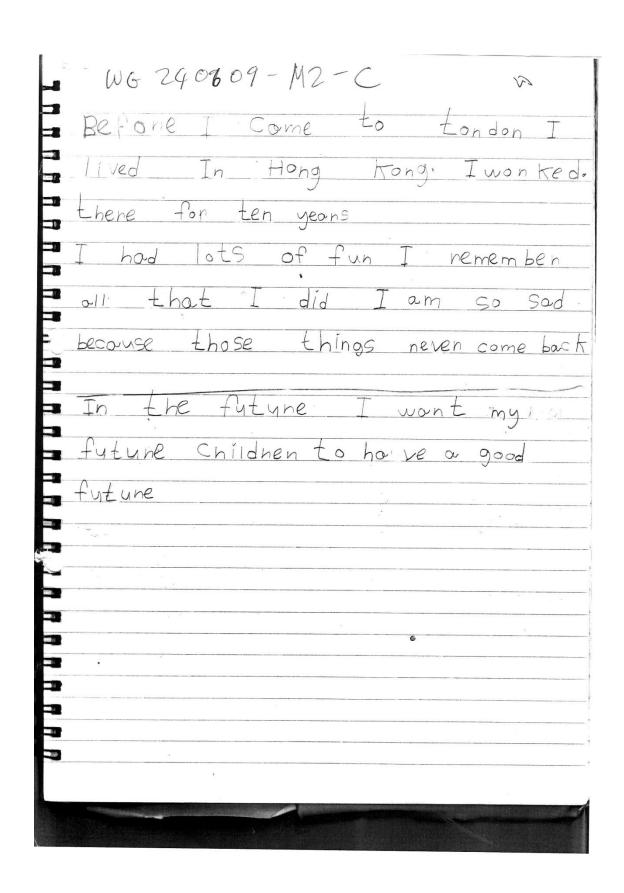
Nhanu said something about how she thought thinking about your obligations to your children was different in Asian countries to here. I think she was suggesting that in Asian countries people felt /have more responsibility for their children's education/well being, rather than just ignoring them once they are 18 or 19 but I'm not quite sure – it's possible that it was the other way round. I mentioned that in their case her case she had had to start working when she was very young and she started explaining how she started work when she was 10 for 2 or 3 years making carpets in Kathmandu and then she went to India to work as a domestic worker. She remembered how five years later (five years after 10 is fifteen, right?) she first got her period when she was working in a house in India and "there was all this red everywhere and I was crying". She explains how her employer told her it's something that happens to all women and now it will happen every month" and that's how it was. Recalling all this she said how she can't imagine now how when they were still children they did all this work, even washing other children when they were still children themselves.

Nhanu also spoke a bit about how she is trying to get her husband here and anxiously trying to get him a visa. She says he wants to come so that can be here together and both work and try to make money together for their future, their children. I asked Nhanu about whether she plans to ever go back to Nepal (if she manages to get her husband here). She said that she thinks it is better for children being here, but if you lose your job and are unemployed here and have to pay rent then it is very very hard so she thinks that one day she will go back to Nepal – she doesn't plan to stay for ever.

Sudha said that after 10 more years working and earning money she wants to go back to Nepal (I said to relax and she agreed).

Nhanu spent a bit of time sharing her concerns about her current job with us, which is clearly causing her considerable anxiety. It seems that her employers no longer want to pay for a full time live-in housekeeper. The polish nanny is ok because it is much easier/cheaper for them to have someone from Poland as they don't have to pay for their visa or pay taxes. She said that her previous employer has offered her work cleaning the house that he has bought for his three children who are all now living in London but she doesn't think there would be a lot of work – especially as

