Libraries in Women's Lives: A Rhythmanalytical Study

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A thesis submitted to The University of Birmingham for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education

College of Social Sciences

The University of Birmingham

December 2020

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Abstract

This thesis is about the library's place in women's education and everyday life. It suggests that there is a connection between these two things, and that this connection has often been overlooked in accounts of the library's significance. The research investigates this by attending to rhythm, as understood by the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre. It captures rhythm through an analysis of narratives told by 25 women in public libraries in the Hall Green area of Birmingham. Through an examination of place and time and the energies which women have expended in and around the library, it argues that libraries rhythm the lives of the women who use them. Libraries take their place in relation to other aspects of women's everyday lives such as work and family. And, through the library, this research suggests, women enter into shared, social rhythms. The study therefore addresses a gap in understandings of the library's educational significance. It offers a richer account of the importance of the 'social' in the value of the library than is sometimes presented. And, through this attention to rhythm, and to women's accounts, it furthers a conversation about conceptualisations of time.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the ESRC for funding this work and to the School of Education at the University of Birmingham for the award.

Thank you to my supervisors Ian Grosvenor and Kevin Myers for being so interested in this work, for offering much support, for encouraging me to take risks, and for recommending books that I now love.

I also want to thank my mum and dad, and Joe, and Rose and Anna for all of their help and encouragement.

I am indebted to the libraries and librarians of Hall Green, Kings Heath, Sparkhill, and Balsall Heath for their support with the research.

And finally, and most importantly, my thanks go to the twenty-five women who so generously shared their stories about libraries.

*

Parts of Chapter 3 have been published as an article in Educational Review. I include the link to this piece in Appendix C.

Parts of Chapter 4 will be published as *On Silent Feet; the library and the child* (Kate Spencer-Bennett and Ian Grosvenor) in a forthcoming special issue of the Oxford Review of Education: Spaces and Places of Schooling.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

There is a rhythm
'everywhere there is interaction between
a place,
a time
and an expenditure of energy'
Lefebvre, 2004: 15

1.1 Starting points

Ten years ago, whilst I was teaching English and Drama at a girls' school In Birmingham, I studied for a Master's in Education. My dissertation project investigated the reading practices of the girls that I taught. As interesting as what they were reading, were the many references they made to the public library. One question I asked was how often they visited a public library. The girls were invited to tick the relevant response and the options presented to them were as follows:

I go about once a week.	
I go about once every two weeks.	
I go about once a month.	
I go sometimes.	
I don't visit the public library.	

One girl noted in the margin next to these limited options, 'I go to my local library every day'. I begin with this story because the library and the 'everyday' are the focus of this thesis.

The thesis is about the library's role in women's education and everyday lives. It suggests that there is a connection between these two things, and that this connection has often been overlooked in accounts of the library's significance. It investigates this connection between education and everyday life by attending to rhythm, as understood by Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis project (2004). It argues that libraries rhythm the lives of the women who use them. Libraries take their place in relation to other aspects of women's everyday lives. They

sometimes offer important spaces and times between the times of family or work, for example. Through the library, this research suggests, women enter into shared, social rhythms. I seek to capture these rhythms through an analysis of the narratives told by 25 women in public libraries in the Hall Green area of Birmingham. And I articulate these rhythms using Lefebvre's emphasis on place, time, and energy (2004).

In taking this approach, the study addresses a gap in understandings of the library's place in women's lives. It offers a richer account of the importance of the 'social' in the value of the library than is sometimes presented. And it furthers a conversation about conceptualisations of time and women's particular understandings of time.

The research takes two starting points. The first is that libraries are of value to women. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport's survey (2015), *Taking Part*, found that more women had visited a public library in the past twelve months than men (38.1% compared to 29.4%), continuing a trend of women using libraries in greater numbers than men (DCMS, 2015, Kelly, 1977). A National Literacy Trust study found that young people, but especially young women, value the public library (Clark and Hawkins, 2011).

The second starting point is based in the related facts that attempts to articulate the value of libraries have often defined that value in narrow terms, and that the importance of the library to women and other marginal groups has been underexplored. I suggest that these are important matters to address, especially in the context of questions about the contemporary relevance of particularly public libraries (Buschman, 2012).

Rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre, 2004), concerned with space and time and the everyday, provides the theoretical frame with which to make sense of women's lives, and I introduce rhythm and rhythmanalysis in Chapter 2. First, though, in this introductory chapter, I situate this project in relation to existing research on libraries.

I begin with an overview of some debates about the purposes of libraries and their futures, and a justification for adopting a broad definition of libraries within this study. I move on to outline some conceptions of women's education, before offering some historical context for the study, in relation to women's occupation of public space. The discussion then moves to the contemporary context where, finding some existing accounts of the significance of libraries to be impoverished and incomplete, I present the questions which this research addresses. I argue that an attention to rhythm aids in approaching these gaps in understanding. Finally, I lay out the structure for the thesis.

1.2 What is a library?

Much of this thesis could be read as an attempt to articulate what libraries are, or at least what they are for the group of women to whom I speak. It might nonetheless be useful at this point to set out, very briefly and in provisional terms, a broad conception of what libraries are, or, indeed should be. As would be the case with any educational space, such ideas are shifting, 'temporary and contingent' (Facer, 2011; 17). Brian Luckham (1971; 1) writes that the philosophy, objectives and role of the public library have sometimes been discernable only in retrospect by the historian. Alice Crawford describes the library as a changing and organic entity (Crawford, 2015; xiv), where the American librarian, John Wilkin, suggests that the library, despite changes occurring all around it, has 'actually had a sort of constancy in its role and function' (2015; 236). This role he names as 'a commitment to sustaining culture' (2015; 236).

Libraries are 'places set apart to contain books' (OED, 2016) but are also 'collections' (OED, 2016) of books, records and other things. For the library historian Raymond Irwin, a library should be defined as 'a community in which both reader and writer meet' (1958; 19). Thomas Markus (1993) argues that we can read all kinds of buildings as a library where Jonathon Rose, in considering the future of library history, calls for an expansive definition of 'library', one that takes in all kinds of cultural repositories; 'Schools, churches, museums, opera houses, theaters, cinemas, and broadcasting stations often have libraries,' he writes, 'But even if they do not, all of these institutions are libraries in and of themselves, insofar as they are archives of knowledge' (2003, 56). Alberto Manguel (2006) takes a broad view of libraries in his essays and his acknowledgment of the importance of the imaginary library finds company in this project where women describe those books which they hope to find or dream of existing.

For Alistair Black (1996), there have always been debates about the purposes and practices of the (public) library, and the conceptions above illustrate this. But the current UK context of reduced public spending or what the research librarian Alice Crawford labels 'economic stringency' (2015; xiv) inspires, and perhaps reveals, a questioning around the contemporary relevance of public libraries (Crawford, 2015; xiv, Birmingham City Council 2015). This questioning sometimes manifests itself in concerns about the future of libraries.

In much of the professional library and information science literature, debate about the future of libraries is articulated through a discourse of transformation. Libraries need

‘reinventing’ (Worpole, 2004) so that they are ‘future-proof’ (Arts Council England, 2014a). Viewed in this way libraries become responsible for adapting themselves to meet the needs of an imagined future where they would otherwise no longer be relevant. I consider the consequences of concerns about future-proofing more fully, and in light of this project, in Chapter 7. But it is important to say here that in the UK and elsewhere, as libraries reduce their opening hours, services and staffing, debates about the future of libraries become particularly pertinent. In Birmingham, the Council encouraged the public to help ‘shape the future of Birmingham Libraries’ (2016a), a Birmingham City Council report prepared for Cabinet talked of a ‘future facing vision’ for libraries (Birmingham City Council, 2016b), and the Library of Birmingham was said by the architects to be the ‘Library of the Future’ (Mecanoo, 2014).

Keri Facer’s (2011) understandings of the future of schools provides a useful departure from this discourse. Schools, according to Facer, should be concerned with ‘future building’ rather than ‘future-proofing’ and they offer an important prefigurative space for this future building to take place (2011;15). Her arguments may hold equally well for libraries; she stresses the need to consider how we might ‘steward collective knowledge, deal with new knowledge and nurture the capacity for democracy’ rather than thinking about ‘how to equip people for a global economy’ (2011;103). Indeed, concerns that schools might equip us or themselves be equipped for a global economy, echo concerns about libraries being judged within a business model (Buschman, 2005) in which diminished accounts of the value of libraries are offered through a focus on their economic impact (Arts Council England, 2014b).

For some, in the context of socio-technical changes, concerns about the future of libraries take the form of predictions about what might be to come. Considering the future of academic and public libraries, for example, Hernon and Matthews (2013) assert that ‘libraries will transform from a center of information to a center of culture’ (2013; 31). (Some have seen them as long having such a cultural role, of course, as the quotation from John Wilkin (2015) suggests.) In the spirit of future-building over future-proofing, Facer offers a ‘vision’ for the future of schools and in it we find reference to ‘a librarian’ (2011; 121). Facer’s future school features someone whose role it is to care for intellectual property. Thus, rather than eschewing the school library and school librarian in the school of the future, they hold an important place.

In taking up concerns with the place of libraries in women’s lives and with the future of libraries, important ontological questions are of course raised about the object of study.

What is the 'library' that I take as my focus in this research? In investigating their place in women's lives, this project conceives of 'libraries' in a very broad sense. It views public libraries, school libraries and academic libraries as libraries, but also women's own collections of books and other materials, as well as their digital collections. Taking a wide view of libraries offers certain affordances and aligns theoretically with the project's aims.

Libraries of course, often implicate buildings. Buildings are personally and educationally significant, having the potential for the discovery of the self and others (Markus, 1993). In considering the way human actors classify buildings, Markus asks 'what beneath the experience of a "museum" or "office" do we really sense?' (1993; 37). Markus gives primacy to the human experience of a building; his concern is with what is 'sensed' rather than what 'is'. Since I am concerned with women's ideas about libraries, in privileging their subjective stance, inviting women to reflect upon those libraries which they choose to reflect upon seems fitting. Further, questions surrounding the place of libraries in women's education and everyday life are not independent from questions around understandings of what a library might be. Consequently, taking women's understandings of what constitutes a library as my guiding principle is theoretically important.

Where women view their own collections of books as libraries, I also understand them as such. Such collections are described variously as home libraries, personal libraries or private libraries. These are particularly significant given the focus on women. McDowell (1999) argued that homes, being commonplace, had been neglected in sociological inquiry but, as sites associated with women, they had been 'doubly forgotten' (1999;93). Since McDowell's time of writing there has been much more interest in the 'everyday' in Sociology (Highmore, 2002a, 2002b, Moran 2005, Back, 2015) and yet in research into the role of the library the everyday has often been overlooked (although see Robinson, 2020).

Taking a broad view of libraries enables online, electronic and digital collections to be understood as libraries. In exploring ideas of value around libraries, the internet and electronic readers are sometimes pointed to as examples of the way in which physical libraries have ceased to be relevant. I return to these debates below. But here I will note that seeking women's views on the way in which these technologies might or might not constitute libraries allows for investigations of the meanings surrounding other kinds of, physical, libraries. For Hernon and Matthews (2013; 26), the 'definition of the library will change as physical space is repurposed and virtual space expands'. Broadly, my own research will view digital resources not as 'opposing forces' to libraries as perhaps traditionally conceived

but, like Facer (2011), as new private and public spaces, which offer 'messy ways of being human' (2011; 90). Within an age of electronic communication some see libraries as becoming 'more rather than less important' (Billington, 2015, 254).

I have here dealt with libraries in very broad terms. I now consider women's historical engagements with libraries before turning to the contemporary context for this project.

1.4 Women, libraries and public space

Women's engagements with libraries have been seen as part of a 'journey' to women's 'public identity' (Sicherman, 2010). The following section situates this study within a literature which addresses the history of women's engagements with libraries and which finds the occupation of public space, in particular, to be significant for women.

The sociologist Janet Wolff (1985;39) views it as 'no fault of a careless patriarchal language' that Richard Sennett's (1977) book on modernity is called *The Fall of Public Man*; the public person of the eighteenth century was male. If the increasingly sharp divide between the public and the private confined women to the private sphere, then the semi-public spaces of nineteenth century cities created places where women might escape from the confines of domesticity (McDowell, 1999). Such 'subaltern spaces' (ibid, 1999; 151) were also escapes from male presence and control, even if only for short periods. In the context of libraries, this escape has also to do with independent access to books. Pearson (1999) notes that women might have access to a father's library, but few women had libraries of their own. Virginia Woolf saw metaphorical and physical space as important for women writers and readers. In explaining her reference to 'five hundred a year' and the 'lock on a door' required by women, she writes that she is not thinking only of material things but the 'power to contemplate' and 'the power to think for oneself' (2004; 123). Gendered accounts of public and private space have, here, to do with freedom and women's education.

In 1798 Birmingham Library had 32 women readers out of 459 (Kelly, 1977). The circulating libraries of the 'library revolution' (Pearson, 1999; 160) were, given the high cost of books, attractive to women but were judged to be dangerous public spaces. The quality of the reading material was a concern; the literature scholar Jaqueline Pearson refers to the 'non-sensical trash of the circulating library' (1999; 162). And as the commercial and circulating libraries were places dominated by women, they were viewed as 'haunts of unbridled sexuality' (1999; 162). Worries that books might spread diseases, which the American

literary critic Leah Price describes as literalising worries about unhealthy texts poisoning their readers (2013;196), took on a more gendered character in concerns that the objects of libraries were being 'feminised', as the popular books became 'ruined by the powder and pomatum between the leaves' (Pearson, 1999; 164).

Because public libraries like all spaces, are gendered (Massey, 1994), it is perhaps unsurprising that even when libraries later came to be seen as acceptable places for women to occupy, the accounts of the place of women in these public spaces remain strongly normative. Burek Pierce (2007; 311), for example, describes the way in which libraries came to be seen as 'wholesome' places for women in the early twentieth century and that librarians used the language of a 'female sphere' (2007; 323) characterising the library as a protective space but also an 'appropriate' space for young women (2007; 323). Librarianship became, predominantly, a women's profession and this shift in understandings of libraries as suitable places for women to occupy might be attributed to women's greater presence in in the public sphere, particularly following the first world war (Kelly, 1977). Contemporary accounts of women's engagements with libraries often conceive of the library as a safe space for young women.

Related to these gendered dimensions and with a focus on one aspect of women's engagements with libraries – reading - are classed accounts of relationships between books and reading practices and space. Leah Price takes up this concern in her writing on reading practices in Victorian Britain. She identifies three spaces as 'staging grounds for tension between commonality and hierarchy' (2013; 175). The first space is the public library, where successive borrowings of a single volume linked patrons across social classes. The second space is the home, where she contrasts the reading of masters with their (female) servants. And, third, there is the book margin which links readers through the traces of previous readers' hands. Spaces of different kinds and of different scales are thus contrasted but found to be gendered and classed.

Here, reading and education take place in spaces of various kinds but all seem to offer sites of contest. In contemporary considerations of the value of libraries for women, this holds a deep significance, further supporting a case that libraries might constitute, as they have always, sites of political and social struggle and that this struggle and contest had, and still has, important classed and gendered dimensions.

1.5 Women and libraries: the contemporary context

Against the context of women's historical engagements with libraries, this section considers contemporary understandings of the value of libraries, as well as contemporary concerns about the library's relevance.

Recent studies in the UK tell us that libraries are valuable for women. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport's survey (2015), *Taking Part*, found that more women visited a public library in the past twelve months than men (38.1% compared to 29.4%), continuing a trend of women using libraries in greater numbers than men (DCMS, 2015, Kelly, 1977). The National Literacy Trust's (2011) study of young people's engagements with public libraries found that young women, in particular, value the public library.

Public libraries are an essential part of a civilised, equal society (UNESCO, 1994; Davies 2013). They provide knowledge and information (a role which remains important in the digital age – Agosto, 2006; Williams and Rolands, 2007), but also act as an important site of social and cultural connection (Corradini, 2006; Pateman and Vincent, 2010; Rankin and Brock, 2012). Libraries are credited with being sites in which to become politically aware (Usherwood, 2007) and sites of feminist critique (Pollock, 2011) and sources of education for women and about women (Spender, 1982). Libraries are seen as havens from the world outside (Lieberg, 1995). For young people, the library is somewhere safe to go to after school (Polatnick, 2002) and an inclusive environment for those without study space (Train et al, 2000). They offer an important meeting space for women (Audunson et al, 2011) and places which women feel safe visiting alone (Worpole and Greenhaugh, 1996). Historical debates about the suitability of libraries for women, discussed above, find their contemporary correlate in conceptions of libraries as 'safe spaces' (see also Glasgow Women's Library, 2016).

The library, as a meeting place (Audunson et al, 2011) offers a sense of belonging to real and imagined communities and a site of connection and identification (Pateman and Vincent, 2010; Rankin and Brock, 2012). Even when engaged in solitary activity the presence of others in the library remains important. In Virginia Woolf's descriptions of working in a library she alludes to 'the student by my side' (2004; 32).Thus, the historical context of women's confinement to the domestic sphere finds a contemporary relevance in feminist sociologists' concern that women have been designed out of the city (Wilson 1991, Beall 1996). For Beall (1996), participation in the city is empowering and the public library is a space for young women's participation and empowerment (Brewster, 2014; Beyond Access, 2012).

Relatedly, and suggestive of the importance of libraries for some in marginal positions, libraries are credited with combatting ‘social exclusion’ (Eastell, 2008).

As noted in 1.2, though, the future of libraries is now often seen as being under question. In the contemporary context of increasing digital resources and e-books, the relevance of libraries of various kinds are sometimes questioned (Buschman, 2012). Public library expenditure has declined (CIPFA, 2019) and libraries, in the UK and elsewhere, are closing. Since 2010, 773 libraries have closed (Flood, 2019) and CIPFA reported a loss of 127 service points in 2017-18 compared to the previous year (CIPFA, 2018). Given that women use libraries in greater numbers than men, and perhaps in qualitatively different ways, the changes to libraries, the closure of libraries and reduced staffing and services, are thought to affect women disproportionately (Frederiksen, 2015).

In this context, understanding the educational significance of libraries is important. However, libraries have received limited attention within the field of educational research. More, broadly, but with regards to specifically public libraries, there has been relatively little sociological attention paid to the library at all (Robinson, 2020). In studies which have approached the educational significance of the library, the focus has been narrow. Contemporary accounts of learning in the library, for example, have been quite instrumental in orientation, focusing on information literacy (Crawford and Irving, 2013), and information seeking behaviour (Marcella and Baxter, 1999, Shenton and Dixon, 2002).

Consequently, a relatively thin picture of value is often presented; a picture which might conceal the way in which certain groups, such as women, find the library to be important, and which therefore conceals the way in which those groups might be affected by changes to libraries. Concerns that one should possess skills in information retrieval and be able to evaluate sources in terms of their usefulness (Nielsen and Borlund, 2011), for example, are not to be dismissed, but might ignore some of the ways in which libraries of various kinds are of value outside of these narrow parameters.

Very recently there have been some exceptions to this picture of general lack. These exceptions have come from sociologists in the UK. Jo Norcup (2017) studied the ‘Geographies of learning’ which are facilitated by a library, finding libraries to be particularly important to parents with young children. Katherine Robinson (2020), in her work in London, found the library to be a site of important everyday activity and ordinary multiculturalism for groups who meet there.

These studies – and the historical snapshots presented above – notwithstanding, the library's role in women's lives has been under-explored. It seems likely that we not only lack an understanding of the learning which takes place within the library, as troubles Goulding (2008), but that we also lack an understanding of the wider significance of libraries.

Consequently, I am inspired by the work of a number of feminist scholars who have made connections between their object of study and women's lives more broadly. Working in the 1980s, Mary Belenky and her colleagues' (1986) concern with 'women's ways of knowing' found them seeking women's views not only about learning but about what is important in life. Consequently, a richer understanding of education is captured than might otherwise be the case. Likewise, the educational historian Sue Middleton's interest in women teachers' views of themselves as feminists led her to reflect upon various domains within women's lives. Drawing on Juliet Mitchell's categories in her work *Woman's Estate* (2015 [1971]), Middleton considered women's family, sexuality, career, formal education, feminism and politicisation. And finally, Kate Pahl's research found her paying 'a close attention to detail that became a kind of attentiveness, or a bearing witness to everyday life' (2014; 4). In this vein, my own research sees women's 'whole' lives and their everyday lives as important to their education and their engagements with libraries.

I am also inspired by accounts of what has been termed women's education or feminist education and which sometimes overlap with accounts of democratic, and community based education, which has traditionally highlighted the activity of some disenfranchised groups (see, for example, Stone, 1981; Mirza and Reay, 2000; Rose, 2001; Gerrard, 2015). Accounts of women's education sometimes capture concerns that education should be provided by women and possessed or owned by them (Coates, 1994); might offer spaces in which to challenge roles ascribed to them elsewhere (Mirza and Reay, 2000), should involve learning about the self and about others (Nussbaum, 2006, Archer, 2007), whilst also turning one's attention away from oneself 'towards valuable objects in the world' (Murdoch, 1970; 33).

In the next chapter, I introduce the concept of the margin as a productive theoretical category and, situate the current research as capturing *marginal* educational activity. Described as 'subaltern counter publics' (Fraser, 1990), the educational practices of women and some other marginalised groups have sometimes opened up a space for the formulation of 'oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs' (Fraser, 1990; 67). These 'hidden discursive arenas' (Fraser, 1990; 67) involve collective action and unacknowledged cultural activity. With particular regard to the challenging of ascribed

identities, the philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2011) nicely terms such possibilities 'exit options,' suggesting that exit options from traditional roles are an important feature of girls' education.

Any transformational educational activity which implicates libraries has to do with not only gender inequality but social class too. Public libraries are important to those who are economically disadvantaged (National Literacy Trust, 2011, Beyond Access, 2012, Brewster, 2014, DCMS, 2015, Frederiksen, 2015, Glasgow Women's Library, 2016). And accounts of the place of the library in women's lives must be understood with regards to social class as the overlapping groups of the economically disadvantaged and women reflect on their counter knowledges (Gerrard, 2015; 27). Here, the library is an important place to look for gendered and classed political struggle. The physical spaces of libraries are relevant here but so too are the imagined spaces opened up through engagements with literature, meaning that this engagement takes place on different levels, making an understanding of the hidden discursive arenas more complex.

In this introduction, I have pointed to work which suggests that libraries are particularly important for women – and perhaps that they have been so for some time. I have also suggested that this importance makes the contemporary threat to libraries a particularly urgent topic to address. However, we know much less about *how* libraries are important. What do women do in, and with libraries? What role do libraries play in their educational lives, and, indeed, their lives more generally? How do their uses of libraries relate to dimensions of marginality? My suggestion in the rest of this thesis will be that these questions can be addressed, and the significance of libraries given much fuller articulation, by paying attention to the everyday role of libraries for women. This can be done by drawing on the feminist scholars discussed above, but also by introducing methodological and theoretical tools not used in the research discussed so far; by collecting women's narratives of library use, and by attending to the *rhythms* evident therein. These tools are precisely what I turn to in the next chapter. To end this chapter, though, I outline the structure of the thesis.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

I began this chapter with a quotation from *Rhythmanalysis* (2004) in which Lefebvre presents, in simple terms, the necessary conditions for the existence of a rhythm: There is a rhythm 'everywhere there is interaction between a *place*, a *time* and an expenditure of

energy' (Lefebvre 2004: 15).These three elements – place, time, energy – although not rhythmically separable, inspire the structure of the thesis. Following this introduction, the thesis is organised into six chapters.

The chapter which follows this outlines the theory upon which the project draws. It introduces rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre, 2004) and justifies the use of narrative as a tool for capturing rhythm. It also outlines the procedure for the study.

Then, Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are each divided into two parts. Chapter 3 takes time as its focus. Part 1 considers the significance of the library through an attention to women's everyday practice. It is through an attention to rhythm and routine that an exploration of the links between women's education and their everyday lives can begin to be undertaken. I posit here, by analogy with public space, 'public time', to help to conceptualise and make prominent the temporal significance of the library in women's lives. In Part 2, accounts of significant 'moments' and continuity in library use allow for an understanding of the significance of libraries over different temporal scales. It furthers the argument that the library holds an everyday significance through a focus on one woman's account of using her local library every day. This woman's narrative allows the significance of the library for some marginal groups to be considered and the rhythmanalytical lens helps the consequences of reduced library services to be identified and labelled.

Chapter 4 turns to accounts of place and space and of movements between home and the library. Part 1 seeks to understand the place of the library through accounts of its material properties. It considers women's reflections on physical space, their 'spatial stories' (De Certeau, 1984) and also their accounts of imagined or desired libraries. Part 2 captures women's accounts of journeys they made to libraries and examines the significance of these stories for understandings of the library's place in women's lives

Chapter 5 takes Lefebvre's third element, the expenditure of energy, and interprets this as being manifest in the educational desire which is both inspired by and worked on within the library. Part 1 considers the desires which rhythm women's educational engagements with libraries. This analysis further addresses the educational significance of the library for some marginal groups as women's practices of identification and attempts to challenge and reject certain identities are revealed. Part 2 builds on this work on educational desire, finding women acting as educators within the library. This analysis reveals unacknowledged, counter publics (Fraser,1990) in women's engagements with libraries. Certain pedagogic qualities characterise the activity which the narratives capture. The discussion highlights convivial, social rhythms, creative pedagogies, cultural learning and an engagement with the

arts. Through a particular focus on women's accounts of learning about themselves and about each other, the library's role in the development of a 'narrative imagination' (Nussbaum, 2006) is made evident.

Chapter 6 offers reflections on the research methodology. It reflects on the consequences of undertaking research within libraries - on researching in whispers - and on how this research was itself rhythmed in particular ways by the world outside of the study.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis, reflecting on the significance of these findings both within the context of this particular study as well as more broadly, before, finally, looking to the future.

Chapter 2: Rhythmanalysis, Narrative and Method

What will you do exactly?

Neha

2.1 Introduction

The *Libraries in Women's Lives* project takes a rhythmanalytical approach to the study of the role of the library in the education and everyday lives of women. It draws on theories of space and time, on realist philosophy and feminist sociology and, in particular, on the work of the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre with a focus on his work on rhythm.

My research adopts a theoretical lens which privileges women's subjective sense-making (Pearce, 1997). It sees women as having concerns (Sayer, 2011) which they seek to protect (Archer, 2007). In so doing, this research operates with a model of the human which acknowledges the many sociological dimensions of women's marginality – their gender, age, social class, race, disability, and so on – whilst also taking seriously the psychological elements of human emotion and feeling. Like Lefebvrian understandings of space which hold emotions as important – spaces of representation being 'felt more than thought' (Merrifield, 2006; 110) – this project views emotions as involved in judgements about what is of value and the relationship between objects in the world and our understandings about our own well-being; emotions are important 'judgements of value' (Nussbaum, 2012; 19).

It sees the communities which are forged around the library as 'spaces for feeling' (Broomhall, 2015) and also seeks to identify 'structures of feeling' (Williams, 1977) within the accounts as women reflect on libraries in ways which are shared. As I go on to show, Lefebvre's work on rhythm provides an ideal framework for thinking along these lines.

One young woman who was involved in the project, Neha, asked me lots of questions about the research the first time we met. 'What will you do exactly?' she said. This chapter lays out what I have done and the theory that I have drawn on. It is organized into three parts.