|  | young people do their own cooking etc. She said that he had said that it would be very flexible – and that would be good for her if her husband is coming over – but she is not convinced by this, especially as she is concerned he wouldn't pay much at all (and pointed out that her current employers pay for her travel, visa etc etc). Sudha said that not too worry if you have to leave this employer as they will write you a nice letter explaining how they no longer needed a full time housekeeper, that is why you left and you can get another job. But Nhanu is really worried that if she changes job now it won't look good for trying to apply for a visa for her husband. I didn't really know what I could say/advise. |
|---|---|
| 'Gossip' | Nhanu and Sudha both discussed where Sunita was. I said that I had thought that she had said she wouldn't be able to come this week but they both said they knew she had the afternoon off and were expecting her to be here. Then Sunita called Sudha who answered. After talking to her for a bit in Nepalese/Tamang Sudha put her on speaker phone and started telling her to say sorry – poor Sunita was very confused but eventually understood when Sudha said "say sorry teacher". She couldn't come as she was with her friend Seema who had a really bad headache apparently – though neither Nhanu or Sudha seemed to find this very convincing and said they couldn't see why Sunita shouldn't be here if it was Seema who had the headache. Nhanu was fed up as she was carrying Sunita's bag around |
|  | Someone called Deepa also called Sudha during the session – at the beginning (the name Deepa flashed up on her phone when it rang, so she clearly now knows how to enter names, or has got someone to do it for her). I asked if it was the same Deepa who used to come to classes but stopped. Sudha said yes, she couldn't come to class anymore as she has taken on an extra part time job on Wednesdays. |
| Other |  |
| Ideas / reflections | Interesting how their international networks link to passing on learning – the Indian cleaner teaching Sudha's sister (in India), who is now teaching Sudha…

Emphasis they place on children and obligation/family when talking about their lives – and how they link this to education. |
| (things to do / remember for next week) |  |

Before I come to London I lived In Hong Kong. I wonked there for ten yeans

I had lots of fun I nememben all that I did I am so sad because those things neven come back

In the futune I want my future Childnen to have a good future

WG 24 06 09 - S - CT great

Before I came to
London I lived in spain for 6/ months'
I worked in a Hotel then I went back to
my Country to see my family because
I was feeling bad. then I was feeling
very good and happy.

Before I come to tondont
lived in Hong kong I won ked.
there for ten years
all that I did I am so sad
because those things never come to
back in the future

161

Came in 2006 Now She likes in London and She is a housekeeper. Her bobbies are to be with her children. She likes her family. *she* has one son and Two daughters. She likes learning English because it is an internasional language.

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Jyotsna is From India. She lives in London She *is* a nanny she likes to learn English. in the future she wants to go to India and get married

162

Comes from Nepal. She likes in London She is a housekeeper. She is looking after three Children and cooking and shopping and cleaning. She likes to learn English and Computer and writing and driving and motorbike

is from Nepal. She lives in London she a housekeeper she likes to go to out with her friends Bobby and Seema They are very good. This is her story. She likes to learn English for her Job she likes to learn English because it is an international language and she's my very good friend.

क  ख  ग  घ  ङ

KA  KH  GA  GHA  NGA

च  छ  ज  झ  ञ

CH  CHHA  JA  JHA  VAV

ट  ठ  ड  ढ  ण

TA  TH  DA  DHA  NA

त  थ  द  ध  न

TA  TH  DA  DHA  NA

प  फ  ब  भ  म

PA  PHA  BA  BHA  MA

य  र  ल  व  स

YA  RA  LA  WA  SA

स  ष  ह  क्ष  ज्ञ

SHA  SHA  HA  KSHA  KA  JVAn

Ka Kha Ga Ga nga

Ch Chha Ja Jha yan

Ta Th dha dha na

Ta Th dh dha na

Pa Pha ba bha ma

ya ra la wa Sa

Sha Sha ha ksha ka Jnan

Ka Kha ga ga nga

ch~~a~~

ka kha ga ga nga

Ch~~a~~ Chha Ja Jha na

Ta Th dha dha na~~n~~

Pa Pha ba bha ma

ya ra La wa ~~Sha~~Sa

Sha Sha ha ~~Ksha~~ ka Jnan

# Appendix 2: Participant observation data and associated texts collected by date

| Month | Session | Participants | Texts produced in class | Texts produced for homework/linked to class | Texts not linked to class | Copies of resources |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| July 08 | WG-160708 | Sudha, Priya, Nhanu | | WG-160708-S-H | | |
| | WG-230708 | Sudha, Priya, Ramita | WG-230708-S-C | | | |
| | WG-300708 | Sudha, Priya, Ramita | WG-300708-ALL-C | | | |
| August 08 | WG-060808 | Sudha, Priya, Ramita | WG-060808-ALL-C | | | WG-060808-Resource |
| | WG-130808 | Sudha, Ramita | WG-130808-S-C | | | |
| | WG-200808 | Priya | | | | |
| | WG-270808 | Sudha, Priya, Ramita | WG-270808-A-C WG-270808-S-C WG-270808-R-C | WG-270808-S-C/H | | |
| September 08 | WG-170908 | Sudha, Priya, Nhanu | | | | |
| | WG-240908 | Sudha, Priya, Ramita | WG-240908-S-C | WG-240908-S-H | | |
| October 08 | WG-011008 | Sudha, Nhanu | | | | |
| | WG-081008 | Sudha, Priya, Ramita, Nhanu | | | | |
| | WG-221008 | Sudha, Nhanu | WG-221008-S-C | WG-221008-S-H | | |
| | WG-291008 | Sudha, Priya, Nhanu | WG-291008-A WG-291008-S-C | WG-291008-S-H | | |
| November 08 | WG-051108 | Sudha, Nhanu | | WG-051108-S-H | | |
| | WG-121108 | Sudha | WG-121108-S-C | | WG-121108-S-N | |
| | WG-191108 | Sudha, Deepa, Nhanu | WG-191108-S-C | | | |
| | WG-261108 | Nhanu, Sunita, Sudha, Deepa | WG-261108-S-C | | | |
| December 08 | WG-031208 | Sudha, Nhanu | WG-031208-S-C | | WG-031208-S-C/N | |
| | WG-101208 | Sudha, Sunita, Nhanu, Ramita | | | WG-101208-R- | |