In the first part, I introduce Henri Lefebvre and his work on space, before outlining the central concerns of Rhythmanalysis. I introduce some of the key concepts associated with a study of rhythm and consider the affordances of rhythmanalysis for a study of women's education and everyday life. Women occupy a marginal position and some of the women I

met occupy many marginal positions. I consider the value of attending to rhythm for making sense of the lives of those on the margins.

In the second section I move on to consider how the rhythms which are so central to rhythmanalysis might be captured. I argue that an effective way of discerning or 'grasping' rhythms and, indeed, capturing rhythms which have been 'grasped', is through narrative. I consider the fittingness of narrative enquiry for this project.

Section three addresses the process of conducting the research. I introduce the suburb of Birmingham, Hall Green, in which I met the women involved in the study. I then introduce the women whose narratives I collected before describing the procedure. Finally I offer some reflections on my standpoint as a researcher and on some important ethical considerations for the research.

Reminders that the methodologies for the research are not separate from the research (Pahl, 2014; 190) encourage the theoretical underpinning to be linked quite explicitly to the research methodologies and the methodology to be linked explicitly to the practical process of undertaking the empirical study. Indeed, in this research these aspects are informed by one another and interlink. Whilst the elements are interwoven, the discussion in the chapter might be seen as moving, broadly, from the abstract to the concrete – from conceptual concerns towards more practical ones.

2.2 Rhythmanalysis

I begin, here, by introducing Henri Lefebvre. I briefly discuss his spatial theory before moving on to introduce rhythmanalysis.

2.2.1 Henri Lefebvre

Living for nearly all of the twentieth century (1901- 1990), Henri Lefebvre was a French philosopher whose writing and activity spanned many disciplines. He was a Marxist thinker with an abiding interest in 'felt experience' (Trebitsch, 2008; xv) and in 'emancipation and the condition of the human' (Shields, 1999; 2). His concern with alienation, modernity, and knowledge of the everyday is evident in his *Critique of Everyday Life* (2008), first published as *Critique de la Vie Quotidienne* in 1947. Yet his most influential work by some way is *The Production of Space* (1991).

In *The Production of Space* Lefebvre 'poses questions about the role space plays in our lives, from the conceptualisation of the world to cities and rural environments, and to the homes we live in' (Elden, 2004b; ix). He posits a triad of, first, spatial practice (perceived space), second, representational space (lived), and third, representations of space (conceived). These three elements relate to our navigations of space, the meaning which we attach to space, and abstract conceptualisations of space, respectively. Together they produce social space; the 'space of human interaction' (Merrifield, 2006; 104).

In considering women's narrative reflections on library spaces, on library buildings and on women's journeys to the library, in Chapter 4, I examine lived space and perceived space (Lefebvre, 1991). In these discussions, I also draw on cultural and spatial geography, sociology, and the history of education to consider important elements of space as they relate to women's reflections on libraries. These include architectural space (Forty, 2000, Jacobs, 2011), space and place (Massey, 1994, Edensor; 2010b), the space of everyday life (De Certeau, 1984, Moran, 2005), spatial flow (Wunderlich, 2010, Edensor, 2010a), sensual and embodied space (Lefebvre, 2004, Burke, 2005), materiality (Bachelard, 2014, Burke, 2017), and the spatial rhythms which define the spaces. I explore the orientations within the descriptions of physical space, approaching these as spatial stories (De Certeau, 1984) in order to examine the the place of the library in everyday life.

Lefebvre's, and others' theorizing around space and place are important to an exploration of women's experiences of libraries, as educational spaces. And yet it is Lefebvre's writing on rhythm which has informed my thinking most prominently and it is Lefebvre's final work – *Rhythmanalysis* (2004) – which provides the continuous thread in this thesis, in making sense of the women's narratives.

2.2.2 *Elements de Rhythmanalyse* (1992)

In *Rhythmanalysis*, Henri Lefebvre sought to understand the temporal and rhythmic elements of the everyday (2004; 196). He thought about space and time together with the everyday lives of individuals. '[E]verywhere there is interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy, there is a rhythm,' he wrote (2004; 15). Stuart Elden, a geographer and political theorist who has written extensively on Lefebvre, writes that Lefebvre's 'insistent point' (2004a; 198) was that the rhythmanalytical project continually underlines the importance of grasping space and time together.

Lefebvre drew on the work of the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard from whom he borrowed the phrase 'rhythmanalysis'. Bachelard, himself inspired by the Brazilian

philosopher Lucio Alberto Pinheiro dos Santos, was interested in 'examining the rhythms of life in detail' (2014; 85).

Although *Elements de Rhythmanalyse* (1992) was Lefebvre's last work, published after his death, he had been concerned with rhythm all of his life. Even in *The Production of Space*, rhythms are central to the analysis. They are, Andy Merrifield argues, inherent to Lefebvre's earlier writing on space (2006; 105). In light of the influence and importance of *The Production of Space*, Merrifield laments the lack of an equivalent volume on time, writing: 'It is a pity that Lefebvre effectively did not produce a sustained analysis of the production of time' (2006; 48). But he acknowledges the value of *Rhythmanalysis* (2004) in this respect: 'his analysis of the everyday and rhythmanalysis certainly yield significant insights on presence and absence, multiple temporalities and the interplay of time and space' (2006; 48).

Sociologists have long been interested in the patterns which underpin an interest with rhythmanalysis; with routine and repetition. This has manifested itself as a concern with habits (Bourdieu, 1977, Dewey, 1922, Durkheim, 2004) and with cycles (Young, 1988). But there has been a relatively recent rise in interest around Lefebvre's work on rhythm (Elden, 2004a; Middelton, 2014; Lyon, 2019,). This has been attributed to 'concrete changes' in the temporality of everyday life and intellectual developments, which bring new perceptions of contemporary temporalities (Lyon, 2019; 3). Thinking rhythmically has offered a way for social researchers to make sense of the world and to go beyond simplistic temporal accounts (Lyon, 2019).

It is the insights into 'multiple temporalities' (Merrifield, 2006; 48) which make Rhythmanalysis so appealing for this project and, aptly for a study of women's lives, also speak to feminist concerns with time. Feminist researchers have approached time in particular ways. They have often been concerned with women's biographies (Weiner, 1994; Thompson, 2000; David, 2016; Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe, 2018). They have asked how time is experienced by women (Hughes, 2002; 137), observed that understandings of time are bound up with women's self-understanding (Hughes, 2002, 142), and sometimes identified a 'complicated relationship' with time (Segal, 2017; 174). Feminist research has traditionally challenged the dominance of linear clock time (Hughes, 2002; 142), arguing that that cyclical time is sometimes 'more reflective' of women's lives than linear time (Hughes, 2002; 136). More recently, these concerns have been taken up as concerns with the way normative accounts of linear time might be another way to under-represent or marginalise women. Michelle Bastian contrasts common sense notions of time as successive and 'all

encompassing' with the 'multiple and contradictory' (2013; 216) temporalities which might better represent some women's experiences. The 'cultural particularity' of time (2013; 218) and complexities of social life which Bastian identifies as missing from temporally normative accounts, chime with previous concerns of feminist researchers that everyday life should be approached not as an object of study but as located in particular experiences (Smith 1987; 88).

In recent times, education researchers have come to explore the value of Lefebvre's, and others', work around rhythms in appraising such 'particular experiences' (Smith, 1987; 88) and in investigating the spatio-temporal elements of education. Most notable for my purposes is the educational historian Sue Middleton's writing on Lefebvre and education (2014, 2016). She notes that, at the time of writing her book, rhythmanalysis had not 'attracted much attention in the field of education' (2014; 111). Although *Rhythmanalysis* was not written specifically with educational institutions and spaces in mind, Middleton argues that it 'offers a methodological focus for the critique of everyday life in educational settings' (2014; 13). Middleton shows how Lefebvre's ideas are applicable to analyses of educational phenomena. She writes, 'In twenty-first century classrooms the polyrhythmic beats of childhood are increasingly drowned out by a "rage for measurement and calculation"' (Middleton 2014; 24, quoting Lefebvre 2003;122). In this context, she sees the value of Lefebvrian principles. Asking 'what practical consequences might rhythmanalysis have for spatial histories of educational theory?' (2014; 111), Middleton considers life history interviews with doctoral students through the lens of rhythm.

Likewise, within this project, Lefebvre's theories, combined with the work of feminist theorists, philosophers and historians including Sue Middleton, bell hooks, and Martha Nussbaum, enable an examination of rhythms of women's educational desire (Mirza and Reay, 2000) and the broader educational significance[1] of the library. The dimensions of

[1] I refer within the thesis both to 'education' and to 'learning'. Education is seen by the philosopher Gert Biesta as having three components; qualification (transmission of knowledge or skills), socialisation (the representation of cultures and traditions), and subjectification (the impact on the individual) (Biesta, 2020; 92). Following Biesta, I understand 'education' within the library to involve the transmission of knowledge. Although learning might also involve a social element as women engage in practices of mutual learning within the library, I see education, unlike learning, to be necessarily relational; somebody acts as educator and somebody is educated (see also, Biesta, 2013). The more social aspects of being educated come to the fore in varying degrees in particular contexts within the accounts and the analysis. With regards to discussions around the 'educational significance' of the library, this phrase is employed quite broadly within the thesis to encompass practices related to both education and to learning.

rhythmanalysis are complex but there are a number of concepts which are important to an understanding of Lefebvre's project. I introduce these now.

2.2.3 The Elements: Linear and Cyclic time; Eurhythmia, Arrythmia and Polyrhythmia; Moments and the Everyday

Lefebvre's theories rest on a number of dyads, triads and key concepts. The distinction between linear and cyclic time and between eurhythmia, arrhythmia and polyrhythmia, are particularly relevant here, as are the idea of the everyday and the moment. I consider these and other concepts through the course of the chapters which follow. The outline of these elements presented here is designed to provide a context for the discussion within the thesis.

Linear and Cyclic Time

Lefebvre's thinking around rhythm is rooted in his concern with the rhythm of capital and an important distinction underpins all of Lefebvre's work around rhythm, capital, and the everyday. That is the distinction between (and ultimately, the interaction between) *linear time* and *cyclic time*. Linear time is the rhythm of capital, of production and destruction, of machines and mechanisms. It is quantified, fragmented, acquired, rational, abstract and imposed by technology; the time of 'brutal repetition' (2004; 74). Linear time is social, in that it is human-made. It comes closer to repetition than cyclical time. It is both continuous and discontinuous; continuous since its 'beginning is absolute', discontinuous since 'it fragments into partial time scales' (Lefebvre, 2008; 48). It is the time of 'fragmented labour' since it might 'begin and cease at any time' (ibid). It is modelled on 'abstract, quantitative time, the time of watches and clocks' (2004; 73).

Cyclic time, by contrast, is natural, irrational, vital, and 'cosmic' (2008; 196). It is the time of human rhythms, rather than human-made rhythms – the biological, psychological rhythms of our own organism (2004; 73). Cyclic time has no beginning or end since every cycle is born from another cycle. Lefebvre writes that cyclic time has for a long time held sway over human life. (2008; 470). It is subordinated to linear time but has not yet disappeared; 'social man has not yet controlled nature' (2008; 49), Lefebvre writes.

It is this relationship between linear and cyclic time – the collision of the social (human-made) and the biological (natural) – which is central to Lefebvre's three volume *Critique of Everyday Life* (2008, originally published 1947, 1961, and 1981). He summarises the concerns of this work as follows: '*Critique of everyday life studies the persistence of rhythmic time scales within the linear time of modern industrial society*' (2008; 49 italics author's own). And, later in the same volume, he writes 'we will be proposing a rhythmology or a sociological "rhythmanalysis"' (2008; 232).

Eurhythmia, Arrythmia and Polyrhythmia

Examining the distinction between cyclic and linear time reveals how rhythmanalysis affords an understanding of the ways in which modern capitalist organisation, and indeed everyday life, can be analysed and critiqued. Capitalist production fragments and shatters the cyclical. Thus, and importantly for a study concerning libraries in a contemporary context, change which has a capitalist logic has particular rhythmic consequences. Elden, for example, notes that the working practices of modern labour disrupt and break natural rhythms precisely because 'they begin and end at any time' (2004a; 196). These times, the cyclical or the linear, condition our perception of the world. We, every one of us, perform rhythmanalysis, and yet, as Lefebvre notes, 'We are only conscious of most of our rhythms when we begin to suffer from some irregularity' (2004; 77). Here, in place of *eurrhythmia* we experience *arrhythmia*, a discordance and lack of harmony (Lefebvre, 2004; 68).

For Lefebvre, all rhythm is characterized by 'strong times and weak times, recurring in a recognisable way, stops, silences, blanks, resumptions and intervals in accordance with regularity, must appear in a movement' (2004; 78). The stress on the opposing states within this definition – of 'strong and weak times' and on 'blanks and resumptions' – allows for an analysis which takes account of many elements. So, 'in music, in poetry too, the silences have a meaning' (Lefebvre, 2004; 96). Such a situation, where both sound and silence are judged to be important, recalls the artist Piet Mondrian's efforts to ensure that the white spaces in his work are painted in with white paint rather than 'empty' space left over on the canvas once other colours have been applied. The white or the 'blank' has its own meaning. The contrasts and contradictions become important.

Contradictions are important to Lefebvre, as they were to Gaston Bachelard. 'Everything comes alive,' Bachelard wrote, 'when contradictions accumulate' (2014; 60). And contradictions, contrasts and comparisons are important, too, to the project of rhythmanalysis. After all, as Lefebvre writes, 'a rhythm is only slow or fast in relation to other rhythms with which it finds itself associated' (2004; 89). And Lefebvre's concern with the

relationship between natural rhythms, those of the body, for example, and those of mechanism and machines (2004; 195), predicates a contrast between the logical and the visceral which is, in turn, captured in the distinction between the linear and the cyclical. Given the embodied nature of the education, rhythmanalysis provides a useful tool. Elden stresses that, in Lefebvre's writing on rhythm, at no point has the analysis 'lost sight of the body' (Elden 2004a; 198).

Further, 'Polyrhythmia always results from a contradiction, but also from resistance to this contradiction' (2004; 99). So, put another way, contradictions are what give rise to polyrhythmia; the multitude of rhythms which make up the everyday. Thus, contradictions are inherent to the dynamic of everyday life. For Sue Middleton, 'Lefebvre's dialectic juggles, does not seek to resolve, contradictions' (2014; 115). They are 'productive of critique and creativity' (ibid).

Moments and the Everyday

Lefebvre was concerned with the everyday and with everyday life. For Elden, Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis* captures the double sense of the *everyday* - 'a dual meaning found in English and French – le quotidian – meaning the mundane, the everyday, but also the repetitive - what happens every day' (Elden 2004b; iv). Repetition is of course important to rhythmanalysis but, as discussed above, there is no 'absolute repetition' (Lefebvre, 2004; 7) in cyclic time. Rather, there is always something new and unforeseen that introduces itself into the repetitive (2004; 6). This situation is attractive for two reasons. First, it is theoretically intuitive. If we consider that, as humans, things that we repeat actually differ, if only slightly, with each repetition – making a certain sound or movement, for example. Second, and important for my purposes, it also allows for an understanding of the patterns of use of libraries and women's sense of the value of the library as being the same or being different across time. In short, paying attention to rhythm enables an analysis of *continuity* and *change*, through accounts of 'historically anchored lived experience' (Pahl, 2014; 6).

This continuity and change might take place on different scales. Since a rhythmanalyst's zones of inquiry will 'range in scale' (Middleton, 2014; 118), rhythmanalysis facilitates enquiry which deals with multiple time scales; for rhythms of embodied activity performed over a short timeframe, a day, a week or longer periods of time. It enables an analysis of the everyday as the site of the ordinary but also of the 'exceptional and singular' (Highmore, 2002a; 4). It allows for an analysis of important *moments* (Lefebvre, 2004; 36) in women's lives.

One thing which the narrators in the project share is their womanhood. Part of the appeal of rhythmanalysis for making sense of the women's stories is its utility in examining those occupying marginal positions and revealing the nature of marginal educational practices.

2.2.4 Margins

Social research has come to use the metaphor of 'the margins' to refer to sidelined/overlooked/ignored/less powerful people, practices or places. A recent Connected Communities research project, for example, was titled 'Productive Margins: Regulating *for* Engagement'. Here, the margins describe 'people and communities excluded from participation in the regulatory regimes that impact upon their daily lives' (2016). In drawing on Lefebvre's work to understand women's narratives of library use, 'margins' emerges as a productive metaphor. If Lefebvre is a theorist of everyday life, then his methods are well suited for looking to the margins, since the everyday is itself an 'overlooked and marginalised' category (Moran, 2005; 102).

Within this thesis, the concept of 'the margin' or of 'margins', functions both in a literal sense and in a metaphorical sense. But despite this abstraction, 'margins', as a concept, ties together a range of concrete aspects of lived experience. Most prominently for my purposes is the experience of being a woman. Women's marginality has important educational consequences; rendering women invisible (Bryan et al., 2018) and 'alienating them from what counts as knowledge' (Middleton, 2014; 129). Other factors might contribute to experiences of marginalisation. These factors might have to do with social class, religious or minority ethnic group, age, family relations, health, habitation, language, education, and so on. And, of course, such factors intersect. In *Women, Class and Education*, Jane Thompson speaks of 'intensifying marginalisation' (2000), suggesting that women experience marginalisation and other factors act to intensify this position.

Classed and gendered experiences of everyday life are united in Lefebvre's discussion in his *Critique of Everyday Life*. Lefebvre refers to the everyday experience of 'the people' as the 'lower depths' (2008; 53). He writes, 'In the margins of the "lower depths" we find certain jobs which are generally reserved for women'. Lefebvre uses the language of 'margins' in his discussion, and, here too, the margins are a gendered, classed, symbolic space.

But 'the margin' takes on significance outside of its use to describe certain social, political and economic categories/circumstances. Significantly for research concerned with rhythms and educational spaces, the margins can take on an important temporal and spatial significance.

The temporal significance of the margin might have to do with particular occasions, certain times of day and the interstices. These could be times which stand outside of more ordinary time – such as the Lefebvrian 'moment'. On a different scale, and in women's lives in particular, margins have to do with transition and change. Margins are imaginary boundaries between women's life stages. Relevant here, for example, are Juliet Mitchell's categories in her *Woman's Estate* (2015), but also Lynne Segal's concerns regarding normative discourses around women's lifecycles (2017; 177).

Margins take on spatial significance when considering certain spaces and places, or the spatial practices involved in 'boundary making' (Rogaly and Taylor, 2009; 65). In cities, there exist 'edgelands' (Farley and Symmons Roberts, 2012) and 'hinterlands' (Lefebvre, 2004; 91) and suburbs. These are sometimes overlooked and forgotten areas. Conceptualising of locations in terms of centres, margins and peripheries, Doreen Massey argues, enables an examination of the 'politics of location' (Massey, 1994; 250).

Within educational spaces, the margins of physical space become important. Architects have often used the margins of a space or, indeed, planned for margins which might serve as spaces of withdrawal (Burke, 2017). Corners, for example, might be associated with quiet (Bachelard, 2014; 156, Spencer-Bennett and Grosvenor, forthcoming) and have, historically, been designed into schools, allowing spaces for children to sit and read or think (Burke, 2017).

In a literal sense, and with particular relevance to libraries, the margins of the book, as a small but important educational space, have been examined by sociologists and literary theorists, who identify continuity with the 'spoor of previous readers' (Manguel, 2006; 17) through marginal notes. Within library books, 'The margins of a page,' Leah Price writes, 'could form a repository for the traces of earlier readers' (2013; 177), where the Sociologist Les Back terms the marginalia which 'refutes' or 'applauds' the writing next to which it is found, 'intelligent graffiti' (2016, 21). In this way, the margins of a book function as a site for small margins in everyday life to take on an extra-everyday significance as sites of celebration or contest.

Lefebvre's work frames an investigation of temporal and spatial rhythms and spatial margins on a variety of scales, but it also frames the educational research for which margins are a sociological metaphor. Here, the margin might represent the overlooked, as discussed above, but it is also a place of learning (in two senses). In Julie McLeod and Andrea C. Allard's work *Learning from the Margins*, accounts are offered from young women who live on the educational, economic and spatial fringes (2007; 1). Consequently, the margin for

some is more akin to 'the leftfield'. Significantly for my purposes, Debra Hayes (2012) looks to the margins for ideas about socially just schooling. And, in the Productive Margins research referred to above, the researchers hold that the excluded communities with which they work 'have expertise, experience and creativity that can be politically productive' (Productive Margins, 2016; np). Here, the margins are to be looked to for insights which might not be gained elsewhere.

Libraries might be places to look to for particular insights or ideas about socially just activity. bell hooks re-frames women's marginal position, calling for a reclaiming of the margins from traditional use as a marker of exclusion and instead seeing it as a 'central location for the production of counter hegemonic discourse' (1984; 149). Margins become subaltern space (McDowell, 1999; 151); spaces for resistance and sites of challenge to dominant discourses. They are politically counter hegemonic or 'subcultural' (Segal, 2017). And in rhythmanalytical terms, arrhythmia, as a marginal state, could offer certain potentials – 'literally being out of step with the dominant regime, may offer a spacetime of resistance' (Davies 2018 in Lyon, 2019; 103). Margins, for some, become important sites for women 'intent on changing the possibilities of and circumstances of their lives (Thomson, 2000; 8).

2.2.5 Why Rhythmanalysis?

Why should I use the ideas of Henri Lefebvre ahead of another theorist in my analysis? Indeed, drawing on other theorists might also have enabled an analysis of rhythm. Despite not using the language of rhythm, Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1979), for example, is 'precisely concerned with social and bodily rhythms' (Lyon, 2014; 7). For my own purposes, I find rhythmanalysis' concern with how rhythms 'shape *human experience*' and 'pervade everyday life' (Edensor, 2010a; 1) to be appealing given the questions which this project seeks to answer. This human quality, with a focus on the lived, on actors and realities, is evident in Lefebvre's work in everything from his rejection of simple geometric understandings of space to his emphasis on music as 'giving us an alternative to purely mathematical models of calculations and measure' (Elden, 2004b; xi).

A Marxist humanist perspective, concerned with the nature of being human and the necessary conditions for human flourishing, aids an investigation of lived experience. And, in line with contemporary critical realist positions (see for example, Archer, 2007) a Lefebvrian perspective offers realist views of time and space, acknowledging that people have attachments and concerns about things in the world. As I go on to argue below, educational narratives capture these attachments. And in capturing the interactions between places,

times and expended energy (Lefebvre 2004) they reveal rhythms. There exists, thus, a unity between the theory and the object of analysis.

Lefebvre's writing on rhythm, and his work more generally, is well-suited to a consideration of the purposes of education and to the role of the library. The public *and* private nature of women's engagements with libraries and their reflections on individual and group activity and on the mundane as well as the extraordinary are reflected in Lefebvre's theory around the entangled rhythms of the self and the other, of the everyday and the extra everyday (Lefebvre, 2004; 95).

Rhythmanalysis lends itself to an exploration of women's lives. Despite criticisms of Henri Lefebvre that his work does not pay enough attention to gender relations (and despite frustrations with Lefebvre's sexist writing style), women's lives were a crucial area for the application of rhythmanalysis (Middleton 2016). I, like Sue Middleton, find rhythmanalysis to work alongside feminist analyses and accounts of educational practices and spaces. Rhythmanalysis, more generally, offers a useful tool for examining the experiences of some marginal groups. And, more than this, and as I will go on to show, attending to rhythm illuminates the consequences of public policy decisions for those on the margins in striking ways.

Rhythmanalysis is also compatible with the understanding of human emotion which this research adopts. Wetherell (2012) sees emotions as 'resting on bodily responses that provoke and turn into feelings' (2012; 24). Emotions and feelings are significant for two reasons. First, this project's concern with women's understandings of the library means that it is interested in women's feelings about and towards libraries - their 'inner worlds' (Norcup, 2017; 73). This is a concern with feeling and emotions, not as a subjective illusion or 'a projection onto the real world' (Nussbaum, 2012; 79), but instead, as contributing to the political and gendered nature of a narrative, and holding an important place in accounts of pleasure and value.

Second, libraries and the communities that use them might also be sites in which certain feelings find their articulation. Susan Broomhall's (2015) concept of 'spaces for feeling' is useful here and unites these two concerns. Broomhall defines 'spaces for feeling' as, 'communities formed by a shared identity or goal ... practiced through a specific set of emotional expressions (acts or performances) and exercised in a particular space or site' (2015; 1). Emotions, for Broomhall, are communal behaviours part of a repertoire of human interactions (2015; 1). The physical context is important for my understandings of libraries as 'spaces for feeling'. Broomhall's reference to a 'particular space or site', is significant beyond

the idea that emotional acts necessitate a space of some kind or that emotional meaning is attached to physical spaces, although that is true. It highlights the way in which emotional structures and acts are actually shaped by 'sites that sustained' them (Broomhall, 2015; 5).

Finally, paying attention to rhythms and cycles are sensitizing practices for a consideration of relations of cyclical and linear time, to the 'times and rhythms which are inscribed and prescribed in successful places favorable to happiness' (Lefebvre, 2004; 68). Through analysing rhythms which bring harmony and eurhythmia and those which bring dissonance and arrhythmia, Lefebvre's work allows for an analysis of the conditions for favourable and unfavourable living and for an understanding of the contexts for human flourishing.

2.3 Narrative

The project brings narrative, a well-established technique within educational research, together with Lefebvrian rhythmanalysis. I have considered rhythmanalytical theory above and now turn to narrative theory. This section is organised into four subsections. After introducing narrative research in the first section, the second section addresses the affordances of a narrative approach to this particular research. In the third section I consider the use of visual research methods and object elicitation in narrative inquiry. Finally, I turn to a discussion of narrative analysis.

2.3.1 Narrative Inquiry

> When one looks to the social practices by which social life is accomplished, one finds – with surprising frequency – people telling stories to each other, as a means of giving cognitive and emotional coherence to experience, constructing and negotiating social identity (Bauman, 1986;113).

The idea that people narrativise their experience of the world and their own role in it (Bruner, 1990;115) has become an important one, and the so-called 'narrative turn' has changed the way that the interview is viewed within social science research (Bruner, 1990). Narrative research takes many forms. It can be understood as part of a set of related approaches (Squire 2008) which include life history interviews, oral histories and narrative identity approaches, but it tends to involve an 'oral narrative of personal experience' (Labov, 2013; 223) delivered in a research context, following a prompt or 'story eliciting question' (Squire, 2008). Narrators are often invited to talk at length and to 'take the lead' (Plummer, 1983; 70).

Narrative is privileged for being the 'primary way in which humans organize their experiences into temporally meaningful episodes' (Richardson, 1990;118, in Asa Berger 1997;10). Indeed, for Bruner, 'we have no other way of describing 'lived time' save in the form of a narrative' (1990; 12). But there are debates about narrative typologies. Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou (2013), for example, distinguish between narrative inquiry which is event-centred and that which is experience-centred. Some of the tools of analysis for event-centred narratives such as Labov and Waletsky's (1967) sociolinguistic framework are useful in analysis. But the present research tends towards the experience-centred, finding value in interpretive perspectives where narratives are viewed as 'individualised accounts of experience' (Andrews et al., 2013; 5). This research thus operates with the idea of an agentic subject whose narratives represent expressions of internal, cognitive or affective states. It recognises that narratives are developed in interaction to some extent and at the very least affected by their audience and that representation will vary over time but maintains that something personal is created in a narrative. They are not merely linguistic 'events'.

Narrative inquiry is well suited to a project about *women's* lives. Narratives have been valuable for those concerned with women's experiences. Through women's reflections on World War II, for example, Stewart and Malley (2004) were able to explore women's education and wartime experience. Linda McDowell (2013) found the autobiographical memory of migrant women to be constructed in social interactions. And narratives have also been valuable in supporting sense making and building rapport in research with women (Langley, 2012).

Etymologically, narrative is linked to *knowledge* rather than telling (Andrews et al., 2013; 13). We might see narrative inquiry, therefore, as a mapping of knowledges. This is particularly significant in a context in which women's 'ways of knowing' (Belenky et al., 1986) have been a particular concern for feminist researchers. In the 1980s, when Mary Field Belenky and her colleagues were conducting their research with women, Harding was suggesting that it is through political struggles that women come to understand themselves and the social world (1987; 8). Women may simultaneously be reporting on their understandings and finding understanding through their narratives. Narrative inquiry is well placed for an investigation of women's subjectivities. And, interested as I am in women's educational practices and how they come to know themselves through libraries and through their meaning making around their experiences, narrative research's concern with knowledges is significant.

I follow Gergen (2004; 270) and others in being less concerned with whether narratives are 'true' or 'false', instead viewing them as renditions of events which make sense of life in a context. And I see narrating subjects as 'actively engaged in meaning making' (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015), as they form events into 'intelligible experience' (Inglis 1993; 153). The concept of narrative adopted in this research will be broad, encompassing sequences which occur outside of chronologically ordered time. Following Andrews et al. (2013), I see this not as trivializing the notion of a narrative, but instead as allowing for an understanding of narratives as 'sequences with a specific order which takes it beyond description, and a particularity which distinguishes it from theory' (2013; 13). I see these 'ordered particularities' of narratives as valuable in investigating women's understandings of the significance of the library.

2.3.2 Affordances of a Narrative Approach

There is something particularly apt about collecting *stories* about libraries, of course, but narrative research also serves the particular aims of the study. First, narratives capture rhythm. Second, since 'it is energy that animates the human' (Middleton, 2014; 114), narratives capture those aspects of life which animate; it captures that which people care about. Narrative inquiry enables an investigation of *value* and of the role or function of something, through the inherent *evaluation* in narrative forms (Labov, 2013). It enables an investigation of women's learning in the broadest sense, incorporating self-understanding. And, finally, it affords a consideration of the way in which women make meaning in the context of social and cultural change. In this section, I consider each of these aspects in turn.

Capturing rhythm

Rhythmanalysis 'requires equally attentive eyes and ears, a head and a memory and a heart.' (Lefebvre, 2004; 36). In narrative inquiry the eyes, ears, head, heart and memory belong to the researcher. But they also belong to the narrator. Narratives captures memories of experience. When narrators recall their experiences there exists, thus, the memory and then the recall of the memory in the act of narration. Of course, a rhythm must have been perceived to have been recalled. Narrative research, then, captures those events which have been recast as experiences; precisely those rhythms which have been, in Lefebvrian terms 'grasped' (2004; 36).

Lefebvre himself saw the value of the qualitative interview in capturing rhythms, writing that 'putting an interview or background noises on disc or cassette enables us to reflect on rhythms, which no longer vanish when they appear' (2004; 69).

Importantly, when narrators report on rhythms, they report on why those rhythms matter. And, inherent to narratives of all kinds, is some element of *evaluation*, making a narrative a useful tool for understanding ideas about *value* (Daiute and Lightfoot, 2004). An important part of the value of objects is that which is 'attributed to them by the beholder' (Arts Council England, 2014a; 9). Evaluation is present in comment, description and reflection but also in our choice to speak on a particular topic or narrate a particular event in the first instance. When we deliver narratives we describe events which serve as 'reportable' (Labov, 2013; 42). We tell stories about things that we care about.

Aptly, Fred Inglis (1993) refers to a person's experiences as a 'library' of stories, arguing that the richer and more various this library of stories is the better one can understand their lives and the lives of others. Viewed in this way, when narrators are invited to deliver a narrative, we might see them as 'sorting through' their stories. Evaluation is taking place as narrators consider the value of their stories in various ways, in the context in which they find themselves. Interestingly, such a scenario parallels the very aims of the discipline of cultural studies as laid out by Inglis (1993). 'Cultural studies', he explains 'discovers the value in the material' under consideration and forms a 'story of the stories' (1993; xi). This might just as aptly describe the act of the narrator recounting their experiences.

So narrative research focuses not only on the experiences of research participants but also on the meaning that they attribute to their experiences (Trahar, 2006). Narrators not only place value on the events which they describe but also value these valuations. Middleton and May (1999), for example, state that their central concern in research around women's education is not the events themselves but the interpretations women made of them and the importance women attached to them. Thus 'value' enters into the research process in many ways (Daiute and Lightfoot, 2004), having to do with the events which are narrated, the interpretations made of these events, and the importance attached to these interpretations. As Rinaldi suggests:

> [Our theories are] something more than simply an idea or group of ideas. They must please us and convince us, be useful, and satisfy our intellectual, affective, and aesthetic needs (the aesthetics of knowledge). In representing the world, our theories represent us. (Rinaldi, 2006; 64)

Our commitment as human actors is therefore tied to narratives at various removes and our understanding of evaluation and notions of value should pay attention to this fact. In investigating the role of libraries, narratives of past experience prove useful and evaluation and conceptions of value emerge in various ways.

Self-understanding and learning about the self

In Ali Smith's collection of short stories titled *Public Library*, Emily Wainwright and Lori Beck (2015) assert that in the library 'it is possible to encounter the newest version of the self' and that public libraries allow us to explore the self and the desired self (2015; 125). If selves are understood to be the narrative embodiment of lives told (Chandler, et al, 2004; 251), then my concern with women's understanding of self is met well by a narrative approach. Narratives are important in human self-understanding and represent our best way of giving voice to it (Chandler, et al, 2004). They capture the routines, habits and rhythms which define our understandings of self across time – our past and present and our ideas about a future self or imagined self. Macintyre describes it as 'natural to think of the self in a narrative mode' (2007; 239) and narrative plays an important role in forging personal and social identities (Bauman, 1986).

Identities are constructed relative to 'normative discourses' (Bamberg, 2004; 153). Ward suggests that narrators reflect 'on their lives and experiences, assessing themselves and their beliefs in relation to the rest of the world' (2012;187). A narrative approach is therefore valuable for considering women's ideas about the relationship between engagements with libraries, and practices of, sometimes, relational identification (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). And despite the stress I place here on relational identification in the narratives, various 'structures of feeling' (Williams, 1977) can also emerge through narrative reflections. Bruner recognizes a sense of belonging to a canonical past which 'permits us to form our own narratives of deviation while maintaining complicity with the canon' (1990), reminiscent of what the historian Carolyn Steedman describes as the 'odd typicality' of her childhood (1986; 121).

Since narrative has temporality as its referent, it is valuable in a consideration of women's *lives*. If self-understanding has a 'temporal depth' (Taylor, 1989, 50) then the stability of a narrative depends on how important it is to one's sense of self (Gergen, 2004) and constants help in making sense of lives (Gergen, 2004; 270). Of course, many methods of conducting research, particularly qualitative methods, involve the possibility of exploring self-understanding, but with narrative research this aspect is particularly salient. We achieve 'personal identities and self-concept through the use of narrative configuration'

(Polkinghorne, 1998; 150). Thus, narratives offer not only the possibility for investigating the self but also act as spaces 'in which to forge a concept of self' (Archer, 2000). In narrativising, women are engaged in self-understanding and meaning making.

In the novelist Ali Smith's collected stories, titled 'Public Library', two writers, Emily Wainwright and Lori Beck, state that 'public libraries allow us to explore the self and the desired self'. They write 'the only way I can express how important public libraries are is to tell you about myself' (in Smith, 2015; 125). Here, and elsewhere (for example, The Reading Agency, 2012), stories about the library and the self are bound together and speaking about one is a way of speaking about both. Since buildings (Markus, 1993), objects (Riggins, 1994) and reading practices (Sicherman, 2010) are all implicated in learning and in practices of identification and self-understanding, the methods of the research and the object of study find symmetry with one another. Put another way, both libraries and narratives are sites for exploring the self. Narrative methods are credited with giving participants space to negotiate identities and make meaning of their experience. Women come to know themselves through their engagement with libraries, but also through their narrative reflections on these engagements, and my research is concerned with, and captures, both. This meaning making around the self occurs in certain contexts; 'individual lives are constructed in the context of particular social structures and material conditions' (Bathmaker, 2010; 3). I address the matter of social structures and contexts now.

Context, change and wider structures

Narrative discourse is individual and personal but, of course, echoes political, economic and other material relationships in the environment. Narrative research's concern with context has to do with both the immediate context of the research 'interview' (Stanley and Billig, 2004) and also the way in which people make meaning in the context of social and cultural changes, recognising that lives are influenced by socio-cultural structures (Smith and Sparkes, 2008, Ward, 2012). Consequently, narrative approaches are particularly suited to research which is concerned with linear and cyclic time – with the rhythms of women's education and everyday lives and with educational institutions.

How, then, are the personal and political linked in narrative inquiry? In the literature around narrative research, the narrator's story is often framed as a starting point which the *researcher* then grounds in wider social and historical contexts, paying attention to relations of power (see, for example, Bathmaker, 2010). Similarly, Daiute and Lightfoot assert that 'narrative analysis generates unique insights into a range of multiple, intersecting forces that order and illuminate relations between self and society' (2004;

xii). The reference to analysis also seems to stress the role of the researcher. My previous research experiences, however, reveal narrators themselves doing work of this kind, as they narrate their experiences. In reflecting on the importance of the library in helping with her homework, one narrator explained that;

> 'The internet was something you could only afford if you had a lot of money then, in the 90s. So I would go to the library. And I remember one project I did - the history of the school and this particular library had the archives for the school, so it had all of the old pictures of the classes'.

Such references demonstrate research participants paying attention to wider social and technological structures.

Similarly, narrators' links with wider contexts might take the form of implicit or explicit references to wider debates concerning the value of libraries. The linguist Michael Toolan (1988) distinguishes between 'narratives' and 'Narratives' where the latter, for my purposes, would constitute the wider discourses surrounding libraries which women may explicitly or implicitly draw on. As I outlined in the introduction to the thesis, this research is, in part, prompted by the feeling that some of the discourses surrounding the role of libraries are impoverished or problematic. Women's narratives might also be implicated then, in broader stories about libraries and education, and so forth. To adopt Raymond Williams's term, 'structures of feeling' might emerge in the meaning making around libraries; the 'meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt' (1977; 132). Women's understandings of libraries exist in a relationship with discussions around the place of library; their understandings may represent adoptions or rejections of these discourses.

Narrative analysis allows, then, for a consideration of the links between the sometimes small, events of an individual's everyday lives with wider debates and circumstances. In line with the aims of sociological inquiry more broadly, Bathmaker (2010) asserts that 'narratives help researchers to think about personal troubles as public issues'. Like rhythmanalysis itself, which appears so general and so vast but also allows for fine analysis (Lefebvre, 2004; 100), oral accounts allow for connections between 'the general and the particular' (Rogaly and Taylor, 2009; 29), where space is given to the importance of social structures as well as the individuality of life stories.

Viewed in this way, narratives allow for an analysis of social change, as described above, but also contribute to social change. Lefebvre held a similar concern with change, writing in the very opening line of Rhythmanalysis, 'It [the book] proposes nothing less than to found a

science, a new field of knowledge [savoir]: the analysis of rhythms; *with practical consequences*' (2004; 3 emphasis added). In the context of research into women's lives this holds a particular resonance; feminist researchers have long been concerned with affecting change.

2.3.3 Eliciting a narrative: visual research methods, photographic and object elicitation

There is an increasing variety in the types of materials gathered and analysed in narrative research (Andrews, et al. 2013; 9). Ethnographers have always used 'whatever data is available to throw light on the issues which are the focus of the research' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; 1). I invited participants to share images, sketches, fiction writing, books, library cards, photographs, and online material. In this section, I consider the affordances of such methods.

The research methods literature, quite broadly, describes a growing interest in visual methods (Robson, 2011, Prosser and Loxley, 2008, Bryman 2012) and in rhythmanalytical terms, the potential of images in 'showing and suggesting rhythm' is coming to be recognised (Lyon, 2019; 53). O'Donoghue stresses that inquiry can take place *in, with and through* the visual (2007; 70). Previously there existed a cultural emphasis which 'placed primacy on written or verbal information in a research context' (Pole and Morrison, 2003; 65) and social scientists have traditionally privileged 'word and number-based approaches' (Prosser and Loxley, 2008). Now, visual research is being celebrated as an 'interpretive craft' (Spencer, 2011; 132) with the potential to 'defamiliarise the familiar', (O'Donoghue, 2007; 70) as well as allowing for socio-semiotic and critical readings (Spencer, 2011). Like narratives, photographs may be seen in ways which are 'simultaneously personal, political, economic, dramatic, everyday and historic' (Berger, 2013; 60).

Photographs and other objects are used in the narrative 'interviews' in eliciting narratives and providing a point of focus in helping to make the meanings together (Katzew and Azzarito, 2013). Conceptions of the relationship between a photograph and the process of memory thus become significant. Berger (2013; 50) argues that much of what photographs do was previously done with reflection, so that memory is a precursor to the photograph. In the case of research photography this process of memory is complex, comprising both the memory of the narrator who might use the photograph as an aid in their reflection, but also the memory of the researcher and the memory of others who view the written products of the research.

Participants were also invited to draw libraries and sketch maps (Prosser and Loxley, 2008). Drawings, capturing spatial rhythms and 'being closely connected with processes of grasping reality' (Priem, 2016), offer another view on women's understandings of libraries.

Interested as I am in women's own collections, visual methods are apt in affording a consideration of the relationships between objects and the implications of objects in practices of identification; the 'storied accounts of material culture' (Hurdley, 2006). For Hurdley, artefacts are transformed by the stories we tell about them, and since 'collecting is a form of practical memory' (Grosvenor; 2002; 107), objects are likely to be useful in stimulating a narrative. It is again useful to consider Riggins' assertion that it is difficult to construct one's own self and to present that self to others in the absence of objects which symbolize achieved and desired statuses (Riggins, 1994; 2). This cannot be viewed simply as identity work. Ethnographic studies have demonstrated that motives for acquiring, possessing and valuing artefacts are varied (Smith, 2000).

Hayes (1996) discusses the importance of diaries and letters in investigating women's reading in the past. In investigating women's understandings of the value of libraries, such objects, or similar documents, have a contemporary relevance too. Sue Middleton (1993) refers to such objects as 'personal texts' and includes photographs, school reports, exercise books, and other official records which make public our personal biographies. For Ken Plummer these biographical objects are 'accessories to a life story' (2001; 48).

Visual and narrative methods might not only work well together, but might not be so distinct. When we consider that narrative data collection seeks to access memories and dreams and desires and so on, phenomena with important visual aspects, then a distinct dichotomy between that which is visual within the research and that which is not, becomes problematic. Jennifer Mason (2002) offers a useful characterization of such phenomena as those listed above, as 'visual but not viable'. The viability to which she refers seems to relate to the researcher but, in important ways, might also relate to the subject, of course. The women who tell me about their lives might identify particular memories or thoughts as important, for the first time, through the act of narration. They might grasp certain rhythms. Thus, claims that visual methods yield responses which 'might otherwise be closed off' (O'Donoghue, 2007; 70), becomes equally true of narratives.

Temporally, I do not see narrative analysis as a discrete stage which follows the collection of the narratives. Like Brinkmann and Kvale, I see interviewing and analysis very much as 'intertwined phases of knowledge construction' (2015; 58). Further, a speaker's intent is always open to reinterpretation, even for the same researcher; Riessman (2013), warns the

researcher against seeing analysis as a one-off event which can lead to a ‘result’. And such analysis would be at odds with the attentiveness (Lefebvre 2004) required in attending to narrative, image, and rhythm.

2.3.5 Summary

The theoretical position outlined above is one which brings a rhythmanalytical, narrative lens to women accounts of their engagements with libraries. In thinking about the narratives, I bring together the thinking of Henri Lefebvre with feminist theorists, philosophers and historians. The project adopts the perspectives of a diverse range of fields including education, literary theory, geography, sociology, philosophy, history, linguistics and cultural studies. Having shown a ‘refusal to accept a straightforward disciplinary designation’ (Elden, 2004a; 4), Lefebvre viewed the project of Rhythmanalysis as ‘transdisciplinary’ in character (2004; 87). The interdisciplinary nature of the approach is well suited to an understanding of women’s education and everyday lives but is also, fittingly, itself an orientation which is Lefebvrian in nature.

Rhythmanalysis offers a useful tool for the analysis of narratives, while narrative offers a useful means of capturing rhythm. Rhythmanalysis and narrative are predicated on a concern with time, place, energy and everyday life. Both rhythmanalysis and narrative shed light on aspects of marginality and within this project, margins take on a temporal, spatial and social significance. The architect Jane Jacobs writes about conducting research by actually visiting the places in which one is interested, as ‘the adventures of probing the real world’ (2016; 13).

As I set out in probing the real world, I am on ‘the margins’ of the world which I wish to study. In the final section of this chapter, I outline the method by which I conducted the research, introducing the place, the participants and the procedure as well as offering reflections on my position as a researcher and some ethical considerations.

2.4 The study

2.4.1 Introduction

The research methodology described here can be seen as a response to and a consequence of the theoretical position outlined above. A narrative and rhythmanalytical

approach allows for an investigation of individual women's subjectivities. I begin by introducing Hall Green, a district in south Birmingham, through whose four community libraries I met the 25 women who make up the participants of this study. I then outline the procedure which I followed from first conceiving of the study to now writing this thesis, before addressing the ethical issues raised by the research.

2.4.2 Birmingham, and Hall Green

The narratives in this project provide accounts of engagements with libraries over the course of women's lives. They offer reflections, therefore, on many different libraries around the world. But the women are united in using and having used libraries in Birmingham.

If historically, the public library was held to serve 'the working class rather than more privileged members of society' (Luckham, 1971; 5), then Birmingham's understanding of the library as offering something to those on the margins is evident in the early plans for the city's libraries. The central library, opened in 1861, and four 'branch lending libraries', which opened in 1865-66 (Kelly, 1977), should, the committee decided, strive to make available those 'rare and costly works which are generally out of the reach of individual students' (Kelly, 1977; 90). The city has housed archives, special collections such as the Shakespeare Library, and collections of materials in languages such as Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi and Bengali and Gujerati. Birmingham libraries have also been thought to cater well to children (Kelly, 1977). The research project *A Place for Children* which examined the value of the public library for children, judged Birmingham's children's library to be 'outstanding' (Denham et al, 2000; 13).

Indeed, long before the 1964 government legislation which made it the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964), Birmingham had been a city with a tradition of investment in public libraries. After its first central library and reference collection were lost to fire in 1879, a new, larger library was built, thought be the 'finest of its kind' (Kelly, 1977). Most recently, in 2012, £188 million was invested in the Library of Birmingham, described by its architects, Mecanoo, as a 'People's Palace' (Mecanoo, 2014) and by the Arts Council England (2014a) as 'future-proof'.

In the south of Birmingham is the district of Hall Green. Hall Green has four community libraries; Hall Green Library, Kings Heath Library, Balsall Heath Library, and Sparkhill Library. When I conducted the research, these lay in the wards of Hall Green, Moseley and Kings Heath, Sparkbrook, and Springfield. Following the 2018 boundary review the libraries

now lie within Hall Green North, Brandwood and Kings Heath, Balsall Heath West, and Sparkhill (see Table 2.1 and Figure 2.1). These four wards are in the most deprived 20% in England and two of them, Balsall Heath and Sparkhill, are in the most deprived 10% (Birmingham City Council n.d.). A greater percentage of people in this district have a language other than English as their main language than for England as a whole (see Appendix A for a summary of the data from the 2011 Census, and the 2016 HM Revenue and Customs and Department for Work and Pensions data). There is an inner-city ward in the district (Balsall Heath) as well as a ward on the southern boundary of Birmingham (Hall Green). Researching in one district provides some bounds to the scope of the study. My aim was to include a diverse group of women in the research but not to obtain particular quotas of women across any particular demographic categories.

Library	Ward pre-2018	Following 2018 Boundary Review
Hall Green	Hall Green	Hall Green North
Kings Heath	Moseley and Kings Heath	Brandwood and Kings Heath
Balsall Heath	Sparkbrook	Balsall Heath West
Sparkhill	Springfield	Sparkhill

Table 2.1 The libraries and their Birmingham City Council wards



Figure 2.1 Hall Green constituency and wards pre-2018. Source http://wikimapia.org/23495147/Hall-Green. Accessed 7 December 2020

The libraries are popular and busy, hosting women's groups, computer game clubs, art sessions, genealogy groups, Lego clubs and music and story sessions for young children. The Hall Green libraries are extremely well used (Birmingham City Council, 2016c), and women are important users of the libraries in the district (Birmingham City Council, 2016c). Women also seem to be central to a number of activities taking place in the district more broadly. At the time of proposing this project a new women's enterprise hub had recently opened on the Ladypool Road, designed to help local women to start new businesses. And a community group – Mums and Families – hold women's only events and activities for carers of young children, who live in the area.

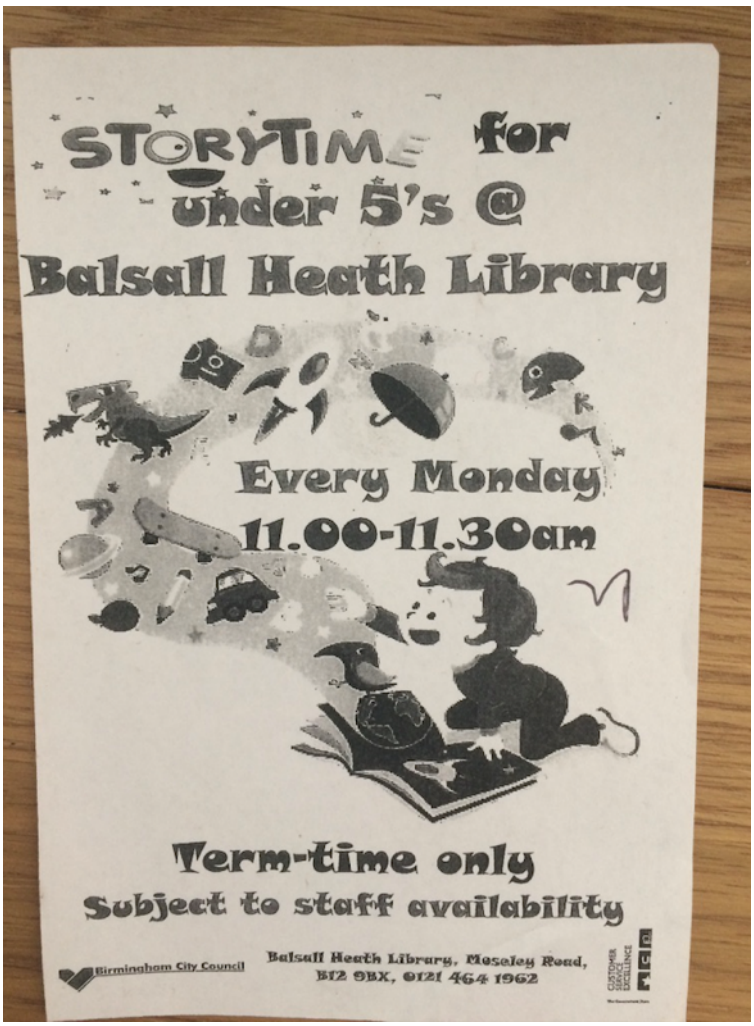


Figure 2.2 Leaflet advertising Storytime at Balsall Heath Library. Source: Author's photograph

After the referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union, Roger Godsiff, then the Labour Member of Parliament for Hall Green, referred to libraries in his description of the dissatisfaction that he saw in those in his constituency.

> 'Communities which have not benefitted from globalised, neoliberal policies and suffered austerity – which had seen traditional jobs replaced by insecure ones, local community facilities such as libraries, sure start centres and leisure centres run down or closed and high streets turned into zombie shopping centres.'

Hall Green is a district, then, for which libraries are important.



Figure 2.3 Hall Green Library in 2017. Source: Author's photograph

Living in the city, and having conducted research here previously, I was keen to undertake the research in Birmingham and I was able to travel by bus to the libraries of Hall Green. I had a number of contacts in the libraries through friends, neighbours, and women that I had met through library meetings and events in the months before designing the study. There were, thus, good practical and theoretical reasons for choosing this area to carry out the study.

After making initial contact with the four libraries, either by visiting them or emailing a library manager, I wrote my proposals into an application for ethical review and prepared my consent forms, information sheets, and other materials.

In October 2016, when I received ethical approval for the project, there was a Conservative government led by Theresa May. The Department for Digital Culture, Media and Sport had, that summer, consulted on public libraries and, at the end of the year, published the

Ambition for Public Libraries 2016- 2021. The government reduced public spending, or, as it was described in the Ambition for Libraries document, 'budgets will continue to be constrained and there will be an ever-increasing expectation of greater transparency around the use of public funds' (DCMS, 2016).

Locally, and set against these proposed cuts to public libraries, new libraries in the city had opened. The new University of Birmingham main library opened in September 2016 whilst the closure of specialist university libraries such The School of Education Library was announced. The Library of Birmingham which opened in 2013, had, in 2015, reduced its weekend opening hours due a reduced library budget. In October 2016, the same month that I received ethical approval for this project, a consultation on Birmingham's libraries was announced. In November 2016 I attended the consultation meeting at South Yardley Library led by Councillor Ian Ward and then attended the briefing meetings at Hall Green Library and Kings Heath Library as well as the briefing session at my local library in Stirchley in December. At these briefings the public were informed about the details of the consultation process. The consultation was to take place between 25th October and 27th January 2017 and focused on the council's proposal to 'reshape' the community libraries into a 'tired system' (Birmingham City Council 2016a). Tier one libraries would be open for 35 hours each week, tier two libraries would open for 21 hours, tier three libraries for 15 hours and just one library would be tier four and would be run by a residents' association. The council explained that they needed to cut £1.8 million for the 2017-18 budget. To achieve this, two further libraries would have to be closed and staffing would have to be reduced by the equivalent of 22 full time library staff.

2016 was a year, then, of great debate about the role of libraries, their purpose and their future, at a local and national level. The questions being raised at briefing meetings at community libraries, and the media attention being given to library closures and changes to library services, provided the backdrop for the planning stages of my research at the end of that year. So too did the community campaigning and the Friends of the Library groups, including the Friends of the Library of Birmingham, and the Friends of Stirchley Library, whose meetings I attended.



Figure 2.4 Poster in front room window in Stirchley in 2016. Source: author's photograph

2.4.3 The narrators

During this time, I made contact with the managers and staff of Hall Green's libraries once again, and in January 2017 I began visiting the libraries and displayed posters on doors and left leaflets about my study in trays with a sign which read, 'Libraries in Women's Lives'.