| | | | | | N | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | WG-171208 | Sudha, Deepa, Nhanu, (phone conversation with Priya) | WG-171208-S-C | WG-171208-S-H | | WG-171208-Resource |
| January 09 | WG-140109 | Sudha, Nhanu, Sunita, Priya | WG-140109-S-C | | WG-140109-S-N | |
| | WG-210109 | Sudha, Nhanu, Sunita, Priya | WG-210109-S-C | WG-210109-S-H | | |
| | WG-260109-phonecall | Priya – phone conversation | | | | |
| | WG-280109 | Sudha, Sunita, Ramita, Deepa | WG-280109-ALL-C WG-280109-S-C | WG-280109-S-H | WG-280109-S-N | |
| February 09 | WG-040209 | Sudha | WG-040209-S-C | | | |
| | WG-100209-phonecall/ meeting | Priya | | | | |
| | WG-110209 | Sudha | WG-110209-A-C WG-110209-S-C | WG-11/02/09-S-H | | WG-110209-Resource |
| | WG-180209 | Sudha, Sunita | WG-180209-S-C WG-180209-M3-C WG-180209-A-C | WG-180209-S-H WG-180209-M3-H | WG-180209-S-N | WG-180209-Resource |
| | WG-250209-A | Sudha | WG-250209-S-C WG-250209-A-C | | WG-250209-S-N | |
| March 09 | WG-030309 | Sudha, Sunita | WG-030309-S-C WG-030309-M3-C WG-030309-A-C | WG-030309-S-H WG-030309-M3-H | WG-030309-M3-N | WG-030309-Resource |
| | WG-180309 | Sudha, Sunita | WG-180309-S-C WG-180309-M3-C | WG-180309-S-H WG-180309-M3-H | WG-180309-M3-N | |
| | WG-250309 | Sudha, Sunita, Jyothi | WG-250309-S-C WG-250309-M3-C | WG-250309-S-H | | |
| April 09 | WG-080409 | Sudha, Jyothi | WG-080409-J-C | | | WG-080409-Resource |
| | WG-150409 | Sudha, Jyothi | | | | |
| | WG-220409 | Sudha, Sunita | | | | |
| | WG-290409 | Sudha, Sunita, Jyothi | | | | |
| May 09 | WG-060509 | Sudha, Sunita, Jyothi, Nhanu | WG-060509-J-C | | WG-060509-S-N | |
| | WG-130509 | Sudha, Jyothi, Nhanu | WG-130509-J-C | | | |
| | WG-200509 | Sudha, Nhanu | | | | |
| | WG-270509 | Sudha, Jyothi | WG-270509-S&J-C | | WG-270509-S-N | |
| June 09 | WG-030609 | Sudha, Sunita, Nhanu, Jyothi | WG-030609-S-C WG-030609-M3-C | | | WG-030609-resource |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | WG-030609-M2-C<br>WG-030609-J-C<br>WG-030609-A-C | | | |
| | WG-100609 | Nhanu | | | | |
| | WG-170609 | Sudha, Sunita | | | | WG-170609-Resource |
| | WG-240609 | Sudha, Nhanu | WG-240609-M2-C<br>WG-260609-S-C | WG-240609-S-H | WG-240609-S-N | |
| July 09 | WG-010709 | Sudha, Sunita | | | | |
| | WG-070709 | Sudha, Sunita | WG-070709-S/M3-C | | | |
| | WG-280709 | Sudha, Jyothi | WG-280709-J-C<br>WG-280709-S-C | WG-280709-S-H | | |
| August 09 | WG-120809 | Sudha, Jyothi, Ramita, Neeru | WG-120809-R-C/N | | WG-120809-R-C/N | WG-120809-Resource |
| | WG-180809 | Sudha, Jyothi, Sunita | WG-180809-A-C | | | WG-180809-Resource |
| | WG-250809 | Sudha, Jyothi, Sunita | | | | WG-250509-Resource |
| September 09 | WG-090909 | Sudha, Jyostna, Sunita, Ganga | | | | |
| | WG-160909 | Sudha, Nhanu, Ganga | | | | |
| | WG-300909 | Sudha, Sunita, Jyothi, Nhanu | WG-300909-S-C<br>WG-300909-J-C<br>WG-300909-M3-C<br>WG-300909-M2-C<br>WG-300909-A-C | | WG-300909-S-N | |
| October 09 | WG-071009 | Sudha, Nhanu, Jyothi | | | | |
| | WG-141009 | Sudha, Sunita | | | | |
| | WG-211009 | Sudha, Nhanu, Jyothi | | | | |
| | WG-281009 | Sudha, Jyothi | | | | |
| November 09 | WG-041109 | Sudha, Jyothi, Nhanu | | | | |
| | WG-111109 | Sudha, Jyothi | | | | |
| | WG-181109 | Sudha, Sunita, Nhanu | WG-181109-M3-C<br>WG-181109-M2-C<br>WG-181109-S-C | | | |
| 2010-2011 | WG-200110 | Sunita, Jyothi | WG-200110-J-C<br>WG-200110-M3-C | | WG-200110-J-N<br>WG-200110-M3-N | WG-200110-Resources |
| | WG- | Sudha, Kalpana, | WG-201010- | | | WG- |

| | 201010 | Sunita | K/A-C | | | 201010-Resources |
| | WG -190111 | Sudha, Purngi, Kalpana | WG-190111-A/S/T/K-C | | | |
| | WG-290611 | Sudha, Purngi, Sunita | | | | |
| | WG-060711 | Sudha, Kalpana | WG-060711-K/A-C | | | |

| Key | |
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| WG | Working group: refers to group sessions. All texts associated with particular group sessions are coded with WG at the beginning |
| -C | Class: all texts produced in class are coded with –C at the end |
| -H | Homework: all texts produced by participants outside of the group session but which explicitly link to them are coded with –H at the end |
| -N | Not linked to class: all texts brought in by participants but which aren't directly to the activities of the group sessions themselves are coded with –N at the end |
| -Resources | Copies of resources prepared by me for the sessions |
| -S- | Sudha: texts produced by/associated with Sudha |
| -M- | Priya: texts produced by/associated with Priya |
| -M2- | Nhanu: texts produced by/associated with Nhanu |
| -M3- | Sunita: texts produced by/associated with Sunita |
| -M4- | Deepa: texts produced by/associated with Deepa |
| -R- | Ramita: texts produced by/associated with Ramita |
| -J- | Jyothi: texts produced by/associated with Jyothi |
| -K- | Kalpana: texts produced by/associated with Kalpana |
| -T- | Purgni: texts produced by/associated with Purgni |
| -A- | Amy: texts produced by/associated with me |
| -ALL- | All: texts produced collectively by the whole group |