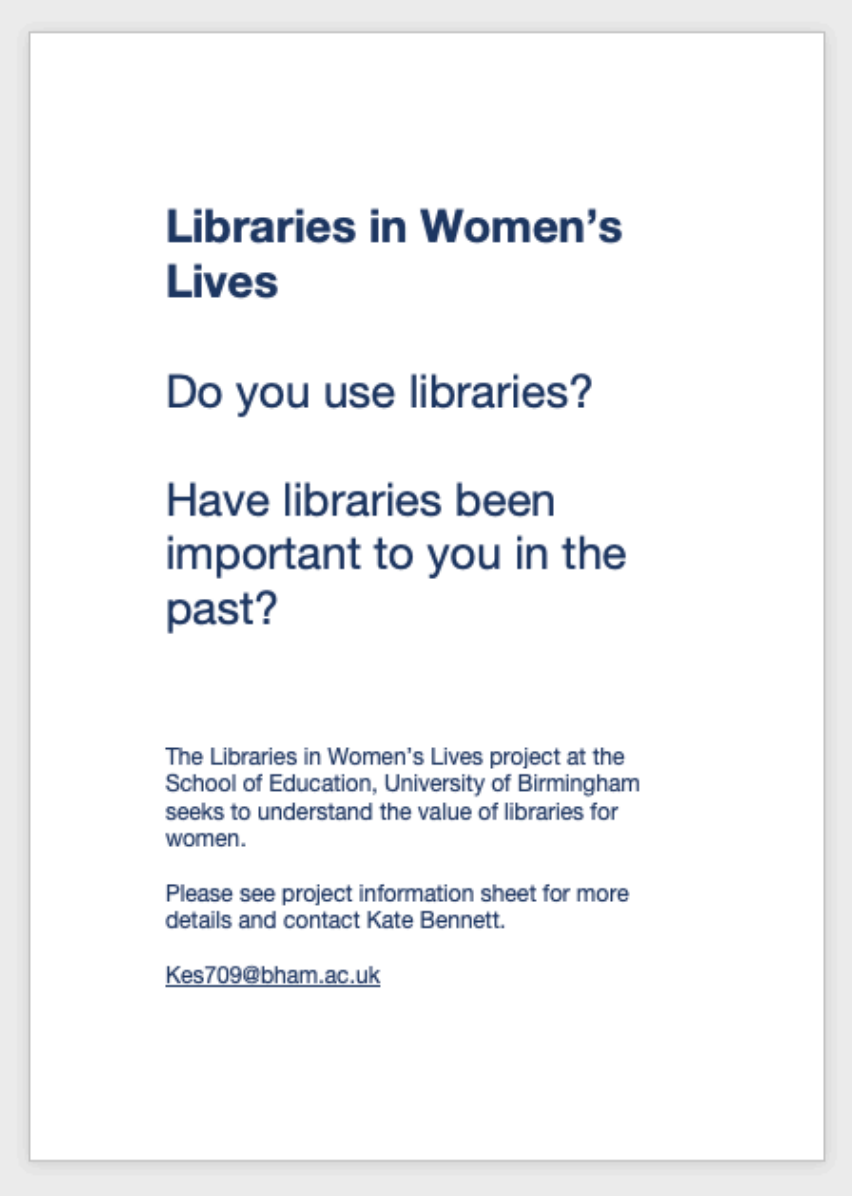


Figure 2.5 Poster advertising the project.

The women who took part in the study contacted me in various ways. Some saw my poster and emailed me to say that they would be interested in talking to me about their lives. Some women were introduced to me by librarians or by a friend that had already spoken to me. One woman saw me putting out my leaflets and came and told me that she'd like to take part. A librarian at Kings Heath Library suggested that I visit each of the libraries for an hour and put up a note to say when that hour would be, in case women saw my leaflets and then had questions that they wanted to ask me in person. I made these visits in February 2017.

A librarian at Sparkhill Library suggested that I visit on a Tuesday morning when a women's group met at the library. She introduced me to the group, and they invited me to join them every Tuesday. I went to Sparkhill most Tuesday mornings between 7th February 2017 and

23rd May 2017. I sat with the group and the women would take it in turns to talk to me, usually at the big group of tables around which they congregated.

Elsewhere, I would meet women at a time convenient to them, most often at a community library but also at other places of their choice including a café, Staff House at the University of Birmingham, one woman's home, my home, the Barber Institute, and St Paul's Trust Children's Centre. The meetings all took place between February and July 2017.

In all, I spoke to 25 women. They are listed below in Table 2. The women were born between 1933 and 1988. They live and have lived in a variety of places and have had different life experiences but are united in having used one or more of the libraries in Hall Green.

Janette	1943
Humera	1968
Talat	1945
Suriya	1945
Sakina	1950s
Saba	1983
Shaheen	1963
Salma	1986
Ferhat	1976
Jabbean	1977
Sadiya	1977
Shahzad	1956
Neha	1984
Samia	1980
Jill	1952
Anne	1943
Janice	1956
Margaret	1936
Alison	1949
Sheila	1933
Sheraza	1950s
Syeda	1988
Safina	1980s
Halima	1988
Jeanette	1967

Table 2.2 The narrators and their years of birth

The length of time we spent together ranged from just ten minutes on one occasion, to two or three meetings of up to an hour. The women that spoke to me on a number of occasions and whose narratives I draw on especially frequently, are listed below.

Janette was born in 1943. She joined her local library as a child. Before living in Birmingham, she taught in Bristol and has worked in libraries too.

Talat was born in 1945 in Pakistan. She has used libraries all of her life. After retiring from teaching in the UK, she founded the Friends of Sparkhill Library Ladies' Group which meets at Sparkhill Library each week.

Suriya was born in 1945 and grew up in Pakistan. She moved to Birmingham in about 1994 and worked as a teacher. She founded the Friends of Sparkhill Library Ladies' Group with Talat.

Salma was born in Birmingham in 1986. She has used libraries to study and meets with the Friends of Sparkhill Library Ladies' Group at Sparkhill Library.

Neha was born in Sparkhill, Birmingham, in 1984 and began visiting the local library when she left school. Neha visits Sparkhill library every day that it is open and meets with the Friends of Sparkhill Library Ladies' Group.

Halima was born in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in 1988. She has since lived in Essex, London, and Birmingham. She has used public libraries throughout her life and the university library whilst studying for her degree.

Anne was born in 1943 in East Anglia. Her family moved to Birmingham when she was young, and she joined Kings Heath Library when she was 10. Public libraries have been important to Anne throughout her life. She also values her own personal library collection of photographs, books, and other publications.

Janice was born in 1956 and has used libraries in Southend growing up, and then in Australia, Bristol, and Birmingham. She used the library to study for an A-Level when her daughter was young and has gone on since to study for a doctorate.

Margaret was born in Birmingham 1936. She has found libraries to be particularly important since her retirement from nursing. She has used libraries in and near Hall Green.

Jeanette has used libraries all of her life but began using libraries in the Hall Green area when her children were young. She is a university lecturer. She has also lived and taught in Japan.

It is good to be clear, like Sheila Rowbothham and Jean McCrindle in their *Dutiful Daughters*, that 'a series of oral testimonies does not make a history' (1977; 1). This group of women, listed above, who are not really a group at all, except on this page, are the 'Dutiful Daughters' of my project. Like Rowbotham and McCrindle, I do not see the women that I have spoken to as typical or representative of women in general. Instead, they are 'individual women talking about their lives' (Rowbotham and McCrindle, 1977; 1) – which might, nevertheless, throw light on important aspects of women's education and everyday lives.

Related to this are questions around understandings of 'womanhood', and, more specifically the understandings of womanhood with which this research operates. Recent writing about girlhood has, according to Melissa Benn, sometimes acted to neglect the 'sheer variety of Girl Land' (Benn, 2013), where Sheila Rowbotham refers to 'the category lumped together as women' (1999; 3).

There has in recent history, been much critique and debate around historically taken for granted terms used to categorise individuals. Sociologists have often distinguished between sex and gender, seeing sex as having to do with biological traits; physical distinctions related to chromosomes or genitalia and seeing gender as a socially constructed category which has to do with how society lays particular meanings on to these biological categories. Simone de Beauvoir whose writing I return to in the thesis, famously claimed that 'one is not born but rather becomes a woman' (1997; 295).

Important political and social questions are raised by who is included under the label of 'woman' and such questions have become more pressing given issues around misgendering and around transsexuality and recognition of the lack of stability of particular social categories through time and between cultures, problematising essentialist, ethnocentric understandings of the category of woman. Issues around transsexualism are important in this context, not only for ontological reasons related to the category of person which I am making my focus, but also because they offer insights into 'the mechanisms and techniques through which sex and gender are naturalized and essentialized' (Hird, 2002). The place of transsexuality in troubling these mechanisms is pointed to by Judith Butler who writes of preoperative, transitional and post-operative bodies which might not 'reveal' the body of a man or a woman (2007; xxiv), problematising notions of a stable anatomy.

Against this backdrop, scholars writing of women in recent times have often stressed the heterogeneity of experience amongst womankind (see, for example, Davis-Maye et al. 2014). Referring to women and women's lives as I do in this thesis paints the individuals as a group, and this perhaps risks reifying the category of 'woman'. The women involved in the

project may be united by embodied characteristics and (some) shared experience associated with womanhood. They understand themselves as occupying the category woman and, in many cases, point to this as central to their understandings of the role of the library in their lives. Nevertheless, like Davis-Maye et al. I am keen to stress that the women represent an heterogenous group and I understand them as such. Further, this project sees conceptualisations of womanhood as intersecting with ethnicity, age, and gender, for example. Women's own interpretations of their identity reveal their perceptions of these categories as both overlapping and implicated in their understandings of the place of the library.

2.4.4 Collecting the narratives

The method of collecting the narratives was quite flexible and varied across the different occasions. The first time we met, and after a discussion about the nature of the project and ethical considerations, I would ask the women a couple of questions about their name, and the name they'd like me to use in my writing and about when and where they were born and where they live now. After this discussion, women were invited to talk at length with a prompt such as 'What do you value about libraries?' or 'What have you valued about libraries through your life?'

I was keen to allow the narrators to talk on topics of their choice and without interruption. However, departing from the aspirations of narrative purists I did not limit *all* 'interruptions'. My own 'semi-verbal cues' (Sealey, 2012; 207), gestures and expressions shape the narrative, but I see this and its effects as an inevitable aspect of such 'hermeneutic' research (Miller, 2000;131). As Miller notes, the material being produced during the data collection has been generated with regard to both the interviewer's subjective perception and the interviewee's perception of the researcher and the relationship between them. Viewed in this way, as a research relationship, a complete absence of interruptions might not only be nearly impossible but not even desirable. Margaret Archer writes that 'dialogical partners deserve human reciprocity' (2003, 162). Listening to the recordings, I see that I agreed and exclaimed and laughed with the narrators and potentially impacted on the narratives in countless ways.

Of course, on different occasions, and in different contexts, the exchange might seem more or less like an episode of narrative data collection, or it might have the feel of a conversation or a semi structured interview where I would ask questions which might be termed 'narrative pointed questions' (Wengraf, 2001). These questions might be drawn from my list of possible questions (see Appendix B), or questions which had arisen from my reading. They

were often questions about what the narrator had already told me. I recorded these meetings, took photos of pictures and objects which the narrators showed me and, in some cases, walked around the library with the women discussing parts of the library which they had referred to in their stories or comments. One of the women in the women's group that I met, Shaheen, spoke in Urdu. Another woman, Salma, translated her words as she spoke. I reflect on translation and related methodological matters in Chapter 6.

After these meetings, either within the library, or on the bus on the journey home, I would make notes in my research diary. I detailed my immediate reflections, and any made other notes which seemed important but might not captured by the recording. I would record any initial links I could see with other narratives and with my engagements with the literature.

These habits, as well as my practice of taking notes from my reading in between the field notes, and reflecting on these as part of the preparations, contributed to an iterative process where the project was continuously reshaped. New themes and questions which emerged were 'looped back into earlier data and taken forward into the next stage' (Pole and Morrison, 2003). I see these reflections as being significant in that they capture something of the way in which I shaped the project. This development can be seen in my notebooks. Notebooks which began as having clear and distinct functions – reading, or field notes or supervision meeting notes, and so on, came to blur during the project as these things seemed more difficult to separate.

Looking back through my field notes, the notebook is also full of lessons which I received from the women on various topics and book recommendations which they made. Similarly, and perhaps more intentionally, within my research diary, I often made contextual notes which related in some way to my research. I often drew a line across the page to divide the material so that above the line it might say 'emailed manager of Kings Heath Library' and below it might say 'consultation of Birmingham Libraries announced'. Or, below the line, I might include notes to self as was the case for 27th June when one of my favourite children's authors was on the radio. My diary note read 'Shirley Hughes on Women's Hour -talked about the importance of libraries – listen again'. Since rhythms have to do with *interactions* (Lyon, 2019), making these ethnographic observations and documenting the environment by taking photos and making notes, made visible the public rhythms which are synchronous with my immediate research concerns. In short, these research techniques offered ways of performing 'rhythmanalysis' (Lefebvre, 2004).

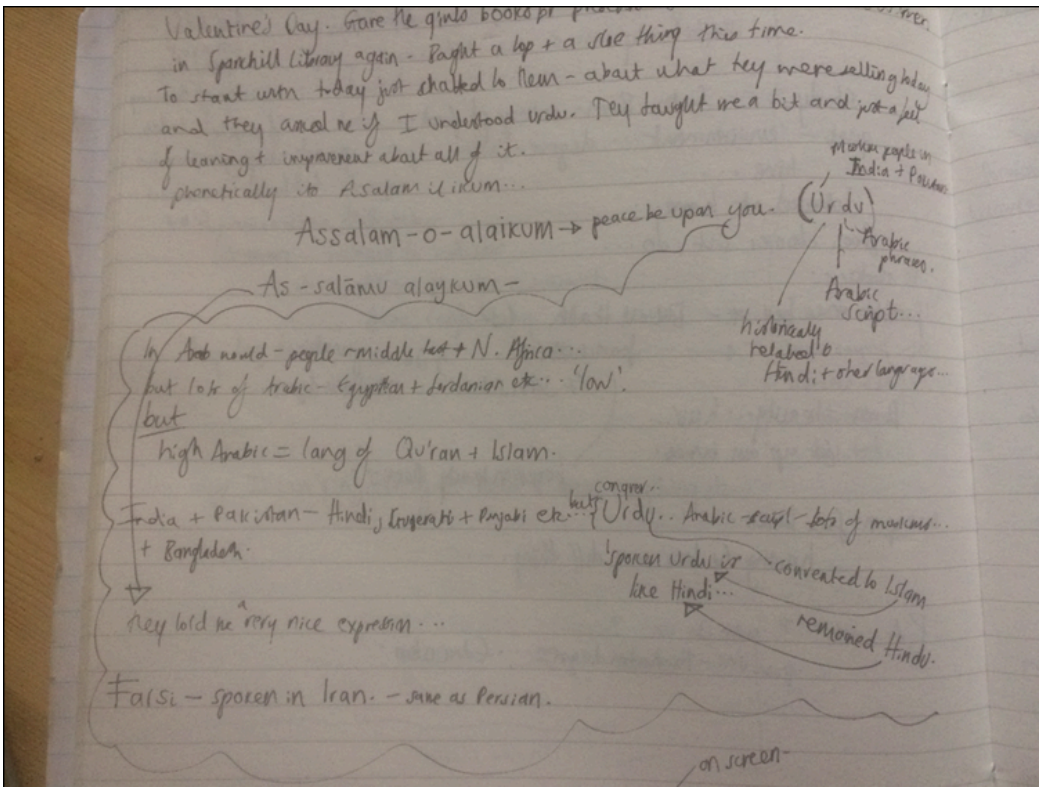


Figure 2.6 Photo of 14th February page from my research diary showing notes from discussion about Urdu with the Friends of Sparkhill Library Ladies' Group. Source: Author's photograph.

Following this activity, I listened to the recordings and transcribed the narratives. And then, reading the narratives, I began identifying themes and taking notes and generated some 'emergent themes' (Cohen et al 2011;553). I grouped notes and quotations from the narratives under these thematic headings and then, read together with Lefebvre's writings, came to view these as sub themes under the headings of the central rhythmanalytical concepts of *time* and *space* and *energy*. Such an approach afforded an analysis of the rhythming role in women's lives along overlapping temporal, spatial and educational lines. Thus, the narratives, the women's own analyses, and the 'background noises' (Lefebvre, 2004; 69) allowed for rhythmic reflections. During this stage of analysis, reading my narratives alongside the work of other researchers who have studied rhythm was useful and sensitised me to the rhythms of cyclic and linear time in women's accounts.

My analysis also pays close attention to the language which the women use. This has to do with code switching, with translated narratives, or with individual words which seem significant. The ordering of longer stretches of narrative become important in considering women's spatial stories around libraries (De Certeau, 1984).

2.4.5 Researcher standpoint

Sandra Harding states that the 'class, race, and gender of the researcher must be placed within the frame of the picture that she attempts to paint' (1987; 9), where Sue Middleton (1993) makes clear that she sees herself, as a social researcher, as within the phenomena which she studies. If a researcher's beliefs are part of the evidence for claims which are made then a sociological analysis of one's 'position as a feminist educator and researcher (Middleton, 1993; 29) becomes important.

I have always found women's accounts of their subjective position as researchers illuminating; Sue Middleton's accounts of her personal life and her home (1993) are particularly memorable. The writing is interesting in its own right, but also works to underpin the women's treatment of their objects of study. Such texts confirm that we research the world and construct knowledge with the values with which we begin (Spender, 1982; 2).

Gergen (2004) views narratives as a cultural creation produced in the liminal space between the teller and the told. Here, narratives are not the product of an individual but are born out of a relationship. For narrative research, then, it seems particularly important for a researcher to reflect on one's 'biographical and historical circumstances' (Middleton, 1993;67) from which the research - its questions, methods and theories - will have its origins. We, as researchers, are 'part of the data that we collect' (Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou, 2013; 21).

There are many stands which might be significant here. I do not regard my research as being politically neutral; the rhythmanalysist does not engage in 'rendering oneself passive' or 'forgetting one's knowledge' (Lefebvre, 2004; 19). I am a white, middleclass woman. And, like many of the authors I cite above, I approach my research as a feminist. I grew up in Leicester and my parents, left-wing school teachers, gave me my fascination with stories, with people and with education. My dad, who grew up in Birmingham, and my mum, in rural Shropshire, met at West Midlands Teacher training college in the 1970s. Their books from this time lined the shelves of our family home in Leicester. One was called *Born to Fail* (Wedge and Prosser, 1973) and, much to their amusement, as a young child, I would carry it around the house with me.

They also took me to the library. The library, then, was a modern two storey building and the children's library was on the first floor so my brother and I would run up the carpeted steps leaving my mum to choose her books downstairs. I remember the large, low, wooden boxes of picture books. Later, aged 11, I remember feeling that I was too old to go to the child-

minder after school, but too young to go home to an empty house – I would hear noises – and so I would walk to the same public library and do my homework at one of the upstairs tables. I had a view through the long windows to the car park at the front where I'd see my dad pull in to pick me up on his way home from work. These memories, and my engagements with libraries of many kinds, in many places, have rhythmed my life and rhythmed this project.



Figure 2.7 Birstall Library (in 2005). Source: https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/581921

I am concerned, in this research, with women's feelings and desires. Those suggesting that we need to 'turn to an emotionally honest engagement with the world in research practice (Pahl, 2014; 192), recognise that the researcher's emotions and desires are relevant too. My 'route' to this research as a reader, a student of English Language and later, a teacher of English will have impacted on my choice of methods for conducting this research. Narrative research, with its concern with stories and social relations, and looking holistically, and rhythmanalysis' interest in people's lives and in complex patterns, satisfy an intellectual desire within me to be engaged in interpretation and in making connections.

Such perspectives as outlined here have shaped all aspects of the research. And my interpretations of the narratives have been, of course, shaped by my reading, which is, in turn, shaped by my beliefs and interests. In researching women's lives, I have been drawn towards women's writing, for example. During the period in which I was collecting the narratives, studying the shelves of Glasgow Women's Library was inspiring. Virginia Woolf wrote of 'approaching the bookcase' asking 'where shall I find that elaborate study of the

psychology of women by a woman' (2004; 91). My own journey through the literature has found me, consciously or unconsciously, often looking to women's ideas.

I have outlined in this chapter the central concepts which have informed my analysis in this research. The thinking upon which I draw to help me make sense of women's memories are, though, both above and below the level of conscious thought. The theoretical framework presented in this chapter needs, therefore, to be read alongside this consideration of my stance as a researcher. I bring something of myself to the work and, although, rooted in the theoretical frame outlined above the analysis is a creative process. The language that researchers use to describe rhythmanalysis is telling in this respect. They speak of 'imagination' (Lyon, 2019, 9), 'improvising with rhythms', 'appropriating Lefebvre' (Middleton, 2014; 24) and 'experiment[ing] with rhythm' (Middleton, 2014; 111). The spirit of this language suggests something playful and perhaps the feeling that, as rhythmanalyst, one might bring something of oneself to the interpretation, yielding novel, even unpredictable insights. In Lefebvre's words, 'Rhythmanalysis wants to separate as little as possible, the scientific from the poetic' (2004; 87).

An overlapping concern with my stance as a researcher is the philosophy which underpins various ethical considerations for the research. I end this chapter by discussing some of the ethical implications of the research.

2.4.6 Ethical Considerations

In planning and conducting the research I needed to consider both formal ethical codes as well as more 'everyday ethical considerations' (MacFarlane, 2010). I followed BERA (2011), ESRC (2010 and 2020) and the University of Birmingham's ethical guidelines. Recent research reports have also been useful in sensitising me to important research concerns. The Connected Communities *Creating Living Knowledge Report*, for example, helped me to think about the ethical issues around the representation of some women from some ethnic minority groups (Facer and Enright, 2016). They warn that some groups might be seen as 'symbolically valuable', but might experience 'little opportunity to have their insights and experiences heard' (2016; 61). I reflect on these issues within the thesis.

I sought informed consent and invited the women to read the project information ahead of our meeting but also discussed this with them when we met (see Appendix B). We discussed the recording of the interview and the ways in which I would use their words both in my current project and in future writing, as the sociologist Anne Grinyer (2009) advises. I also asked the women how they would like to be referred to in my writing. Alongside

references to individuals there is also the question of a suitable generic reference for those involved. Rather than 'participants', I have chosen 'narrators'. I hope that, rather than 'functionalizing' (Van Leeuwen, 2003; 42) the women in terms of my research, this foregrounds their role as narrators of experience.

If ethical research aims to empower those involved, then there seems something respectful about narrative research's interest in people and their stories. Narrative is sometimes credited with keeping 'the integrity of people' (Cohen et al 2011;553). I have tried to use the words of those who take part in the research in a respectful way. I have aspired to 'thick description' (Geertz, 2003 [1973]), rendering the women's words in, I hope, thoughtful ways. I am, of course, making decisions about what is important and how to group the ideas within my discussion, but I hope that something of the individual remains and I seek to render the narrators' words in ways which are faithful to my understanding of their intended meaning (see MacFarlane, 2010).

There are also important issues concerning power. Ward's description of the narratives as having been 'gifted' (2012;187) is thought-provoking. I do not want the narrators to feel they have been 'mined' for their stories (Reinharz, 1983). I hope that by discussing where we might meet and for how long and allowing the women a freedom, within the bounds of the research, to talk about what they feel is important, mitigates, to some extent, potential problems of this kind.

While much has been written about the ethical considerations of qualitative research and work around narratives, the ethical implications of work around rhythm are not discussed at length in the existing literature. Lefebvre notes at the end of the first chapter of *Rhythmanalysis* that there are 'possible ethical, which is to say practical, implications' (2004; 18). He does not elaborate on this point except to say that 'knowledge of the lived would modify, metamorphose, the lived without knowing it' (2004; 18). I became aware, as I conducted the research of ethical considerations which might not have been possible to anticipate. I reflect on these below.

Working, as I am here, with the idea of margins, the historian Natalie Zemon Davis examined the lives of three seventeenth century women in her work *Women on the Margins*. She, of course, compares the women; 'I put you together to see how you were alike' (1995; 2). And she examines their marginal position; 'I asked what advantages you had by being on the margins' (1995; 2). In light of this questioning around the women's lives, in the prologue to the study, she imagines that the three women join together and ask questions of her. She reflects on what they might say. In her words, she 'listens for a time from the shadows'

(1995; 2). I return to this matter of the views of 'the researched' below, in the Methodological Reflections. But, I can say here, that unlike Natalie Zemon Davis, of course, I do have some of the women's comments on my research and their comments on me, as a researcher. I have reflected for a long time on these comments. In listening to the women's stories, I must listen to what they say, but must also listen for a time 'from the shadows' (Zemon Davis, 1995; 2).

2.5 Summary

This project adopts a rhythmanalytical and narrative approach to understand the significance of libraries in women's education and everyday life.

In the chapters which follow I adopt the Lefebvrian concepts of time, place and energy, although never separate, as organizing principles for my analysis and also as the structuring elements of the thesis. I begin with *Time*.

Chapter 3 Time

Part 1 Routines, rhythms and public time

> Everyday life remains shot through and traversed by great cosmic and vital rhythms: day and night, the months and the seasons, and still more precisely biological rhythms. In the everyday, this results in the perpetual interaction of these rhythms with repetitive processes linked to homogenous time.
>
> Henri Lefebvre, 2004; 73

> The library is unlimited and cyclical.
>
> Jorge Luis Borges, 2000; 85

3.1 Introduction

This chapter argues that libraries play an important rhythming role in women's education and everyday lives. It further argues that temporal concerns are often overlooked in accounts of the value of library for women. It suggests that as well as offering important public space, the library offers public time.

In this chapter I draw on Henri Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis* (2004) to reflect on the place of the library in women's everyday lives. As I stated in Chapter 2, I also see feminist researchers' understandings of time as a starting point for my appraisal of the narratives. I am concerned with women's remembered experience, experiences of time (Hughes, 2002, Bastian, 2013), and relationships with time (Segal, 2017). This chapter is also informed by the idea that normative accounts of time have served to marginalise women and that the study of everyday life should consider relationships between cyclic and linear time (see Middleton, 2014) and be located in particular experiences (Smith, 1987; 88).

Consistent with Sue Middleton's observation that the rhythmanalyst's zones of inquiry will 'range in scale' (2014; 118), my analysis will deal with multiple time scales; the rhythm of an embodied activity performed over a short time frame, the rhythm of a day, a weekly routine and, in Part 2 of the chapter, longer periods of time such as women's understandings of library use as continuous through generations of women.

Cycles are important to my discussion of *time.* The sociologist Michael Young, who does not

write in terms of rhythms but does write in ways which are compatible with rhythmanalysis, stresses the cyclical in *Metronomic Society* (1988). He writes 'I have been making so much of the cyclical because in the industrial world the stress is the other way' (1988, 12).

Lefebvre writes that the rhythmanalyst is sensitive to 'moods' (2004; 87). The writer Alberto Manguel's reflections on his own library capture something of its mood. Rhythmic shifts alter the meaning of the library for Manguel; by day 'the library is a realm of order' (2006; 12), but 'by night the atmosphere changes' (2006; 13). The reflections within the narratives represent or overlap with temporal considerations in various ways. In this first section on *time*, I consider women's remembered experiences of library use with a focus on rhythms and routines. Women remember their everyday engagements with libraries, and these take their place around other everyday activities. Engagements with libraries sometimes find their space in the interstices and this chapter addresses memories of women borrowing books or educating themselves in the between times of family and work. Finally, the chapter turns to focus on a group of women for whom the library offers not only a space in which to meet but, through the meetings of their women's group, it also offers time. Libraries, the narratives reveal, rhythm the women's lives.

3.2 Rhythming Lives: Libraries, Rhythms and Routines

Women reflect on their routines around library use. Jeanette remembers library visits when her children were young:

> Sometimes when we used to go to Northfield we'd go there and then we'd go swimming. And that would be like almost a day out and yeah that's the thing it's kind of filling time with them when they're little and you've been at a home and everyone's climbing the walls, where you gonna go?

For Jeanette, a visit to the library 'fragments the day, parcels it out' (Lefebvre, 2004; 77).

For Ferhat, visiting the library has been a routine in childhood, in college, and now again as a mother of young children. As a child she remembers;

> We'd go there and have a little treat on the way back. We used to catch the bus because we didn't have a car, so it was like an adventure for us. We'd all get on this bus, go to Swan Centre as well. It was like a thing.

Later, in college, she would use the college library every lunchtime.

> At college we went every day. They'd always chuck us out for making too much noise, but we'd always be back in.

Then in the school holidays she would meet her friends at Birmingham's Central Library;

> We'd all meet at the library and everybody would be doing their assignments, and all have a chat and then we'd go up to McDonalds and have a breakfast or whatever and then we'd all go back to the library. So our holidays were spent around that library.

Ferhat reflects on her library use as a routine. She describes those visits as a child as 'like a thing'; a recognised, repeated activity and perhaps a significant one. In her use of the library now with her children, she draws a parallel with others around her who use the library in the same way. Ferhat refers to her sisters-in-law who live locally and take their children to the library; 'I've seen them do the same routine as well'. This is 'le quotidian,' (2004; iv); the ordinary and the routine. There is a repetition in the narrative of the habitual 'would' - 'we would', 'they would' - indicating habitual use. The other women who 'do the same routine' even hints at the mundane.

The library had an everyday importance for Ferhat during her time at college. Visits to the library would punctuate her day, as the rhythms of the college day offered lulls, bringing opportunities for the friendship group to congregate in the library. Rhythms on different time scales present themselves here. When the college holidays come around, Ferhat and her friends move to the central library. Particular rhythms can be discerned in Ferhat's patterns of use for each library. There existed;

> strong times and weak times recurring in a recognisable way, stops silences, blanks, resumptions and interactions in accordance with regularity (Lefebvre, 2004; 78)

Social gatherings find their rhythm around the prescribed rhythms of the institutions, but they work to other rhythms, bodily rhythms of hunger and thirst. Cyclic and linear rhythms overlap in the pattern of use around eating. As a child, Ferhat remembers they would 'have a little snack on the way back'. In the college holidays they would leave the library to go to McDonalds for breakfast.

Such cyclic rhythms make themselves felt for Margaret too, who remembers a group who would meet at the library in Kings Heath and would have 'a cup of tea and a biscuit and then

go and do their shopping on the high street'. Sheraza's account of visiting the library with her grandchildren also features food.

> And we take books, or read them there...with nanna and sandwiches

Although this is Sheraza's speech, much like with the literary technique of free indirect style, we can hear in the third person narrative the voices of her grandchildren for whom a trip to library takes place 'with nanna and sandwiches'. Library visits have props which indicate their place in daily life.

Routines around eating and drinking feature elsewhere. Talat's family would buy fish and chips on Saturdays after visiting the library and the park. And Jeanette would go to a cafe for lunch in the middle of a day of study in Leuven's libraries. In this way, engagements with the library take their place alongside everyday routines around food. The references to food are not inconsequential details within the narratives, but instead reveal the way in which library use rhythms and is rhythmed by everyday social practice, taking its place around routine human activity and bodily rhythms.

Sleep is another rhythm which surfaces as important in narratives around library use. Rhythms of library use intersect with circadian rhythms and other natural rhythms in various ways. Janice reflects on her preference for borrowing books from the library to using computers for research, noting 'you can read them in bed for a start'. Jill associates the library with borrowing books to read in bed, both as a child and now as an adult.

> I can't remember a time that I've never read at night. Obviously, my mum and dad would read to me and then once I could read…

On the cushion in the corner of her childhood bedroom, Jeanette remembers falling asleep when reading.

> And I remember when I was doing History A-Level we had this really boring book about the Tudors that was smelly and dusty and I'd sit in the corner with this book and then be asleep!

The book of Jeanette's memory was 'smelly and dusty'. Scent and smell are 'impressions that are so strong in the child' (Lefebvre, 2004; 21) and **'**Olfactory memory is particularly important in memories of childhood' (Rodaway, 1994; 71). In accounts such as this, these impressions hold strong in memories of books and libraries.

The routines I have considered so far have tended to involve a particular pattern of activity implicating the library. Other accounts reveal library use as tied to particular times. Michael Young's distinction between *sequence-locked* and *time-locked* cycles is useful here.

> Intermittent cycles can be sequence-locked, being locked into a sequence without being locked into a particular time; and they can also be time-locked, recurring at the same time in a day, a week, a month, a year, or some other duration (1988; 7).

Jabbean remembers such 'time locked' activity in her weekly library visits.

> My parents used to take us once a week, definitely.

Janice recalls a new library being built in Southend.

> I started going there and then it just became routine to go every week.

The women might name the day of the visit. Jill told me about bringing her children to Hall Green Library:

> We've always used libraries. We brought them every Saturday.

The idea that a library visit might be a weekly routine recurring on a particular day, recalls Carolyn Steedman's (1986) reflection that until recently we saw days of the week as having particular functions.

When her children were young Talat remembers taking them to Sparkhill Library and then:

> We used to go to the park, sit there and enjoy, and the children would play. Then we used to buy fish and chips. Sitting on the bench. Then we would go further til the end… Springfield... window shopping or shopping. So this was a weekend we used to do.

The library was part of 'a weekend' they 'used to do**'.** For Ferhat, above, the library visit, the bus journey, and the food, meant the routine became, in her words, 'a thing'. Similarly, for Talat, the trip to the library and the time in the park and the walking, was a way of spending a weekend. It is a pattern of use to return to.

On a different temporal scale, the women's use of the libraries intersects with rhythms of the calendar year and the school year. Jeanette remembers that although their local library was Stirchley Library, the family would visit Kings Heath Library when they went to the school

uniform shop there. Memories of library use are tied to a particular ritual at a particular time of year in this account. Annual visits might, then, be made to particular libraries but they might also be made to the usual library but for a particular reason. Jill, for example, visits her library before she goes on holiday each year in order to borrow the relevant ordinance survey maps. The visit to a library functions ritually here, marking the preparations for holidays at the beginning of summer, or the visit to the school uniform shop at the very end of summer.

This discussion indicates that women's everyday lives are rhythmed by the library. Of course, libraries themselves have rhythms which intersect with women's lives in important ways. I consider these here before turning to the cycles of activity of the Friends of Sparkhill Library Ladies Group.

3.3 The rhythms of the library and routinised practices

Particular rhythms are inherent to the function of libraries. The cyclic nature of choosing, borrowing and returning materials is an obvious example. Janice remembers that when the children were young they would 'have a book every time'; the borrowing of books and the due dates rhythming the visits to the library. The potential for this cycle to continue without end is suggested by Janice, who, talking of Kings Heath library, says:

> I haven't run out. I still come up and find things.

Jeanette studied for her doctorate whilst teaching in Brussels and describes her patterns of working at this time.

> One thing the library in Brussels used to do that was useful was they did a good inter-library loan and they ordered the articles and they'd come and I used to see the little thing with the green sticker on it and get really excited and think oh there's my new article that's come.
>
> The thing is with the Brussels University, it was all closed stack. So nothing was open on the shelves so you had to know exactly what you wanted and write it on a card and give it to the librarian who would tell you to come back in half and hour when she'd got it from the closed stack and you'd get your book, which - as you know - when you're researching that's not what you want. So I discovered Leuven library.

> Leuven was about a half hour's train journey away and Leuven is Flemish speaking and it turns out that Belgium is much more well-resourced for libraries and things so I used to go on the train to Leuven. And they had lots of little libraries and they were all 'open' so they had the Linguistics library, the Education library, the Business library and each library was in a gorgeous old building. And I used to love those days out because I'd get there and photocopy maybe 50 articles and then come back on the train and put them all in their plastic wallets.
>
> I'd go there and visit all these libraries …well probably once every four or five weeks and get a big stash of stuff to read and then go back.

Jeanette's rhythms for working were at odds with the pulses of Brussels University Library. At Leuven's libraries, by contrast, she experienced a synchronicity; the routinized practices of browsing the open shelves, the rhythm of the photocopying, the break for lunch, the repetition of the articles being safely stored in plastic wallets, even the 'half an hour train journey' home was memorable. Before taking possession of the ideas in these papers through her reading and thinking, Jeanette takes possession of them in a very physical way through her photocopying, ordering and organising of the objects. She takes pleasure in the haptic experiences of the library. In Brussels there is the joy of the 'green sticker' indicating the arrival of a new article. Lefebvre writes that 'with regard to intellectual concentration and the activities with which it is bound up (reading, writing, analysis) they also have their own rhythm, created by habit, which is to say a more or less harmonious compromise between the repetitive, the cyclical and that which supervenes on them' (2004; 75). Jeanette's account finds the repetitive bodily gesture of photocopying and the cycle of travelling, searching, photocopying, organising and studying to be routinised practices which bring harmony, even joy to her studies and her life. Where Jeanette finds a lack of harmony in these intersecting rhythms - where she despairs at the 'linear beats of bureaucracy' of the Brussels University library (Middleton; 2014; 137) she studies elsewhere, but libraries of one kind or another rhythm Jeanette's studies at this time.

Jeanette completed her doctorate before she had her children. Some of the women describe using libraries to study at a time when their children were young. These women reflect on the intersection of multiple overlapping rhythms of the body and the library with the rhythms of family life. This takes a variety of forms but temporally, and to borrow Janice's words, often takes place within 'miniature gaps'.

3.4 Miniature Gaps

Jabbean worked at St John's School in the day and, in the evening, would go next-door to Sparkhill Library to study.

> I used to study after work. I used to go to the Sparkhill library, do my assignments. When I started my foundation degree, I was also working full time so I used to do that in the evening and I'd have my daughter who was one years old too (laughs) so I've done it all!

Janice studied for an A Level whilst her children were young.

> I got all my books for that either from the college library, cus that was an FE college or from the public library. I used the public library quite a bit. And that was hard going working in the evenings – you just don't have – well you have a miniature gap to do anything.

Sue Middleton (2014) uses rhythmanalysis in order to examine doctoral researchers' accounts of studying. Just as for the women here, she found students with children 'configuring their working days' around their hours of employment and the hours of their children's school day. Middleton speaks of one woman's study as being 'punctuated by the staccato rhythms of family life' as demands came in from children for her attention. She had, to borrow Janice's words above - 'a miniature gap to do anything'. Within the rhythms of family life, study must take place in the miniature gaps - in the 'weak time, the stops, silences, blanks' (Lefebvre, 2004; 78). Thus, for Janice, the library offered a space to work but she also emphasises through her account the way in which it also offered *time*.

Alison also identified a brief window of time in which she visited the library when her children were young.

> And Balsall Heath Library...my daughters had swimming lessons next door so I used that library while they had their lessons. My youngest had swimming lessons at Sparkhill. I'm sure I went to the library there as well. I associate swimming lessons with going to the library.

The length of a swimming lesson presented just enough time for Alison to go into the library, borrow books, and return to her children.

Middleton writes of the educator and writer Sylvia Ashton-Warner and her attempts to claim

space for herself by setting aside time for ‘intellectual and artistic expression’ (2014; 92). Similarly, Jabbean, Janice and Alison, ‘crave a separate place for creativity’ beyond the reach of work and family (Middleton, 2014; 93). Middleton contrasts the space of a study, that room in the house associated traditionally with male withdrawal with the household common rooms in which Ashton-Warner would conduct her activities. In the narratives of Jabeean and Janice and Alison the role of the study or the household common room is played by the public space of the library as the women claim space for themselves by carving out not only space but also *time* for studying, reading or borrowing books.

Talat recognises the importance of time too. She described seeing women in libraries with small children and noticing that when the children are choosing books the women ‘have a chance to choose a book and read it’. She reasons, ‘when they’re at home they don’t have any time to do that but when they are here they have time’.

Margins are an important idea in these accounts of women with young children. In Janice’s, Jabbean’s and Alison’s account it is the evenings; the margins of the day where they find this time. It is in these margins when ‘the miniature gaps’ make themselves visible.

These women rhythm their library use with the rhythms of family life. Shaheen’s children have now grown up. Salma translated Shaheen’s words, so this appears in the third person.

> This is her catching up time in her life after the busy time of bringing up children - being a grandmother and a mother she gets to go here, sit with the women. It’s a different kind of.. like she can escape being a married woman and having kids. She can move away from all that, learn a bit of English, learn a bit more Urdu and like all the years that she’s missed out - it’s catching up time; she hasn’t got much education.
>
> [On borrowing books from the library] She doesn’t have the time, she takes books for the grandchildren, not for herself. She thinks she can read here, do everything here. The kids can study at home, but her study time is here.

Time is, once again, foregrounded in the narrative and it has two relevances. First, Shaheen is afforded ‘study time’ in the library. Second, Shaheen’s circumstances, with children grown, mean that it is now her ‘catching up time’. Shaheen does not have very much formal education. Salma tells me that she ‘got married early and so is not well educated’. In the 1980s, writers Mary Hughes and Mary Kennedy were concerned with women’s educational life cycles. In the language of their model, Shaheen has had and continues to have

responsibilities to her children and grandchildren and yet has particular *needs* of her own (1983; 20). These needs are addressed by weekly meetings at the library.

In all of these accounts, women claim something for themselves by carving out space – and parallels might be drawn between the public library and the private study associated with male withdrawal (Middleton, 2014; 93) - but also *time* for studying, reading or borrowing books. Here 'multiple and contradictory' (Bastian, 2013; 216) temporalities exist simultaneously as women rhythm their library use with the rhythms of family life. Time is important; the library is the *when* as well as the *where* in these narratives.

When Salma says that Shaheen can 'sit with the women', 'learn a bit of English' and 'learn a bit more Urdu' she is referring to the Friends of Sparkhill Library Ladies' Group. This group meet at Sparkhill Library each week and I consider them now.

3.5 Rhythms and rituals; the Friends of Sparkhill Library Ladies' Group

Our group is a very good group. I can say that.

Humera

On Tuesdays, a group of women local to Sparkhill Library meet at the library and gather around two large tables. The group talk to each other, raise money for charities, help each other with various problems, and educate one another. I met the group each week for four months, talking to the women and joining in with some of their activities. The first time that I met the women, they introduced themselves and told me that I was welcome to join them each week and one of the women, Talat, suggested that they talk to me in turn.

On that first Tuesday Talat, and another member of the group described the group, Humera told me that Sparkhill Library 'works wonders for ladies in this area'. Listing the activities that the group engage she said 'another thing that excites us is the functions'. The functions might take place in the rooms downstairs at the library or at one of the women's homes. A particular function might observe a religious festival, a national holiday or another celebration. Suriya explained:

> We have lots of functions - two Eids, mother's day, father's day, ladies' functions.

Humeria and Talat described how the functions work.

> **H:** She [Talat] made a rule that everyone has to come to the front and tell something - read a poem, read a paragraph or tell about your parents - just to give more confidence. What everyone is saying she makes a note on her paper and then at the end she makes a quiz. She makes the questions from the speeches.
>
> **T:** And one or two ladies never had a chance to go to school in their village or they never had a chance to stand up before an audience. They say 'I can't speak' and I say 'tell about your mum'.

The religious and cultural observances and national holidays constitute public rhythms, celebrations which punctuate linear time. But the events or functions and associated practices produce social rhythms which find the women celebrating their individual lives and their life as a group. These events are outside of everyday routine, the linear rhythms of the daily grind. They are what Lefebvre refers to as the 'festivals and play' against the 'serious business of daily life' (2005; 13). The group's Tuesday meetings rhythm their week and these other events rhythm the women's lives in important ways too.

And yet, as the discussions with the women round those tables reveals, although there is intuitively a distinction between the festival and the everyday – the women's functions and their everyday life – they come together in the women's planning and in their recounting of stories. Lefebvre writes of the festival; 'its preparation, its celebration, and the traces and memories it left behind – was never far off' (2005; 13). Indeed, the women often recounted their memories of these events to me and with each other. This is important if we take seriously the idea that the symbolic space of memory is significant with regards to narratives but also to learning more generally' (Gomez et al., 2016). Like foundational stories, the memories and stories hold an important place in the women's understandings of their group and the role of the library.

Indeed, the women's functions and their engagements with the library are perhaps akin to the 'incorporating practices' which Adrian Forty identifies as important in social activity (2000; 219). Incorporating practices are those activities which become 'more important than objects for memory'. They are the 'ritual codes of behaviour' and repetition 'which ensure that collaborative memories are reproduced amongst the members of a society and may become attached to particular places' (2000; 219). Rites and rituals are themselves Lefebvrian principles; he points to the 'gestures, solemn words, and acts prescribed in certain sequences' (2005; 49), performed on certain dates or occasions. Particular rituals and

‘solemn words’ rhythm the women’s time in the library.

The bodily gestures which are implicated in the rituals of the group echo the bodily responses of emotion which provoke strong feelings (Wetherell, 2012; 24) in the women. They ‘love’ the library and are ‘excited’ by their activities. This reveals something of women’s feelings about libraries but also reveals libraries to be sites in which certain feelings find their articulation. Susan Broomhall’s (2015) concept of ‘spaces for feeling’ marries these two concerns. She defines ‘spaces for feeling’ as: ‘communities formed by a shared identity or goal, practiced through a specific set of emotional expressions (acts or performances) and exercised in a particular space or site’ (2015; 1). Accordingly, the women’s group and the library itself as ‘spaces for feeling’ (Broomhall, 2015) become something more important than just objects of love; they become spaces for particular emotional expressions to be ‘exercised’ (Broomhall, 2015; 1).

Further, Broomhall’s definition of emotions as ‘communal behaviours part of a repertoire of human interactions’ (2015; 1) is significant. Challenging received ideas about a lack of synchronization in social rhythms in contemporary social life (Giddens, 1990; Beck, 1992), the women’s group represents an acting together, an entering into ‘shared rhythms’ (Brighenti and Karrholm, 2018;3).

One Tuesday morning in March a woman brought her five-day old baby to meet the group. The baby was passed around and sweets were shared to celebrate. Then on a Tuesday morning in May the women were visited by two women from the Helping Little Angels charity. The group had been raising money for the charity and the founder Shamin Mahmoud had recently died. We all listened together as Talat talked to us about her life; ‘I’m telling her life story’ Talat told me. She then read out a card that she’d written for Shamin’s friends from the charity to take away. The women said ‘amen’ from time to time as she read.

In this way, the library becomes a place for the women to celebrate festivals and religious occasions but also to celebrate the lives of individual women and of the group. Through such rites and rituals and bodily gestures as those captured in this research, the library meetings and events function ritually to rhythm the social worlds of the women and their communities, fostering social memory and bringing eurhythmia (Lefebvre, 2004;68).

3.6 Summary of Part 1

Women's uses of libraries exist in rhythmic relations to other times and places, both public and private. The narratives constitute a combination of 'the creative practice of everyday life with the dull monotony of quotidian routine' (Moran, 2005; 11). It is a certain kind of everyday life which many of the accounts of library use point to, one which fits in and around the buying of school uniform, taking children to swimming lessons or to the park and involves getting a bus and taking some home-made sandwiches. Through particular routines and rituals, the women enter into shared rhythms with others and the library and the groups it hosts emerge as objects of love and spaces for feeling.

What is the value of Lefebvre's method in appraising these accounts? Rhythmanalysis sensitizes me to relations of cyclical and linear time, to the 'times and rhythms which are inscribed and prescribed in successful places favorable to happiness' (Lefebvre, 2004; 68). The value of the library thus exists, in part, in its mediating role between the linear rhythms of the everyday and the cyclical rhythms of women's lives. The library offers an important public space, but it also offers public time. Through the library, women enter into shared rhythms and are able to claim time for themselves in the 'weak time' (Lefebvre, 2004; 78), 'beyond the reach of work and family' (Middleton, 2014; 93).

The discussion in this first part of the chapter has revealed some instrumental accounts of the library to be narrow and problematic. As important spaces and places, the temporal value of the library is sometimes overlooked, and yet is revealed here to be important to an understanding of the place of the library in women's everyday lives. Part 2 also has a temporal focus but moves on to consider the everyday importance of the library through attending to particular 'moments' in women's memories of libraries, to accounts of *continuity* in use, and through close attention to one woman's account of visiting her local library every day.

Part 2 Moments, Continuity and the Everyday

In Part 1 I introduced the idea that the library rhythms women's lives, that the library had an important temporal significance and that through entering into shared rhythms the library not only offers an important public space to women, but also public time. I also introduced the Friends of Sparkhill Ladies' Group. Whilst some of the Friends of Sparkhill Ladies' Group visit the library only on a Tuesday, for the group's weekly meet, one member, Neha, visits

Sparkhill Library every day. I return briefly to Neha in my chapters on Place, but I consider Neha's account of her library use in some detail now. The focus moves here from 'the everyday' to 'every day' and to a closer, more explicit focus on the role of the library for women in various marginal positions.

Part 2 then moves on to consider two other significant temporal elements which the narratives around libraries reveal. Firstly, and set against the routines and cycles which I discussed in Part 1, are accounts of particular moments in women's lives in which libraries are implicated. Punctuating the quotidian rhythms of library use, these moments are individual stories of rupture; times of great significance in women's lives. Second, and on a different temporal scale, are accounts of continuity in women's use of libraries. Continuities in library use bring important connections with the past and for the women, they represent cycles of activity beginning again, as rhythms grasped in childhood are taken up once again.

This second part of the chapter argues that given the significance of the library to women's everyday lives, and given their importance to some marginal groups, the changes to library provision are gendered matters and have important rhythmic consequences.

3.7 Neha: Libraries and the everyday

K: What have you been doing in the library recently?

N: Mainly using the building, mainly reading the newspapers.

Neha started going to Sparkhill Library regularly when she failed her GCSE examinations. Her intention was to study to retake them but she has been unable to do this. She 'joined' the job centre once she was 18 but has not found work and has had her income support stopped. She visits the library every day that it is open and spends all day there. She meets the women's group at Sparkhill Library on a Tuesday morning. She tells me that she spends her time looking at English, Maths and Science books in case she is able to retake her GCSEs but says 'no one will take me on'. On the day that Sparkhill Library is closed she travels into the centre of the city to visit the Library of Birmingham.

Since Neha's everyday use of the library is to use the library quite literally every day that it is open, and since her life circumstances indicate that she is overlooked and marginalised, her narrative is well suited to a Lefebvrian analysis. Libraries themselves, like Neha, are ignored

and overlooked and it is a Lefebrvian notion that the everyday itself is often ‘overlooked and marginalised’ (Moran, 2005; 102).

I have considered everyday life and the spaces and practices of everyday life above in analysing women’s routines around library use. However, I consider Neha’s narrative in some detail here because it reveals a different kind of practice around library use and consequently a different understanding of the value of the library. Joe Moran (2005) distinguishes between everyday life as creative practice and the everyday of quotidian routine and dull monotony. He argues that studies of everyday life often value the creative and recreational over the banal and boring. Neha’s use of the library might, at times, be creative and recreational. But she also describes monotony and boredom. In this section, I look at Neha’s account with a Lefebvrian lens.

Before considering the role of the library in Neha’s life it is first necessary to consider Neha’s life more broadly. Neha is unemployed and thus talks about potential employers and the job centre within her narrative. Listed below are a number of examples of her comments about them.

Potential employers:

> They can be quite hard you know.
>
> They’re looking for someone that’s overqualified and has a lot of experience and I don’t have that.
>
> They won’t even give you part time, forget full time.
>
> They are a bit picky choosey.
>
> They want you dressed a certain way, you know?

Managers at the NEC where Neha worked as a catering assistant:

> They were really rude.
>
> They didn’t offer me a job.
>
> They told me, thank you very much. Bye bye.

The job centre:

> After three and half years they take you off.
>
> They've started to sign people off, you know.
>
> They're sick of people you know, but what they meant to do?
>
> They don't give you no help.
>
> They've signed me off.
>
> They said 'we don't care, we're not putting on a special programme. You're able to look for work. You're not dyslexic'.

Evident in Neha's comments are her understandings of class belonging. She understands herself to be beneath the employers and the employees of the job centre. Such feelings about class belonging echo accounts of working-class girls in the work of feminist academics such as Valerie Walkerdine who see classed subjectivity in constructions of 'other' (Walkerdine et al, 2001;45). Those who Neha refers to as 'they' in her comments above represent the powerful and the 'other'. In *Uses of Literacy* Richard Hoggart suggested that for 'the very poor the world is divided into 'them' and 'us'. 'They' are 'the people at the very top', 'the higher-ups', the people who give you your dole.. 'Never tell yer owt'' (1957; 72). Perhaps predictably, the job centre employees and the potential employers feature as the 'them' in her narrative. They 'can be quite hard', are 'a bit picky choosy' and 'they're sick of people'. Through Neha's use of 'they', the generalised exophoric reference, the referents are endowed with an 'impersonal authority, a sense of unseen yet powerfully felt coercive force' (Van Leeuwen, 2003; 52). 'They' indicates an external locus of control; Neha sees that there are structures which prevent her from achieving success and happiness in various ways.

These structures, in Neha's life, are many. The Geographer Katy Bennett has documented the many structural inequalities around women's paid work. Neha is working, or trying to find work, in an economy 'shaped by low pay and insecurity' (Bennett, 2015). As a young, Muslim, working class, woman, she is 'multiply marginalised' (Walby, 2009); subject to 'intersecting regimes of oppression' (Bennett, 2015). Neha has dyslexia and says she is told by the job centre 'you're not dyslexic'. As a working-class Muslim woman, she finds that she does not dress the way that employers might like. She remembers going into a shop advertising work in the window and being told the position had been filled. Neha thinks they did not like the way she looked; 'they want you dressed in a certain way'. She also finds that

employers are ‘looking for someone who is overqualified’. She might simply mean that they are looking for someone more qualified than her, but it may also reveal a familiarity with those around her feeling that they are qualified above the role in which they are employed (see Standing, 2014). Neha is, therefore, subject to a lack of wealth, a lack of opportunity and experiences marginalisation based on her ethnicity, social class and gender.

The job centre and the businesses which might offer work are powerful institutions. Neha sees the library as another powerful institution. When we were talking about her use of the library immediately after she had left school, Neha told me:

> [I] looked at the books and I got to borrow them as well.

The use of ‘got to borrow’, rather than perhaps ‘I would borrow’ seems significant. The implication here is that the borrowing of books was a right or privilege which Neha was afforded. In the context of her wider experiences as recounted in the examples above, this represents a contrast. Neha is not allowed to do things that she would like to do. She is not able to retake qualifications as she would like. She is unable to find work. She is unable to claim job seekers’ allowance. And yet she reflects on her borrowing of books as something she ‘got to’ do. This, perhaps classed, way of talking about the library, might reveal why the library has been important to Neha. She sees it as a place where she has been allowed to do things. Indeed, reflecting on her childhood she says, ‘When I was little, I started using the libraries and I found it quite useful’.

However, Neha does not only see the library as something which gives; she sees its power to withhold. Neha values the access to the library computers and finds the limitations frustrating. She says:

> They say our systems are down.
>
> They don’t let you wait. You have to just pick up a book and read it.
>
> You can’t have any more hours [on the computer] at any library cus they said it’s cheating the system.

Booking and using computers brings its own set of rules and ‘rhythms imposed by authority’ (Lefebvre, 2004; 99). Nevertheless, Neha relies on access to the computers and this is a valuable resource for her. Her frequent framing of events and circumstances in terms of what she is allowed to do, is evident once again (‘you can’t’, ‘they don’t let you’). Even her reference to her obligation to attend school is framed as being about ‘not being allowed’ to

go to the library in the day:

> You know before you left school, you have to study for your GCSEs. You're not allowed to come.

She sees the world as allowing her and not allowing her to do things. If these powers are the 'them' of Richard Hoggart's 'them and us' then Neha's use of 'you' here - 'you're not allowed to come' and elsewhere ('they don't give you no help') represent the 'us'. It points to the group who Neha views as being in the same situation. The sociolinguist Alison Sealey (2012) notes that 'you' indicates an implicit identification with a wider population.

If the use of 'you' in these examples represents an identification with an imagined group then it is important to point out here that Neha also identifies with other 'real' people who she sees as sharing her circumstances. On one occasion, Neha and I were talking in Sparkhill Library and a man who was sitting near us slumped down onto the table and put his head on his arms. This is an extract from the transcript of that morning.

> (we both look up at the man who has slumped down onto the table with his head on his arms. I must look concerned because Neha says:)
>
> N: He's alright he's just a bit tired – we all get like that.
>
> K: Yeah, you know a lot of people that come in then?
>
> N: Yeah but I don't know their names though, He's probably just bored because he can't get a computer

In Sealey's (2012) work around constraint in oral history accounts, she cites Margaret Archer:

> Those who face similar restrictions to us; those who are affected in similar ways share interests with others in the same situation may be thought of as 'collectivities sharing the same life chances' (Sealey, 2012; 200, quoting Archer, 1995; 257).

Neha views the man at the table nearby as existing in a just such a collectivity. She does not know him personally but can identify with him and speak for him. 'He's ok', she says.

When she tells me 'we all get like that' she is referring to the 'group' of people who spend their days in the library for the same reason which she does - because they are not in education or employment. Hoggart writes of 'an acceptance of life as hard' a feeling among

some groups ‘that life is always like that for people like us’ (1957; 92). Hoggart has been criticized by feminist writers for his representation of women as passive (Steedman, 1986). Nevertheless, his description of individuals who ‘feel they cannot do much about the main elements of their situation’ and ‘feel it not as despair or disappointment but as a fact of life’ (1957;92) is relevant here. Replaying that extract, Neha’s tone is one of resignation. Whether Neha is correct or not in assuming that the man is bored because he cannot get access to a computer, it demonstrates something of the way she views the library and the use of the library by people who she sees as being like her. Neha is identifying with a group of perhaps marginalised individuals who might rely on the library in various ways.

3.8 Slow rhythms: boredom and waiting

> Boredom is pregnant with desires, frustrated frenzied, unrealised possibilities. A magnificent life is waiting just around the corner, and far, far away (Lefebvre 1995; 124 in Moran; 2005; 117)

Well, you know, I like the star signs. (Neha)

The boredom which Neha saw in the man sitting near us that day reflects her own feelings of boredom. Boredom finds its relevance in rhythmanalysis. Deidre Conlon conducted research on women asylum seekers describing a sense of ‘inactivity, ennui and unease’ (2010; 80). She termed their experiences a ‘slow rhythm’ compared to the world beyond and described a ‘culture of waiting’ as evident in their lives (Conlon, 2010). Parallels can be drawn with Neha and the slumped, ‘bored’ man; as members of a marginalised group, they experience the slow rhythm of the asylum seekers and a similar ‘culture of waiting’.

Indeed, Neha seems to be in a constant state of anticipation both with regards to libraries and her life more generally. She waits for computers to be available within the library, she waits for the library to open, and she waits for it to open after a public holiday. She was, when I last saw her, waiting to see the result of the public consultation on public libraries.

Waiting is a recurrent theme within the narratives more broadly. Janice, for example, told me that she met her friend when waiting for her daughter at the end of school.

> [We were] sitting on the seat waiting for them to come out of school (laughs). She had a daughter the same age as my youngest daughter.

Perhaps, for women, being more likely to have caring responsibilities there is a common experience of waiting for things. Social class is important too. Shortly after the period of consultation on Birmingham's libraries I arrived at Kings Heath Library to find it closed. A group were waiting outside for it to open when someone noticed a sign which said that the library had had to close 'for a staff meeting about the future direction of the service'. People who were waiting began to disperse. Many moved to the bus stop to begin waiting for the next bus. As Joe Moran (2005; 4) points out, waiting cannot be separated from its cultural practices and meanings. For Neha and for many of those I found waiting outside Kings Heath Library, as 'for the poorest members of society, waiting is simply a daily experience (Moran, 2005; 4).



Figure 3.1 Sign at Kings Heath Library. Source: Author's photograph

Neha waits for things and anticipates things which she cannot really control. Consequently, Neha's rhythms, like the rhythms of the asylum seekers in Deidre Conlon's (2010) research, might be juxtaposed with the rhythms of those in the world beyond hers. Neha arrives at the library when it opens and leaves when it closes. When the library closes at lunch time she walks around the local area waiting for it to open again. And, in the absence of paid employment, within the job centre she does 'the work of waiting' (Tonkiss, 2000; 124). There is a syncopated rhythm to her day which is underpinned by prescribed, rational rhythms; the particular opening hours of her local library, decisions about library budgets, the hours of opening and so on. Neha's rhythms are, thus, disrupted when the library closes for holidays. She told me:

They're closing for probably a week or so, for some kind of holidays.

You know what it is? The library is closed too much – and they are short staffed.

Neha is disenfranchised. She does not know exactly why the library is closing or what the holiday might be, but it will disrupt her pattern of use. For Neha, who follows a regular routine in her library use, temporary closure brings 'arrhythmia' (Lefebvre, 2004; 68). She is concerned, therefore, about more permanent library closure and about the results of the library consultation.

She told me that she was asked about the opening hours:

N: We have the other guy come in, English guy, he asks about the library, he's quite a nice man you know. Asks when we should we have holidays…and the opening hours.

K: And what did you say?

N: I want Monday 9-til 7, but that's not gonna happen. And Tuesday 9 til 5 and Wednesday 9 til 5 and Thurs 9 til 6 and Friday 9 til 5 and Sat 9 til 5 (laughing). Sunday 9 til 5 (laughs). That's not going to happen though.

In Kofman and Lebas' (1996; 19) introduction to Lefebvre's *Writing on Cities* they state that 'the right not to be excluded from centrality and to participate politically in decision making were particularly significant to the working class'. Neha's laughter and comment here that 'that's not gonna happen' indicates, once again, her recognition of her 'exclusion from centrality'.

Indeed, Neha seems to watch the world from the sidelines. Like Lefebvre's 'housewife' who 'is immersed in everyday life, submerged, swallowed up; she never escapes from it, except on the plane of unreality (dreams: fortunetellers, horoscopes)' (Lefebvre, 2008; 51), Neha looks at her star signs in the newspaper. I asked Neha one morning what she had been using the library computers for. She told me that she had been looking at the cost of holidays.

K: And when you do get on a computer, what you doing at the moment?

S: Well…the holidays at the moment .. the holidays you know are quite expensive you know.

On another occasion, we chatted whilst Neha looked at the library newspapers. Even Neha's rhythmic flicking through pages of newspaper seems to suggest a waiting or a marking of time. Embodied movement is seen as central to the experience of time (Conlon, 2010) and Neha passes the time by looking at each newspaper in turn. On this occasion she looked first at the Pakistani newspaper *The Daily Jang*. Neha told me, 'it's all in Urdu. The people who can't read Urdu look at the pictures'. Looking only at the pictures, she pieces together what is going on in the world. That morning, pictures of Princess Charlotte on her birthday had been published.

> They've grown so big. She looks so cute.

Next, in the *Birmingham Mail* she sees a picture of firefighters. 'Probably not enough,' she says, without looking at the story.

There is a feeling of Neha being on the edge of everything, a spectator. She can look up holidays on the computer but that is as far as she can take that, given the expense. She can look at the pictures in *The Jang*, but cannot read the words. And when she sees the firefighters, against a backdrop of cuts to public services, she assumes more of the same. Neha, unsurprisingly given her circumstances, sees failure and failings everywhere. And despite her reliance on it, nowhere does Neha see failure more than in the library itself. No one that I spoke to spends more time in a library than Neha and yet no one is so dissatisfied.

> You know what it is, the library is closed too much – and they are short staffed.
>
> [Of the Library of Birmingham] You have to do everything yourself. There is no-one to help you.
>
> You know what it is, the computers are always down. The booking systems are down.

Perhaps it is precisely because of her reliance on libraries that Neha is so critical. Her account contrasts with some of the other women in that Neha does not love libraries. She does not feel nostalgic about libraries and what they symbolise. She does not see her use of libraries as an important part of her identity. And yet they are important in her life nonetheless.

In Guy Standing's (2014) terms, Neha represents the precariat. Her life is characterised by chronic uncertainty and insecurity. For Guy Standing the key assets for a good life in a good society are socio-economic security, control of time, quality space, knowledge, or education,

financial knowledge and financial capital. Neha does not enjoy these assets and yet despite her dissatisfaction the library gives her a small amount of space to utilise and within this space she is able, to an extent, to control her time. In short, through the library, Neha has the means to glimpse the world outside, even if not to fully take part.

3.9 *The-always-in-the-library-people*; arrhythmia and eurhythmia

The time's gone so fast. They'll kick us out soon.

Neha

Although the particular details of Neha's practices are, of course, specific to Neha's lived experience, the more general fact of spending all day, every day, in the library is something that is captured by others. Jeanette's narrative is illustrative here. Jeanette talked about a project which she had organised which involved an event at the Library of Birmingham which was open to the public. She remembers,

> It was interesting the people who came because there were the people who were interested in the subject and then there were people who are just always in the library. And the library organisers said, 'oh yeah so and so, he is just always in the library'. And it was quite nice because they came up, at the end, and said 'thanks that was fun' so that was nice.

That there are people who 'are just always in the library' is something that is well understood by the librarians (as we see in this account), by Jeanette, and by me. Our shared understanding of this fact is evident in Jeanette's later reference to such groups of people as 'the-always-in-the-library-people'. Of course, there are many groups of individuals who use libraries regularly but we both know here that she is referring not to groups of students or academics, for example, but to those library users who Lynsey Hanley refers to as 'misfits' (2016; 22); poorer, vulnerable, marginalised, disenfranchised groups. We are talking about people like Neha.

It is interesting then that the narratives capture library use of this kind from the point of view of someone who uses the library in this way and also the point of view of someone who does not but has witnessed such use. And it is interesting to see how women occupying different positions differ in their descriptions of the use of the library. This is Jeanette's description of

the value of the library for those that spend much of their time in libraries.

> The-always-in-the-library-people need their place to go because there's very little space in town where you haven't got to pay to be there. There aren't even sort of that many benches where you can sit on and certainly indoor space you've got to be paying, or about to pay a lot of money.

This is not the same analysis of the situation that Neha, for example, gives. It might be part of the reason that Neha uses the library but it is not something which she says. In the same way, Neha does not see herself as spending all of her time in the library. When I asked her when she visits the library she lists the days of the week, considering each day in turn.

> I come here Tuesday and Thursday, and Monday…and Saturday.

Sheila, to take another example, is not herself unemployed but she reflects on the importance of the library for unemployed women:

> I believe there is someone who comes in here who helps people build up a CV and I've seen them at the computers you know and they help them fill in job applications, all that sort of thing. And it's always women that I've seen doing that. It's always been women that I've been aware of doing that, I think. When women - and it's usually women - who find themselves a bit thrown out, kind of thing. Here is where you can find out. You can come in here and someone will help you to find something. Here is where they can start to find out what they need to do.

I too have seen women using the library to 'find out what they need to do'. My research diary documents, for example, an occasion when a man and a woman in Kings Heath Library were seeking help from a librarian to complete an SSCS1 form; a notice of appeal against a decision of the Department for Work and Pensions.

Libraries might then, be an important site for those whose lives are characterised by social and economic marginalisation. In-keeping with the language of margins, Janice, who has used libraries as a setting to work with young people, described libraries as a 'gateway'.

> God I have a passion for them. I think they are the gateway.

If the library can act to rhythm a woman's life, as I have argued above, then it might also be an important site for those who, like Neha, are 'out of rhythm' in some way, or in Sheila's words 'a bit thrown out'. Of course, this description, as a passive construction, does not

reveal the structures which might lead to such circumstances but does suggest conflict and disruption or, arrhythmia. Importantly, Sheila has seen the library give support in these circumstances. And, conversely, women finding out ‘what they need to do’ suggests, in rhythmanalytical terms, some seeking of or restoration of harmonious rhythms and eurhythmia.

In ‘The Right to the City’ (1996; 151), Lefebvre asks ‘what are and what would be the most successful places? What are the times and rhythms of daily life which are inscribed and prescribed in these ‘successful’ spaces favourable to happiness?’ Libraries are drawn here as sites of favourable rhythms, as ‘successful places’. And yet when libraries are forced to reduce their offer they themselves can be the cause of disruption and arrhythmia (Lefebvre, 2004; 68). For Neha the library is already ‘closed too much’ and so further closure is a concern. Elsewhere, Jeanette’s family have had their Sunday routine disrupted by the Sunday closure of the Library of Birmingham.

> Often we’ll be in town, and then you think, oh it would be nice to go to the library, and then remember that its shut.

Jeanette’s family here find themselves out of rhythm after the reduced opening hours of the library. Lefebvre writes ‘disruptions and crises always have origins in and effects on rhythms - those of institutions, of growth, of the population, of exchanges, of work’ (2004; 44). Lefebvre draws on the example of rhythmic changes which follow revolutions in his own work. I think for Neha and many of the women, although not seismic social shifts, changes in the patterns of library opening cause disruption and crises of their own kind. Sue Middleton writes that ‘in educational institutions imperatives of the conceived; deadlines, appraisals, national ‘standards’ colonise cyclic pulses of the lived - pregnancy, sickness, child rearing (Middleton and McKinley, 2010, in Middleton, 2014; 13). In the context of consultations on library opening hours and questions about the value of libraries, we find such imperatives of the conceived colonising cyclic pulses of the lived. The prescribed and the conceived impose themselves on the lived, impacting women’s lives and educational practices. Since the closure of public libraries is thought to affect women disproportionately (Frederikson, 2015), the ‘pulses of the lived’ are the pulses of women like Neha.

Neha, like all of us, experiences the perpetual interaction of diverse rhythms, but in her applying for jobs and waiting for things and marking time, she experiences the brutal repetition of the linear particularly harshly. Even in the library, a place which she values, she experiences monotony. And yet the library brings cyclic rhythms. As Lefebvre writes,

> in present daily life, the rhythmical is overwhelmed, suppressed by the linear. But the rhythmical cannot disappear; the repetitive cannot be reduced to the results of a combinatory, a prefabricated, imposed linearity (2005; 12)

The routines around her library visits, her weekly visit to Library of Birmingham and her meetings with the women's group punctuate the week. If women occupy a space on the margin (hooks, 1984), then engagements around libraries and groups such as the women's group, might be conceived of as hidden counter publics (Fraser, 1990); ignored and marginal but offering important places for women to spend their time; for some women, to spend much of their time. Indeed, bell hooks re-frames women's marginal position, calling for a reclaiming of the margins from traditional use as a marker of exclusion and instead seeing it as a 'central location for the production of counter hegemonic discourse' (1984; 149). Margins become subaltern space (McDowell, 1999; 151); spaces for resistance and sites of challenge to dominant discourses. They are politically counter hegemonic or 'subcultural' (Segal, 2017). And in rhythmanalytical terms, arrhythmia, as a marginal state, could offer certain potentials. Whilst assertions that 'literally being out of step with the dominant regime, may offer a spacetime of resistance' (Davies, 2018 in Lyon, 2019; 103) seem too hopeful in Neha's case, it seems reasonable to say that the margins might become a site for women 'intent on changing the possibilities of and circumstances of their lives' (Thompson, 2000; 8).

My focus until now has been on everyday routines; on the way in which libraries rhythm and are rhythmed by women's everyday engagements with them. I now turn to those experiences which punctuate the everyday; making particular 'moments' memorable.

3.10 Moments

> A little old man sat behind a little old desk in the middle of the room
>
> Haruki Murakami, 2014, *The Strange Library*

Punctuating the everyday rhythms of routine library use are individual stories of rupture; times of great significance in the women's lives. Moments are Lefebvrian. They intervene in the 'sad hinterland of everyday dullness' (Lefebvre, 1959; 356). For cultural theorist Ben Highmore, moments are:

> an instance of intense experience in everyday life that provides an imminent critique

> of the everyday; they are moments of vivid sensations of disgust, of shock, of delight and so on, which although fleeting, provide a promise of the possibility of a different daily life, while at the same time puncturing the continuum of the present (2002b; 116).

The discussion below centres on two particular moments from the narratives. Jeanette's memory of an encounter in a library in Japan is the first and Janice's memory of using the library to find her father is the second. In line with Highmore's definition above, the discussion which then follows, centres on the dual importance of the particular instant, and the lasting change; 'the possibility of a different daily life' (Highmore, 2002b; 116).

Moment 1: The Second Sex

Jeanette was teaching English in Shiki, a suburb of Tokyo, when she came across a library.

> I remember being out for a walk in Shiki and there was a building there and for some reason – it must have had a sign on it saying library in English - and I remember walking into this library and it was quite a strange experience. There weren't any books in English out on the shelves but there was sort of an older man and he had this huge box and he said 'oh you can help me' and he said 'I want you tell me which are the 'dame' books and which are the 'not dame' books'. Dame in Japanese means kind of forbidden, the no-no books – so in other words he was worried about which books to put on the shelves because he didn't know which were the rude books.
>
> And we had this really strange surreal experience where he said 'dame?' and I said no! (laughing)
>
> And one of the books was Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and on the front of it, it had a nude woman or a statue of a woman – and he was saying 'dame?' and I was saying 'no' and he was saying 'yes, dame! dame!'
>
> But what was good about that was that was that he wouldn't accept that that wasn't dame and so in the end he said, 'well I'll give it to you'.
>
> And so I read it and that was a book that was influential, massively influential. I took it to Thailand to read it on the beach and I was thinking this is going to be nice, and it was the most depressing book (laughs). That was the book that made me see – it was a bit sad really – because that was the book that made me see life really differently - before and after reading that book, and I've never had a book like that.

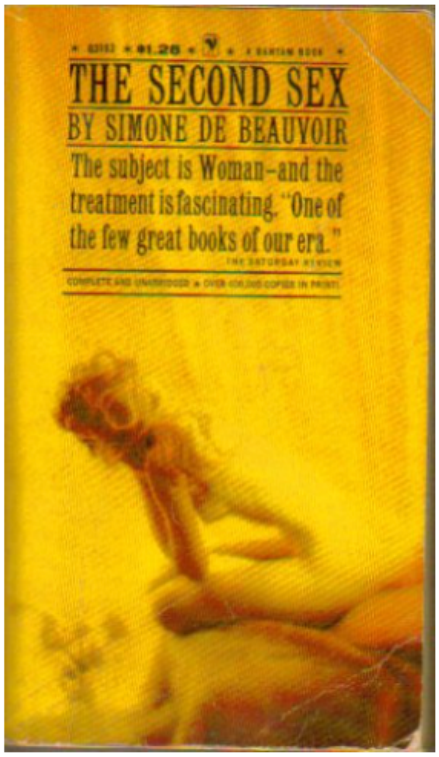


Figure 3.2 Cover of *The Second Sex* (1961, Bantam Books, New York)

This takes place in Tokyo's suburb, Shiki, so the setting for these events is once again on the margins of a city. This chance encounter with an unknown library has something of Murakami's *The Strange Library* about it. Jeanette herself describes it as 'strange' and 'surreal'. The 'older man' asking her to help him decide which books should be forbidden is reminiscent of the 'little old man behind a little old desk' (2014; 6) in Murakami's novel.

This account differs from Jeanette's other accounts of library visits; visits which are part of her usual routine – visiting to study or, later in her life, visits with her children. As a memorable encounter, it is in Filipa Wunderlich's (2010) terms an 'experience event'. Where elsewhere Jeanette might refer to her library use using the habitual 'we'd go': 'we'd go and choose [books]' and 'we'd spend ages there reading in the library', here, Jeanette breaks from the longer narrative to tell of a particular memory in a particular time and place.

In rhythmanalytical terms (Lefebvre, 2004), this encounter, as contrasted with the routine and the habitual, represents a moment of rupture, a break from existing rhythms. But rhythms do not halt here to be returned to undisturbed following this surreal encounter. Rather, the experience is a transformative one. Jeanette recalls:

> I started to see life through a different lens and I've never had that. And you know

> people say that and I think oh it sounds a bit pretentious about a book. This was really 'before' and 'after' because she really really points out so lucidly how the whole of society is shaped or was shaped – maybe not quite so much now – by men and for men, seen through the eyes of men, and organised for men, and women are very much the kind of second sex and 'the other' and I started to see that everywhere and it was a bit.. especially living in Japan because Japan is quite a… still is quite a sexist country.

Jeanette sees the book as her feminist awakening.

> It really did have a really strong effect – because I'd never read feminist literature before.

The moment of change in Jeanette's life is lasting rather than temporary. The cultural Geographer Tim Edensor suggests that there could be no indefinite repetition anyhow. Rather, he argues, 'there is always something new and unforeseen that introduces itself into the repetitive' (2010a; 14). Jeanette's encounter with 'dame man' is just such an unforeseen something and the consequent reading of *The Second Sex* introduced a feminist gaze – 'a different lens' – into the repetition of Jeanette's life.

Fittingly, Tim Edensor describes Lefebvrian (2010a; 14) moments as moments of 'surprise, insight, revelation and sharp self-awareness.' For Jeanette it was a moment of revelation and new insight. Yet if Lefebvrian moments are also seen as 'opportunities to escape everyday alienation' (Edensor, 2010a;14) then she has actually experienced a new kind of alienation as a result of this experience; 'part of me wishes I hadn't read it,' she says.

The library in this moment is not, then, a comfortable space of escape or retreat as it has been for Jeanette at other times in her life and yet it is heterotopic all the same (Foucault, 1986). Jeanette, a young woman in an unfamiliar place describes feeling 'trapped' by the older male librarian and yet, slightly ironically, the book she came away with gave her a new way to look at this and other experiences, reflecting a heterotopia's capacity to 'mirror and yet unsettle the world outside' (Johnson and Browning; 2017). Jeanette was unsettled on that day and had her view of the world unsettled. Perhaps predictably, just like the boy in Murakami's *Strange Library* who tells the reader that he 'never visited the city library again' (2014; 6), Jeanette tells me 'I never went back in that library'.

Crucially, with my concern here with memory and narrative and learning, the moment not only introduces itself into the repetitions and rhythms of the future, it also intrudes upon the

past. Within this narrative Jeanette remembers events and experiences and also, at a double remove, recalls remembering events and experiences in the past.

> And you started to see it in films and think back and see it in all those children's programmes we used to watch. Even in things like The Wombles where there's all these different characters and then there's one female character and her character is to be female. And she does all of the cooking. And like every single child's thing like The Clangers, there was always like the one female and her job was just to be the female.

When she speaks to me, Jeanette is not presenting an analysis of these television programmes for the first time. She is recalling insights from the past. Such recounted memories are themselves valuable. Gomez et al (2016) conclude their paper on memories of childhood experiences with the statement that 'an educational experience that is memorable has a two-fold value: it served to educate the individual in its day and it continues to educate that individual each time it is recalled.' In Jeanette's case the educational value of experiences in the library in Shiki, and elsewhere, have the potential to educate her but also to educate others now through her teaching.

Moment 2: Family history

Janice's memory of using the library to help her find her birth father is another important moment.

> I'm adopted. And I discovered that Birmingham had the records and it was the only other place outside of London, the only other place outside of Somerset House that had all the records. And that was all on Microfiche. I had my adoption certificate and it has names on it and from that I could get my first birth certificate which I had done when I was about 19. And from that I got my first birth certificate. I traced my mother who had died. You just narrow it down and narrow it down and it takes a long time. And he had an unusual name and then there were about five, and we rang a couple and they were too young, and then we narrowed it to one and checked it against the electoral register. And then we went through an intermediary – which I had also found out about in the library; the library was your only information source at that time. You couldn't just find anything. And then she wrote a letter and then I was in contact with him, so yeah. And I stayed in touch until he died.

Like Jeanette finding *The Second Sex*, this memory of encountering something in the library

- this time her father - was an important moment in time and also a lasting, transformative experience.

Filipa Wunderlich distinguishes between flow and experience events, where the former is, in terms of rhythm, the state of the 'everyday' and the latter akin to Lefebvrian moments. An analysis of such moments as Jeanette encountering her book and Janice finding her father reveal the importance of the 'both flow and experience events', as they 'combine to provide fulfilment and are thus aesthetically significant' (Wunderlich, 2010; 48). Aesthetic significance, here, refers to the affective component of experience and memory. In these narratives, libraries figure as sites of great emotional significance.

The moments recounted here might not be the grand moments, the 'significant times when existing orthodoxies are open to challenge' and 'things have the potential to be overturned' (Elden 2004b; x). And yet if a little of this sense rubs off on to the moments of women's accounts then that is fitting since women report the library as having similar potentials in their own lives. But perhaps more importantly, it is also fitting if we consider that these moments, rendered so singular and so personal, find a connection with specific historical and cultural moments.

Jeanette's encounter in the Shiki library connects her to feminism and feminist writing and a reappraisal of her past experiences of popular culture, for example. That the library might be a site for this sort of reckoning is not so surprising. For literary theorist Lynn Pearce (1997), readers are linked, through the texts they read, to historic and cultural moments. Jeanette, here, uses the materials of one cultural moment – early second wave feminist literature - to help her reflect on another - the popular culture of her childhood. Pearce identifies a mediating structure of feeling which links the personal to specific historical and cultural moments.

The structure of feeling here, although different to Raymond Williams' 'structure of feeling' (1977), carries the same interest with shared experience rather than simply private revolution. In this way, Lefebvre's conception of the moment as mutually experienced (Elden, 2004a) is realised, as personal histories are linked to social histories. That the library might be a site for 'recreating, resisting and transforming dominant ideas about gender' (Mirza and Reay, 2000, and Gerrard, 2015) in a very broad sense, finds here a specific realisation.

Set against the routine of the everyday, these moments of rupture seem to suspend everyday rhythms and yet an understanding of repetition as necessarily entailing change (Edensor, 2010a), enables me to see them as linked to the everyday so that, to borrow

Wunderlich's terms once again, flow and experience events are woven together. Further, the fact that these experiences might represent something novel entering into the repetitive (Edensor, 2010a) allows me to explain the women's understandings of these transformative experiences in libraries as being something memorable and singular and yet shaping things which have happened since whilst also intruding upon the past.

Even if 'moments' bring lasting change they remain fixed points within experience and of short duration. At the other end of the temporal scale women value various practices and encounters with libraries for the sense of continuity with the past which they lend.

3.11 Continuity in the Library

> The memories of childhood have no order and no end.
>
> Dylan Thomas, 1954; 8

Since the reflections gathered in this project span the time frame of living memory, women consider not only their recent lives but also their own childhoods. In Lefebvrian terms (2004) they 'grasp rhythms' over many years and over generations of women. Reflecting on her engagements with libraries, Jeanette remembers:

> But also, as the kids got a bit bigger, it would be a day out. And I suppose really it might be harking back to what I used to do with my mum.

Ferhat recognises a similar continuity:

> And it kind of carries on from one generation to the next so what my parents did with me, I have tended to carry on and do with my children.

Michael Young wrote that 'as soon as memory is in play the linear loses some of its predominance' (1988; 9). Here, cycles are not daily or weekly repetitions but patterns of activity taking place over a generation or more. This continuity is valued by the women. And Michael Young recognises this, stating that 'modern grandparents are usually pleased at this realisation that life is repeating itself, that the events of their childhood are being reproduced again by their own kind' (1988; 7). He writes that 'cycles build up their own momentum. The motion is carried over from one occasion to another' (1988; 8). He terms this process 'renewal' which fittingly suggests an evolution rather than an exact replication of events.

Shaheen's description of her grandchildren using the library in the same way that her children once did echoes this position.

> It's a generational thing; it's an ongoing process.

Of course, the current activity might be viewed differently to that which sits in the past. When Ferhat tells me that her sisters-in-law, in regularly taking young children to the library are 'doing the same routine' as her, there is the sense of mundane regularity and perhaps even resignation about adult responsibility. Those same trips to the library, however, experienced as a child, she recalls with enthusiasm. Even the fact that the family did not have a car, which might have made some journeys seem difficult to her parents, is remembered by Ferhat as contributing to the feeling that those trips were exciting.

> We used to catch the bus because we didn't have a car, so it was like an adventure.

The contrast between the memories of childhood and adulthood reveals the use of narratives of this kind in capturing particular memories and, more importantly, in revealing the value of libraries to be contingent and changing.

The notion that libraries or practices relating to libraries might provide links with the past or bring continuity are themes which emerge elsewhere in the narratives and take a variety of forms. Inscriptions in book margins provide important links across time (Price, 2013). Margaret shared a book with me from her own small 'library'. It was Margaret's mother's copy of the Catholic text *A Devout Life* which she had been reading when working as a nurse at Selly Oak Hospital in 1939. As she heard the announcement of war she recorded it next to the section of text that she was reading at the time.

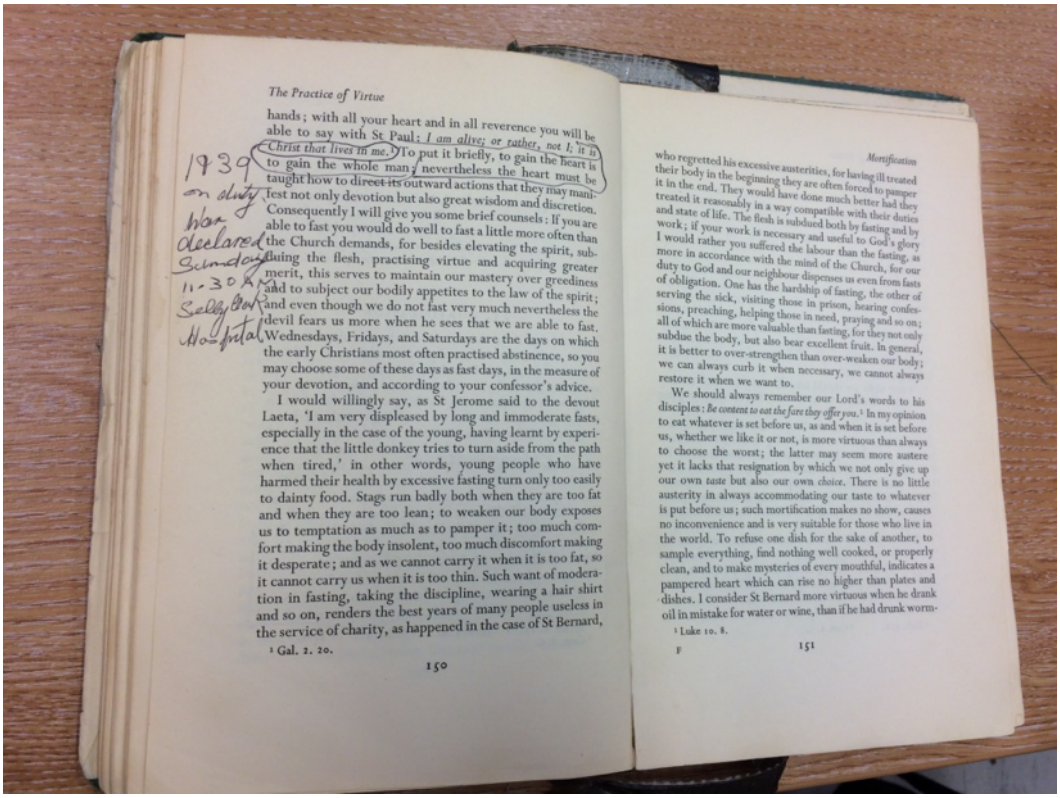


Figure 3.3 Margaret's mother's annotations in her copy of *A Devout Life.* Source: Author's photograph

Margaret says,

> It is old isn't it? I promised myself to get some more of this tape to mend it a bit. It's falling apart at the moment (opening the book). There it is, (reading) '1939 War Declared Sunday at 11.30 Selly Oak Hospital'. She was nursing at the time.

Margaret now keeps this book next to her bed. Through it, she is offered a link with her mother's and her own history as she learns about her faith.

Others identify links with those that they do not know through their reading. Janette finds links with past readers of the same library book.

> I bought a fantastic book at Kings Heath library about Napoleon and it was for sale. It was withdrawn from the library. From the 1970s. By a relatively well-known Dutch historian and in the back was a newspaper cutting about the death of AJP Taylor, the British historian and obviously, the person reading it must have been an historian, reading a history book about Napoleon, and there was this obituary about a British historian.

Here, through the 'spoor of previous readers' (Manguel, 2006;17), Janette enters into an

imagined community of readers, linked by a copy of a book.

Elsewhere, the women find links between their activity in the library and their own pasts. They told me stories and shared photographs to help to contextualise their current engagements. Talat and Suriya, the women who began the Friends of the [redacted] Library Ladies' group and mentor the women, see their activity in the library as rooted in their philosophy of education and their practices as teachers in their pasts. I return to this discussion in Chapter 5. One of the members of this group, Shahzad, told me about her time at college. 'I'll show you my drama pictures from Pakistan,' she said.



Figure 3.4 Shahzad in a 'mixed play' in Pakistan. Source: Author's photograph of the photograph

What is the significance of a photo of Shahzad as a young woman for an understanding of the role of the library? Marc Auge cites Piere Nora: 'through our religious accumulation of personal accounts, documents, images' are the 'visible signs of what used to be … within this spectacle of difference the sudden flash of an unfindable identity' (1995; 25). Auge writes that 'researchers meet halfway the public's interest in obsolete forms, which seem to tell our contemporaries what they are by showing them what they are no longer' (1995; 25). Shahzad, in showing photographs from her past, shows me what used to be. For Auge, the photograph is a 'place of memory' (1995; 55). Shahzad's stories about her Tuesdays with the women's group in Sparkhill Library and about her book collection at home are contextualized with the references to her past.

The continuity across generations or across time is a rhythm of a different time scale. These are important connections with the past and for the women, they represent cycles of activity beginning again, as rhythms that have been grasped from childhood are taken up by the women. This is a kind of trace leaving. When, in *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre writes that 'the past leaves its traces' (1991; 37), he's thinking about things being inscribed on space – in homes, in landscapes, in schools and so on. But the women's narratives suggest that traces are also inscribed upon people so that threads might be picked up and grasped rhythms taken up once again. And these continuities would be favourable and harmonious, for Lefebvre. In *Critique of Everyday Life* (Vol. 2), Lefebvre sketches some examples of individuals in certain circumstances. These are little vignettes offered to examine the level of the everyday. For the 'young farmer' he describes an agreeable, harmonious state in which 'nothing separates childhood from adulthood, the family from the community and work from leisure' (2008; 50). Accounts of continuity through the library reveal similar connections between childhood and adulthood.

3.12 Summary



Figure 3.5 Leaflet announcing reduced opening hours at Hall Green Library. Source: Author's photograph

Libraries are important to women for a great many reasons. But this chapter argues that temporal concerns are often overlooked and that libraries play an important role in rhythming

women's lives. This has an educational component but is also true of women's lives more broadly. Education and everyday life are revealed to be intertwined.

On a methodological level, this chapter points to the value of narrative research for performing rhythmanalysis in the library and in other educational spaces. This work around the temporal significance of the library in women's lives supports Middleton's view that, 'Rhythmanalysis offers a methodological focus for the critique of everyday life in educational settings' (2014; 13).

Read in conjunction with Middleton's writing, the work of cultural geographers who take up concerns with rhythm (for example Edensor, 2010a, 2010b), and with feminist theory, rhythmanalysis offers new understandings of social and educational practices and processes. It provides a useful tool for the analysis of experiences of libraries and, paying attention to rhythms and cycles in appraising the women's narratives sensitizes me to relations of cyclical and linear time.

Although the accounts reveal 'personal interpretations of past time' (Steedman, 1996; 6), structures of feeling (Williams, 1977) emerge around the library. The library takes its place around routines of study, work, childcare and everyday life. Women enter into shared rhythms in their engagements with libraries and in Neha's stretched out time the library brings cycles of activity. The narratives reveal the value of the library in offering a space for women to claim time for themselves in the 'weak time, the stops, silences, blanks' (Lefebvre, 2004; 78), 'beyond the reach of work and family' (Middleton, 2014; 93).

And the continuity in women's practice reveals the library's role in offering connections across time, as 'grasped' rhythms are taken up again, challenging a 'modern view of a linear history in which nothing repeats itself' (Young, 1988; 5). Through the library, women are linked to particular histories and they enter into shared and public rhythms both synchronically, so that women see and value others using the library in the same way, and also diachronically, so that women see continuity in practice.

Routines, cycles and continuity of use over various scales are important in women's engagements with libraries. But memorable too are particular *moments*. Punctuating the quotidian rhythms of library use, these moments are individual stories of rupture; times of great significance in women's lives. Set against the routine of the everyday, these are times for personal histories to be linked to broader social histories, and for ideas about gender and 'race', for example, to be resisted, so that identities and pasts are explored and challenged.

The narratives reveal reflections on who the women are and what they can become, on how they remember themselves and how they find their place in the world.

In the context of this research, instrumental accounts of the value of public libraries are revealed to be not only inaccurate but deeply sexist. Since cuts to public libraries and library closures disproportionately affect women (Frederikson, 2015), and women also make up the majority of librarians (Kelly, 1977, Norcup, 2017) cuts, closures and questions around the relevance of libraries are gendered matters. Offering important public space but also public time, this research suggests that changes in in library provision necessarily have rhythmic consequences, with reduced opening hours and library closure bringing *arrhythmia* (Lefebvre, 2004;68).

Having explored *time* in this chapter, Chapter 4 turns to *place*.

Chapter 4 Place

Part 1 A Cushion in the Corner

What are and what would be the most successful places? What are the times and rhythms of daily life which are inscribed and prescribed in these 'successful' spaces favourable to happiness? (Lefebvre, 1996; 151)

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is about the ways in which the narratives reveal a sense of place around the library. In his writing about buildings, the architect Thomas Marcus gives primacy to the human experience of the building. He frequently talks about 'what we sense' rather than 'what is'. He asks, 'what beneath the experience of museum or office do we really sense?' (1993; 37). The same question might be asked of libraries.

As the Geographer Paul Rodaway writes, 'the term *sense* has an important ambiguity - sense as in making sense and sense or the sense can refer to specific sense modes' (1994;5). Women draw on a range of senses in their accounts, reflecting a central tenet of the rhythmanalyst's method. But 'sense' also foregrounds women's understandings of the spaces they inhabit; within the narratives they 'make sense' of libraries. This has a temporal dimension, which I considered in the previous chapter. But it also, of course, has a spatial one. This chapter addresses Lefebvre's second requirement for the existence of a rhythm – place. It approaches women's narratives with a focus on their accounts of place and space.

The chapter is organized into two parts. Part 1 seeks to understand the place of the library through women's accounts of real and imagined locations. Here, I consider women's reflections on the physical space of the library, their 'spatial stories' (De Certeau, 1984) and also their accounts of imagined or desired libraries. Part 2 captures women's accounts of the journeys they make to and from libraries and examines the significance of these stories for understandings of the everyday place of the library.

I begin this first part of the chapter by considering women's reflections on the physical spaces of the library, with a focus on the haptic, the visual elements, the sounds of the library and the spatial rhythms which define the space. This discussion draws on reflections on women's engagements with library buildings, the spaces of libraries and the materialities of library use. It is about what Lefebvre (1991) calls 'lived space'; the concrete space of users. I then turn to the orientations within the descriptions of physical space, approaching

these as spatial stories (De Certeau, 1984) which reveal the place of the library in everyday life. The focus then shifts to metaphorical and imaginative space, as I consider Halima's search for particular books within the library. Finally, I examine accounts which contrast the library with other kinds of place in terms of the surveillance women experience. Finding the library to be a site for various identities to be challenged and resisted by women, this discussion lays the groundwork for an examination of the way these spaces might act to foster certain educational rhythms and act as sites for working on educational desire, in Chapter 5.

4.2 A Cushion in the Corner

> When I was little, I had a cushion in the corner of my bedroom where I would read.
>
> Jeanette

Jeanette remembers her primary school classroom:

> … thinking in terms of learning at primary school, I always remember the library corner being a little bit of an escape from the rest of the really busy classroom. And I don't know if it's still the case, but the bit with the carpet and some cushions and you sat on the floor and lose yourself. Because the primary school classroom, my memory of it is really massive classes and noisy and chaotic and hectic and a little bit overwhelming at times. I think I was quite quiet and quite liked to go in that corner.

Jeanette's reflections recall Bachelard's words; 'A human being', he writes, 'likes to withdraw into [their] corner and… it gives [them] physical pleasure to do so' (2014, p. 112). Catherine Burke (2017) found quiet corners being designed into schools, allowing spaces for children to sit and read or think. And Jeanette remembers corners and cupboard-like spaces being important elsewhere.

> When I was little, I had a cushion in the corner of my bedroom where I would read.
>
> And then at university I always used to go and work in the library – definitely at university and I'd get the little carrel.

Jill remembers the carrels in her college library offering a similar kind of enclosed space.

> I remember at college little like rabbit hutches set out, so you'd sit there, and everything was very silent. You could concentrate.

After completing her degree, Jeanette taught English in Japan.

> In Tokashimadaira we did these funny teaching hours. It was meant to be from one in the afternoon to ten at night were our hours but sometimes there'd be a break of two or three hours in the middle and it was too far to go home, I'd go to the library … there was this corner with cushions.

Moving through her education, corners and cupboard-like spaces are memorable for Jeanette, as if those early experiences of a corner in which to read were formative ones. The philosopher Gaston Bachelard writes of 'our bodies, which do not forget' (2014, p. 36), suggesting just such a template for the later inhabitation of spaces. Seeing continuity here between her experiences of libraries Jeanette reasons that it is 'just going back to that … a bit of quiet time away from everything'.

This reference to quiet was not the only one. The women often talked about the quiet of the library in their narratives.

> When I did the A Level I used to use the college library and just any library that I could sit in and be quiet. (Janice)

> I had to study and had to sit quietly. (Shahzad)

Margaret asked where you went if you wanted quiet:

> If you lived in a big family, and there were 7 of us in our family so there were always people coming and going. Where did you go for a bit of peace and quiet? I used to go to the library.

Jabbean compared the library to other study spaces. 'I think it's quieter isn't it?' she said.

It is a Lefebvrian idea to privilege the aural sense (Wunderlich, 2010; 51). Paying attention to sounds is important for the rhythmanalyst. Rhythmanalysis 'requires equally attentive eyes and ears, a head a memory and a heart.' (Lefebvre, 2004; 36) and Lefebvre writes that the rhythmanalyst will come to 'listen' to a house a street or a town as an audience listens to a symphony (2004; 22). I listened to the women's narratives within the library but the idea of

listening to the library takes on a new quite literal significance as I listen again to recordings that I made in the public libraries of Hall Green.

In the narrative extracts above, the women value the quiet of the library and find it conducive to studying; they enjoy the 'energy of silence' (Maitland, 2008; 16). For Lefebvre (2004) silences always have a meaning. The narratives were nearly all collected in libraries and sometimes in whispers, and I reflect on the consequences of this in Chapter 6. But the libraries were not always places of silence or even of quiet.

There were rhyme time music sessions at Hall Green Library. There were conversations between library staff and those in the library. And there was the noise of visiting school groups. The recordings from Tuesday mornings at Sparkhill Library capture the noise of the group rising as the group grows. Elsewhere, the recordings capture conversations between visitors to the library or conversations with librarians, murmurings, and familiar background noises of automatic doors and machines and computers and the movement of chairs. These 'typical repetitive sound units' of a particular place 'make an environment recognisable' (Wunderlich, 2010; 52). Indeed, and in keeping with the women's accounts of the library as a place of quiet, these 'keynote sounds might define a place for its residents and be almost unnoticed by them' (Rogaly and Taylor, 2009; 37). The sounds become 'listening habits' (Schafer, 1994; 9). Perhaps the educational significance of the quiet resides not in silence or in quiet as a simple acoustic/sonic property, but in the rhythms associated with quiet places. Given the conclusions of the previous chapter – the temporal significance of the library - and the role of the library in rhythming women's education and everyday life, it seems significant that Jeanette speaks, in the example above, not simply of *quiet* but of *quiet time.*

In popular representations, the requirement for quiet in libraries is sometimes portrayed as about draconian enforcement of arbitrary rules. Catherine Burke (2017) finds the quiet spaces of schools to be less about control and more about the exercise of freedom. There seems to be a similar feeling about many libraries which feature in the narratives. Perhaps because schools are institutions in which children sometimes experience little personal freedom, school libraries and reading corners emerge as spaces in which women remember exercising some freedom – either in opting to use that space in the first place or in the activity they undertake when there.

As well as remembering the quiet library corner of the classroom, Jeanette recalls the primary school reading trolley.

> There was a thing that used to come in the corridor each week – I don't know why it

> was in the corridor. And we'd go and change our Ladybird books, and that was quite a thing. You'd move up a level or choose one and there was this series of books and I don't know why this was in the corridor. You just changed books and – it was probably a big thing because you actually got to leave the classroom.

Being outside of the formal space of the classroom, the quiet corridor offered freedom. It is a space on the margins of the central activity of schooling. Halima remembers the school library as such a space.

> I would go to the school library … a corner of the school where people weren't around.

If corners within library spaces are valued, then in Halima's account the library itself stands for a corner. The library is a space apart; a heterotopic space (Foucault, 1986).

The cushion as a central motif in the examples indicates the importance of the haptic experience of space. Suggesting comfort and warmth, references to cushions imply something of how the space is being used. Accounts of 'sitting' feature frequently in the narratives. Jeanette compares the space of the library with the space of the museum as follows:

> In a museum you feel you have to be on the move. You've got to be walking round looking at things, whereas in the library you feel you can relax and you sit down and you can just exist. In the museum you still feel like you're performing a little bit. You can't just be slumped ignoring everything around you.

If people establish a sense of place using contrasts (Rose, 1995), then, here, Jeanette contrasts the space of the library with a similar public space in order to point out the salient aspects of her experience of the space.

More importantly, and in line with others accounts of the experience of social space (see Monica Degan, 2010), the body emerges as important in this account. Through some combination of the inscribed and the prescribed (Lefebvre, 2005), Jeanette feels that she can be quite free with her body; that she can 'slump'. Erving Goffman (1963) refers to such activity as behaviour settings. Talat also values the behaviours which the library allows; the ability to 'just sit' in the library. Whereas Jeanette contrasts this feature with other places, Talat aligns the library with other places which she sees as similar. She says:

> I love three places; mosques, parks and libraries.

Talat's favourite places, her 'favourite haunts' in the local area (Massey 1994; 146) are places where she feels peaceful and places where she can sit. On my visits to Sparkhill Library, Talat always sat in the same place, at the corner of the table, and she told me that this is where she sits whenever she visits the library. From this seat in the library she pointed to her surroundings:

> There is… light and beauty. The sunshine comes from here (she gestures to the North-West facing window to her left), from here (she gestures to the South-East window to her right), and I love to sit here. I love it.



Figure 4.1 Sparkhill Library: Talat sits in the chair at the corner of the table. Source: Author's photograph.

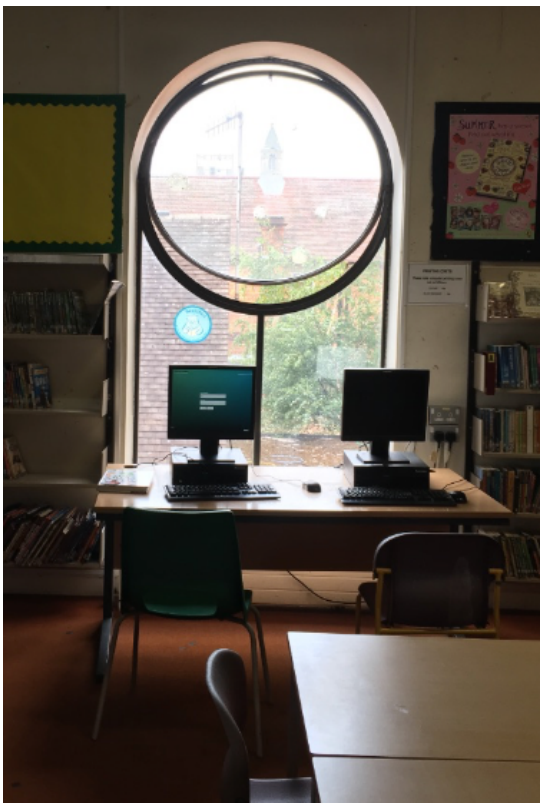


Figure 4.2 Sparkhill Library: North-west facing window. Source: Author's photograph



Figure 4.3 Sparkhill Library: South East facing window. Source: Author's photograph

Talat's narrative indicates the central role of the physical properties of the space to her experience of the library. This is an embodied understanding in which Talat engages with the space in a sensuous way. The library, here, gives 'validity' to an understanding of the self as bodily (Fausch, 1996). She experiences warmth and light. The architectural historian Adrian Forty draws attention to the importance of light in our experience of social spaces, quoting Christopher Alexander et al.: 'People will always gravitate to those rooms which have light on two sides' (1977; 747 in Forty, 2000; 117).

Windows are central to Catherine Burke's analysis of the place of light within the school. Enlightenment thinking about logic and rationality was projected metaphorically as a move from darkness towards light (Burke, 2005 ;132) and symbolic associations of light with knowledge, non-materiality, and spirituality (2005; 127,128) are significant given that for Talat the mosque is the place which most closely aligns with the library.

For Burke, windows in the school might be linked to surveillance but also to light and learning and truth (2005; 133). Indeed, the therapeutic effects of the channelling of light into a room, which Burke addresses, are consistent with Talat's description of 'light and beauty' and her typology of peaceful spaces. Light in the library might represent a spectacle. Lefebvre writes that 'we do not perceive [light] as a waveform carrying corpuscles but as a wonder that metamorphoses things, as an illumination of objects, as a dance on the surface of all that exists' (2004; 82). Light unites the haptic experience of the space with the visual. I consider the visual geography of the library next.

4.3 Visual Geographies and Spatial Rhythms

So far, I have considered the haptic. I turn now to the visual geography of the library (Rodaway, 1994). The narratives often began with descriptions of the library building. Jeanette remembers the library she visited as a child and then the library she visited as a student in Belgium:

> It was just a small sort of local library, 70s building, on the estate where we lived
>
> I used to go on the train to Leuven and they had lots of little libraries and they were all 'open' so they had the Linguistics library, the Education library, the Business library and each library was in a gorgeous old building.

Significantly, even when women talked to me about their reading and learning within particular libraries, their stories often began with a description of the building itself, suggesting that the materiality of the space is bound up with understandings of educational practice and understandings of value more broadly. Indeed, material and visual elements are not separate from the educative potentials of spaces (Spencer-Bennett and Grosvenor, forthcoming). The women's reflections on the signage and displays within libraries are illuminating in this respect. Talat told me:

> It is a good atmosphere to sit here and to learn. Subconsciously as well, you learn many things. It's not necessarily if I read these books or those books then I will learn – just like (she looks to a sign by some language learning books. She does an impression of someone looking at the sign and thinking.) 'Oh books in Urdu and Punjabi and Gujarati here. So, what about the languages? And look (she looks to another section of shelving near us) childcare'. I know, being a mother, how important it is to read these books, how helpful they could be for you. When my children were young there wasn't this section about childcare.



Figure 4.4. Books at Sparkhill Library. Source: Author's photograph

The signage within the space, in Talat's eyes, represents an important part of the material culture and the educational context of the environment.

For Janice, and in a similar vein, it is the visual element which makes her childhood experiences of the library so memorable.

> When we were at school we didn't used to have colour illustrations or posters or anything because printing was expensive so, 1956, yeah. You know if you went into a café and I can remember this - travel posters - you know that would be the only thing that was in colour. Go to Switzerland! There would be a mountain. [But in school] everything was in black and white because of the cost. So in libraries they had books with colour pictures in which was really attractive.

For Janice library books are colourful and thus attractive, but they are also objects charged with meaning, and which in turn imbue the space of the library with certain meanings. In this case the library was an innovative forward-looking place which literally and metaphorically offered colour where school did not.

In a different context, as a teacher at Redmaids school in Bristol, Janette remembers designing the new school library.

> I became the librarian and I helped organise the planning of the library which was really nice because I organised a study room in the library which had individual desks and everything. They could borrow CDs and things and then of course when computers came in, they were able to convert those little desks into a special computer room off the library which was important. I trained [student] librarians and they ran it for me, well they had to because I was mostly teaching! And they did other things. There were very high shelves and we had plants all around them and they helped grow the plants and when we had a school fete they had a plant stall and raised funds for the library.

Janette, as librarian at this time, offers a different view of the library. In Lefebvre's spatial triad, this is the space of the conceived (Lefebvre, 1996), and yet it is conceived with the child in mind. This contrasts with Janette's account of the role of the boarding school more generally:

> It was the Redmaids' School, 1634, the oldest girls' school in the country and it was independent and I don't approve of that but it was at the top of the road so you can just walk in five minutes! It was boarding and you don't realise that people just shove their children into boarding school, just for convenience and there was a lot of unhappiness there and it was an eye opener to me cus I thought well it's an independent school!

Janette sensed arrhythmia (Lefebvre, 2004; 68); children have been 'shoved' into the school. The space of the library, by contrast, is designed 'to fit the child' (Burke, 2017). There is harmony in the description of the study room, the resources and the collaborative way of working. There is harmony too in the 'static rhythms' (Wunderlich, 2010) of the 'little desks', 'high shelves' and 'plants all around'. Plants have a eurythmic quality in their patterns of growth and nature suggests something 'integral and harmonious' (Meyer, 2008; 159).

The repetition of elements here chimes with other accounts of libraries and with examples of practice that I observed. One Tuesday morning in Sparkhill Library, Sadiya's daughter was sitting on the floor near the group of tables at which the women's group were seated. The little girl was laying out a series of books in a pattern. The static rhythm of the rows and the repetition of colours echoed the activity of the women sitting around the tables above her. They too were arranging books to look at and choose from. I reflected in Chapter 3 on

patterns of library use across generations of women; here is a stark visual example of continuity across generations.

Where Lefebvre writes of successful places, the architect Jane Jacobs (2016) writes of 'effective places'. The factors which she identifies as constituting 'a thriving city or district' – what she terms the 'generators of diversity' – seem to have their parallel in the library and the features which the women describe as valuing in libraries. The 'mixed primary uses' (2016; 135) which Jacobs recommends are evident in the accounts.

The conceived space of the library (Lefebvre, 2004) prescribes the women's use of the library in various ways. But we see elements of Jacobs' diversity in the ways in which the women create the library through their use of it. The rhythms of the group 'shape the ongoing formation of the materiality of a place' (Edensor, 2010a; 3). This shaping or 'inscription' (Lefebvre, 2004) sometimes finds the women subverting the meanings of places through their spatial practice (Rogaly and Taylor, 2009), and using places in subversive ways (Cresswell, 2004). One of the ways in which the Friends of Sparkhill Women's Group raise money for charity, for example, is by bringing small unwanted items to the library to sell to the rest of the group. The items are laid out, prices are agreed and Talat collects the money. One Tuesday, before the school half term holiday, a librarian came over to the group and asked the women not to do this the following week. She explained that she did not want the children (who would be using the library in greater numbers during the half term holiday) to think that the library was a place to sell things. This is just one example of the definitions of spaces and places, and appropriate practice, being negotiated (Massey, 2005) and of the diversity of the practices which are engaged in.

Likewise, in her writing on diversity, Jacobs refers to 'peculiar scenes'. She concludes 'to be sure, city areas with flourishing diversity sprout strange and unpredictable uses and peculiar scenes. But this is not a drawback of diversity. This is the point of it, or part of it.' (Jacobs, 2016; 208). The child arranging books on the floor at the foot of one of the women, for example, is just one small peculiar scene and yet is the kind of diversity which seems, in these contexts, to create the library's vital, educational space.

4.4 Libraries and spatial stories



Figure 4.5. Entrance to former School of Education Library, UoB. Source: Author's photograph



Figure 4.6. Entrance to Sparkhill Library. Source: Author's photograph

The discussion above indicates that the materialities of the library are charged with educational significance. I referred above to the way that women often included descriptions of library spaces in their narratives. Often these descriptions feature memories of entering buildings, such as the reflections here.

> A lovely place, lovely building, it was an old building and you went upstairs to the children's library. (Janice)

> I used to go to the central library in Bristol and go upstairs and work in it. (Janice)

> I remember the building and going in. It was quite old fashioned. It was a 1960s concrete building. (Sheila)

The entering of the building is perhaps a prominent feature of these accounts because it represents a 'passing from one rhythm to another' (Lefebvre, 2004; 97); that of the street to that of the library, or in Lefebvre's terms the time of architecture and urban time (2004; 97). This transition might be sensed haptically, as in the case of Jeanette; 'libraries are warm, literally warm, you go in out of the cold'. Such elements within the narrative reveal something of the way memory works with regards to buildings. They also act to orient the listener. If women use temporal orientations to help tell their story ('and remember this was a time when'), then they also use spatial orientations.

> A lovely place, lovely building, it was an old building and you went upstairs to the children's library. (Janice)

Here *descriptions*, which might suggest something quite static, are actually dynamic and imply movement with the space. These orientations or, in Michel De Certeau's terms, these 'treatments of space' (1984;122) tell us what one can do in a place. For De Certeau 'every story is a travel story - a spatial practice' (1984; 115).

Sheila's description of Hall Green, which she gave whilst sketching a map of the area that is local to her house, represents another 'travel story'.

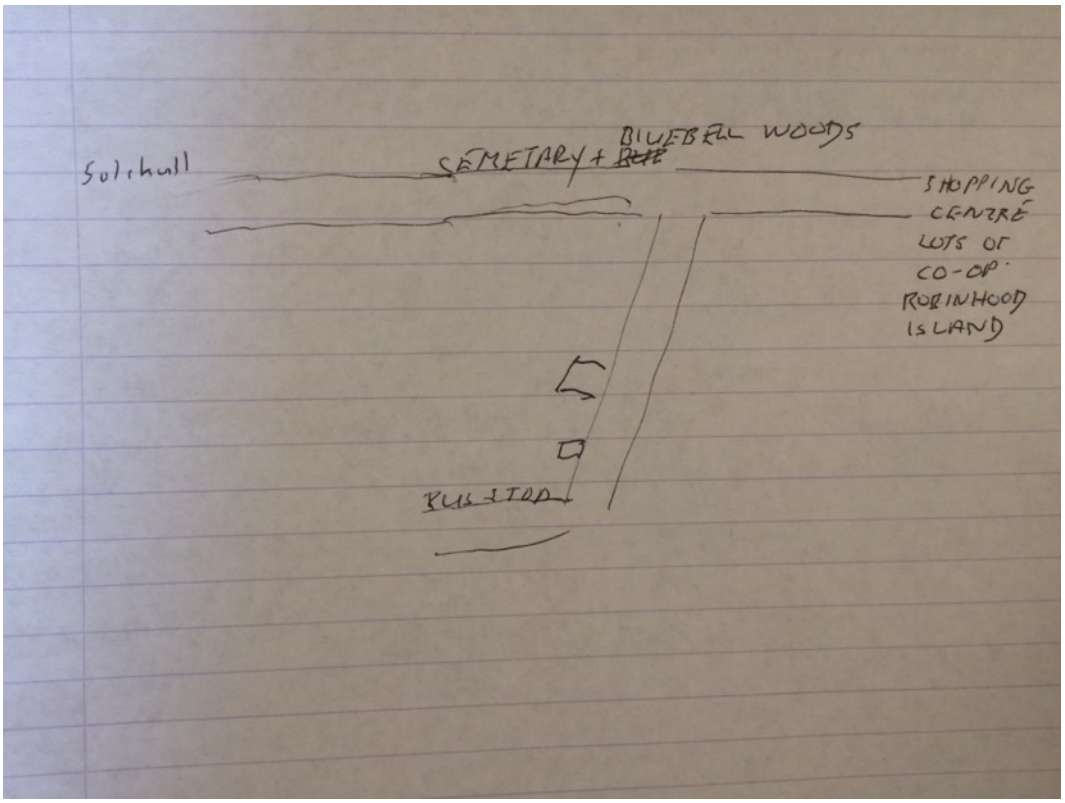


Figure 4.7. Sheila's sketch of Hall Green. Source: Author's photograph.

This is an extract from Sheila's transcript:

> You go up there just along there and…no you don't need to go up to Robin Hood. You come up Pitmaston and that would be to the main shopping centre here ..centre (speaking as she writes) ……lots… of Co-ops .. you could get anything from all the shops up there... everything. The Co-op was by Robin Hood Island but it's much different now ..so I'd come up Pitmaston and there was the school there. So we just walked up to the school … so along here you walked along there and there was a cemetery .. cemetery. I used to love going up there and looking at the graves. I don't know why… just interested in looking at them but the woods were lovely but you see this road went ... goes on to Solihull and you see I was a great walker. I used to walk or run but all along here there were woods and but now they've got rid of most of them because first of all, the cemetery they've had to cut it all back for the graves but up here it's all houses ... that was when I was young.

Sheila sketched the map (Figure 4.7) to help tell her story about the things she used to spend her time doing when she was young. Geography, meaning 'earth drawing', is

concerned with ‘representations of an experienced world’ (Rodaway, 1994; 13) and geographers have long been interested in such sketches, finding meanings in what is included and excluded in the schema. Helen Scalway’s Travelling Blind project, for example, involved asking people to draw their mental maps of the London underground. She was interested in how people mentally construct the urban spaces they move through (2000; xvi). Sheila’s map also constitutes a mental construction, in this case of a then quite rural space at the edge of a city. Like Scalway’s project, I have the transcription of the commentary which accompanied the map drawing. But importantly, and unlike those underground passengers drawing their routes home, the drawing was not Sheila’s attempt to draw a space as it currently exists now. Rather she is drawing the Hall Green of the 1940s with Cooperatives, a large cemetery, and woods.

Together, the map and the narrative constitute a spatial story; one which is significant in its own right and also acts to establish a context for Sheila’s other stories around library use and her lived experience more broadly. It offers a setting for the action. The main routes and landmarks are established. Michel De Certeau’s conception of the map and the tour, which builds on Linde and Labov’s analyses of oral narrations, are useful in appraising this narrative. De Certeau exemplifies these as follows.

> The map: *The girl’s room is next to the kitchen.*
>
> The tour: *You turn right and come into the living room.* (1984; 119)

Sheila alternates between the form of the map and the tour in her telling – ‘you go up there just along the road’ (tour), ‘the Co-op was by Robin Hood island’ (map), and ‘there was the school’ (map). De Certeau’s (1988) analysis of the combination of the tour followed by a map (of the kind ‘you walked along there (tour) and there was a cemetery’ (map)) finds the map element to be conditioned by the tour element. In this instance, the action of walking along the road allows one to see the cemetery. Thus, these descriptions of the local area as ‘stories about space, exhibit …the operations that allow it’ (1988; 121). De Certeau suggests that ‘everyday stories tell us what one can do in [space] and make out of it.’ (1988; 122). The idea that the story allows us to see what one can do in an area is evident again in Sheila’s description of the local shops; ‘you could get anything from all the shops up there... everything’. Even the road, ‘which goes on to Solihull’, seems to allow for Sheila to be ‘a great walker’. One enables the other. In Lefebvrian (1996) terms the space of the conceived enables the space of the lived.

> This road went ... goes on to Solihull and … you see I was a great walker. I used to

> walk or run all along here. (Sheila)

We see the significance of the description of each route and landmark as the story unfolds. The idea that stories might indicate what one can do is an important one for this project. Narrators made frequent reference to what they were able to do in the library, in the sense of being 'allowed' to do. This was the case across the narratives and across the lifespan. Libraries are bound up with women's right to space and to time and Neha's account, which I considered above, exemplifies this.

Talat describes the family's routine around a visit to the library on a Saturday. I mentioned her account in Chapter 3 but draw attention to it briefly here as a spatial story.

> The park is just near the library so when my children were young after sitting here reading and having books we used go to the park sit there and enjoy and the children would play. Then we used to buy fish and chips. Sitting on the bench. Then we would go further, til the end, Springfield, window shopping or shopping. So this was a weekend we used to do.

In spaces of representation we find 'an affective kernel' (Merrifield, 2006; 110). Talat overlays physical space with meanings and the library is revealed to have been an important place. The fact that we met at Sparkhill Library accounts, in part, for the deictic use of 'here'. But there is also the suggestion of familiarity and even love. De Certeau (1984) refers to a 'here in relation to an abroad', a 'familiarity in relation to a foreignness'. For Talat the library is the 'here'; the familiar. When Talat says 'we would go further..til the end .. Springfield' she is referring to the Stratford Road. Springfield is the area south of Sparkhill Library and Avondale Road, where she lived at this time, rather than the end of the Stratford Road which continues south into Hall Green and beyond. Thus 'the end' to which Talat refers is the end of the stretch of shops, the stretch of road which was the setting of their Saturdays. There is something here of the perception of a place. The proximity of the library to her home helps to give a feeling of the familiar in relation to the foreign and, in the ordering of events for a Saturday, makes this the logical starting point, as well as the starting point for her story.



Figure 4.8 The area around Sparkhill Library ('Liby' on map). Source: https://osmaps.ordnancesurvey.co.uk

Through her narrative, Talat, like Sheila, 'sketches' her own map of the area. And just as in Sheila's description of Hall Green, boundaries are set for the limits of her activity in each direction.

In many ways, the spatial practices of the research encounter itself were conducive to reflections on engagements with libraries. Drawing on the work of Walter Benjamin, Ian Grosvenor refers to 'effecting the act of remembering' so that 'correspondences are established between the arc of present and past states of consciousness' (2002; 111). Social science researchers might use photo and object elicitation to achieve this aim (Pole and Morrison, 2003; 63). In this project the library space itself acted to 'effect the act of remembering' (Grosvenor, 2002; 111).

Likewise, Sheraza told me about her use of Sparkhill Library in the 1980s whilst we sat

within the same library.

> It was the same as this! This used to be there (gesturing to the furniture) I used to come with my daughters. This was all there.. (pointing to the children's area) …since that time it's there! All these shelves were there! Same setting! I was surprised the first time when I came here with anji pudni and ranji pudni.. I said 'oh the setting is same!'

The objects and areas created within the library by the placement of furniture triggered memories and aided Sheraza in narrating her experiences.

> [They] used to sit there on the mat for story reading (she gestures to the little mat on the floor in the children's section).

In De Certeau's terms, the narrative here presents a map of the area of the library in front of us. Sheraza provides 'a tableau' (De Certeau, 1984; 119). Others took me on a tour of a library to show me a particular area or collection of books. Such 'conceptual walking' (Wunderlich, 2008) is a reflective mode, which in the context of the research encounter heightens both mine and the narrator's awareness by 'rendering places strange' (Wunderlich, 2008; 130).

Sheraza is shocked to find that the 'setting is the same'. References to familiar objects, the physical setting changing very little, and to old buildings were common. The word 'old' appears in Sheila, Janice's and Jeanette's accounts, above. Old buildings are important to Jane Jacobs' appraisal of the effective city. She writes that a district must have a 'good proportion of old buildings' (2011; 150). 'When a neighbourhood is new all at once…It is dead. It was dead from birth' (2011; 198). Stuart Brand also writes of the attraction of old buildings noting that people 'find them freeing', and, suggesting that one is aware of the rhythms within and outside the immediate space, he writes that a 'draughty old building reminds us what the weather is up to outside' (1994; 33).

Writing in the 1990s and specifically of libraries, Brand maintains that although their collections grow, libraries 'exude architectural permanence' (1994; 44). Whether he would say the same now, as public libraries, at least, are in an unsure state, old buildings are implied by this claim. Aptly, for a consideration of their educational role, he writes that 'time has taught them, and they teach us', and, echoing the words of the women, he notes that 'some rooms remain reassuringly the same for decades' (1994; 48).

This continuity might be cause for celebration; even when libraries are run down Jeanette talks about quite liking 'the scruffiness', for example. Likewise, Sheraza and I share a joke about the story mat possibly being the same one that her children sat on in the 1980s. But the fact that the libraries seem to some of the women to have changed so little partly reflects, of course, their lack of funding; their marginal status. And thus, this discussion returns to the beginning; those reflections on inhabiting the margins of the library itself - the cushion in the corner. When public policy decisions mean that libraries are underfunded the library itself is marginalized; it becomes its own kind of corner.

4.5 Halima: a place in history

> Like all men of the Library, I have travelled in my youth; I have wondered in search of a book.
>
> Jorge Luis Borges, 2000; 78

In considering place and space I have focused so far on the physical. The narratives point to the importance of other kinds of space too. Heidi Mirza (2009) argues that for black women existence is not just about physical space but also the power to occupy historical space. In this section I consider the library as a site for the search for a place in history. Halima's narrative is illustrative in this instance.

Halima's understandings about the value of the library and her memoires of her engagements with libraries are bound up with her self-understanding. As a young black Muslim woman, Halima reports not having seen herself represented in her reading. She describes reading the Sweet Valley High books marketed at teenage girls and finding them 'foreign' to her and her experiences. Halima's early life experiences, including her reading experiences, had consequences for her understanding of her self. Growing up she didn't see her own experiences as 'interesting' or enabling.

> Until recently I didn't think anything about my religion or my ethnicity was interesting. It was just I'm Somali or I'm Muslim, nothing really exciting. Not much you can really do with that.

We met in Hall Green library, near where Halima lives. On one occasion we talked about her attempts to learn about Somali history within the library.

H: There's not much from my parents and I don't have close relationships with my extended family so if I wanted to learn about Somali history the first place I came was here. I came here to see if they had my reservation for a book on Somali history but apparently that one's lost so like, I don't have that access. On the internet - there's not much there.

K: Do you still need that book?

H: Yeah, I check about once a year for it.

K: A book on Somali history.

H: Yeah one that seems like its legit, like got some credentials. There was this kind of thing I saw on the internet like a discussion about like who tells the story because a lot of people were concerned it came from a white name. Although I don't mind where it came from, I would like to see a good Somali history book with a Somali name on the front. And I've just been trying to look for it. One day somebody will. It is possible.

Here the library is a place where a particular book which Halima knows to exist might be found. But it is also a place where she searches for books which she hopes exist. She would like to find a 'Somali history book with a Somali name on the front'. In the context of Halima's invisibility within her fiction reading, a search for such a book might be read as a search for the 'power to occupy historical space' (Mirza; 2009).

Halima tells me about another book which she has been looking for but has not yet read; *The Perks of Being a Wall Flower* by Stephen Chobsky.

I think with *The Perks of Being a Wall Flower*… I don't know what it's about at all, but I think I liked the title and especially with my frame of mind at the time.

Reflecting on how she might now feel if she read it, she said:

It could be disappointment, or it could be about looking back at how I felt then and seeing the relationship between the two. I don't think how I felt then is how I feel now so it'd be kind of like a nostalgic thing.

Halima's concern here is with examining old feelings about herself and viewing them through the lens of a work of fiction. It is not only physical libraries and their objects which are

important to Halima but also imaginary libraries. Alberto Manguel claims that we 'lend libraries the qualities of our hopes' (2006; 290). Halima has hopes for what a book might be able to do with regards to shaping her self-understanding.

In transcribing our conversations between our meetings, I was reminded of Jorge Luis Borges' 'Library of Babel' and the representation of the universe as an infinite library (2000). The next time we met, I told Halima about this. She said,

> I have a favourite poem of his; it's called The Suicide. It's just about wanting a place in the world.

Halima's description of the poem seems an equally fitting one for her own search within the library. Here, the library might be 'a source of the self' (Taylor, 1989) and since 'identity is intimately tied to memory' (Hayden, 1995; 9), it might also be a site for a search for one's past. There is a twin concern with a private quest to find oneself and one's past represented both in fiction and non-fiction texts and also a search for a place in history much more broadly. Halima's search confirms that we are concerned with 'where we have come from and where we have dwelt' (Hayden, 1995; 9), representing a search for recognition and visibility.

Halima's narrative closely aligns with accounts of invisibility in Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe's work *The Heart of the Race* (2018) [1985], despite it having been published over thirty years ago. Black women describe being 'conspicuous in their absence' in schoolbooks and yet in other ways having been singled out and victimized. Similarly, Halima has experienced the invisibility of a lack of representation in her education and her reading and yet she has also experienced the visibility of surveillance. I consider surveillance next.

4.6 A place without surveillance

I have argued that Halima's feeling of not seeing herself represented in her reading, represent a kind of invisibility. There are, though, other ways in which Halima feels very visible in her everyday life. In this section I contrast the library with other places in terms of the surveillance that Halima and others report being subject to. Halima explained,

> If you go into stores or say you're in a Starbucks or coffee place, there are baristas and security guards and they're aware of you and sometimes that's not comfortable. I

> don't really feel comfortable being around security guards. There have been a few occasions where I was just followed round and it's a nuisance. There have been a couple of times where I've just messed around with them and taken them around a store.

Halima suggests that it is because she is black Muslim woman that she experiences this sort of surveillance. 'Hypersurveillance', to use Mirza's (2009) term, is something Halima most associates with shops and cafes; places where one is expected to spend money. But she feels being a black Muslim woman also makes her feel highly visible in other institutions such as the Mosque and the school.

> Even when I went to mosques there was this kind of thing where people either saw you as a Muslim first or black first and for me it's always been black first. And they notice the headscarf much later and they're like what do you wear that for? And I'm a Muslim and they see me as a black person, but not their kind of black, which goes back to the representation thing. You're not their kind of black you're not seen as .. it's hard to say. Like, growing up in London there was the black Jamaican, Caribbean kids, and Nigerian, African kids and especially the Asian kids. There were segregations and even the Asian kids were split into Pakistani and Indian. There were segregations and it was hard to make friends because of it and, a lot of times, we were the people who didn't fit anywhere.

This experience of segregation at school between various groups and a feeling of not belonging is something which I return to below. In the library Halima does not feel the same visibility.

> I think the one place where you're completely invisible is a library.

Here, the invisibility is not the invisibility of being marginalised or overlooked but the invisibility of not feeling that being black or being Muslim or being a woman is her prominent characteristic, or something which makes her a suspicious character. Halima's account of her experience of different physical and conceptual spaces reveals a complex relationship around feelings of visibility. Halima herself reflects on this complicated position:

> I always feel kind of visible and invisible.

Significantly, within the library, she is not subject to the kind of surveillance which she is subject to in a shop. Halima perhaps perceives similitude amongst patrons in the library. Yet

she is not ignored. After our meeting in the library one morning, I was talking to a librarian about my research leaflets and she mentioned that the woman that I'd been speaking to earlier was 'often in the library'. In many ways, despite her feelings of invisibility, Halima is better known in the library than in the shops and cafes which subject her to such surveillance.

Halima's account aligns with Neha's in important ways. Neha also views the library as a place where she is free from the surveillance which she experiences elsewhere. Neha, as discussed in Chapter 3, is unemployed and uses public libraries every day. The use of the computers is one of the things Neha values most about the library. She explained:

> I can use the computers. You know everywhere else when you go on computers there's dirty stuff you know and they keep an eye on you and here you can just do what you like and … Like, you know if you go to an internet café? You know if you type in something you're not supposed to it comes up on all the computers and they take you off the computer and take all the computers away and they think that you're accessing porn. Yeah, you know you go on a website and it just comes up and it won't go off, but they take you off.

As someone who does not have any qualifications, has dyslexia and describes herself as 'struggling' with things, Neha might not have the same skills in information literacy as others who use the computers in internet cafes. Neha is aware that in an internet cafe the staff 'keep an eye on you'. By using the computers, she risks humiliation and censure. It is interesting that Neha views the library as somewhere that you 'just do what you like' when using the computers. At the library, of course, there is more filtering of the material which can be viewed on the internet and 'pop ups' – which at an internet café 'just come up' – are more likely to be blocked. Thus, although the library staff are controlling the activity which takes place within it, these controls are not visible to Neha. Consequently, the library staff might not seem to Neha to be 'keeping an eye' on her. In the library, Neha feels safer accessing information and she does not experience the surveillance that she feels elsewhere.

These accounts are illuminating for an understanding of the library as a particular kind of place. Marc Auge's (1995) conception of non-places is illustrative here. Non-places, for Auge, are 'those curious spaces which are everywhere and nowhere' (1995; back cover). Significantly for this discussion, non-places are characterised by 'checks' of various kinds. One is required, in 'non-places', to be able to produce a ticket or a pass or to be able to pay. Chiming with Neha and Halima's experiences of surveillance and suspicion, in the 'non-

place' the user 'is always required to prove his innocence' (1995;102).

This discussion raises two important points. First the very 'place-ness' of the library comes to the fore. I cite Auge's work not to argue that the cafes and shops which the women describe above are 'non-places', but rather to highlight the place-ness of the public libraries which they find to be so different. Unlike Auge's non-places, at the library one can, according to Janette, 'walk in and walk out'. There is a lack of obligation; a freedom to come and go. The library emerges as a place where one might experience protection in place of constraint and recognition in place of surveillance.

Secondly, if educational sites should be viewed as spaces for reinforcing or resisting ideas about gender (Mirza and Reay, 2000) then these accounts, particularly Halima's account, suggests that as a particular kind of educational site, the library might also be a place in which to resist dominant ideas about race. I pick up these threads in the next chapter through a consideration of Halima's understanding of her educational worth.

4.7 Summary

Towards the beginning of this chapter I asked Lefebvre's question, 'What are and what would be the most successful places? What are the times and rhythms of daily life which are inscribed and prescribed in these 'successful' spaces favourable to happiness?' (Lefebvre, 1996; 151) Libraries, in the women's accounts, are places whose materiality and sensory properties are charged with educational significance. The women value and see as significant the various visual, aural and haptic properties of libraries. Particular modes of bodily inhabitation are possible. Women's 'spatial stories' (De Certeau, 2004) indicate what is possible within a library and reveal the women's attachments to libraries.

The library is drawn in the narratives as a successful place (Lefebvre, 1996) or an 'effective place' (Jacobs, 2016) whose materiality and sensory properties are educationally significant. It is drawn as a particular kind of place; it is a site for the search for a place in history, and it is contrasted with other places with regard to the surveillance experienced. The library therefore becomes somewhere, once again, for identities to be resisted and for dominant ideas to be challenged. Libraries, in the women's accounts, are 'successful places'.

Part 1 has laid the groundwork for an examination of the way that libraries both foster educational desire and host women's activities as they work on their desire to educate

themselves and others. And I turn to this in Chapter 5. But first, in Part 2 of this chapter, I examine women's accounts of their journey to the library.

Part 2: The Journey to the Library

To be, I would now say, is not to be in place but to be along paths.

Ingold, 2011; 12

4.8 Why Journeys?

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel De Certeau proposes that 'every story is a travel story' (1984; 115). Embedded within the women's narratives of their engagements with libraries, there are smaller stories of travel. These 'travel stories' describe the means by which the women journeyed to the library and offer reflections on the modes of travel, their 'physical deciphering of space' (Lefebvre, 1991; 38) and their 'routes through a place' (Massey, 1991; 28).

In Part 1 of Chapter 4, I considered women's memories of entering libraries and their accounts of their movements around library buildings, conceiving of these as 'spatial stories' (De Certeau, 1984). In this second part of the chapter, I consider spatial stories on a different scale as I reflect on women's accounts of their journeys to and from a library.

Cultural and spatial geographers are concerned with journeys and with routes and pathways in their analysis of social space. But why consider journeys here? How does an examination of an account of a journey aid an understanding of the role of the library in women's education and everyday lives? There are a number of practical and conceptual reasons to pay attention to the women's travel stories.

First, the journeys serve to shed light on the role of the library. Lefebvre (1991) saw social space as composed simultaneously of the lived, the conceived and the perceived. In considering women's journey's to libraries, perceived space comes to the fore as women's navigations of space are articulated. The narratives capture spatial practice. As I go on to explore, a number of overlapping practices can be discerned and, perhaps more importantly, as gendered and classed spaces, the modes of transport described, and the accounts of libraries converge in important ways. The journey also links to the library through the porous

relationship between the physical library and the mental connection which exists with that library on the journey. The narratives reveal that the space can be visualised at a remove.

A second reason to pay attention to journeys is that libraries themselves make journeys. Travelling libraries and mobile libraries are ready examples. Historically, the schools' library service in Birmingham, and elsewhere, lent books to schools and boxes of relevant materials for a particular topic would arrive to form a display or a temporary classroom library, perhaps. Even in the most ordinary examples of library use, books and other resources are always making journeys – whether short or long – as they circulate between homes, institutions and within the library system. In this way, even if one was to conceive of a library as 'static' – and for Doreen Massey (1991) places are never static – there is always movement and flow inherent to its workings.

Third, as an everyday practice, journeys are associated with routines and with particular rhythms. Since journeys entail a movement from one place to another, they unite concerns with routines and rhythms and with space and place. Rhythmanalytically, journeys are significant since 'rhythm is found in movement through space' (Elden, 2004b; viii). In making the journey to the library, women move between the rhythms of private and public space and between the rhythms of streets and buildings, passing 'from one rhythm to another' (Lefebvre, 2004; 97). If I want to argue that the library rhythms women's lives, I need to account for their journeys.

Fourth, a consideration of accounts of journeys of a *literal*, physical kind opens up a space for an exploration of journeys a *metaphorical* kind. The women's explorations of a subject or topic, for example, can usefully be seen as a kind of travel. Such spatial metaphors link journeys to curiosity and educational desire – a theme I return to in the next chapter. Since reading has itself been linked with women's 'journeys' to public identities, journeys of various scales and orders become important to theorising women's engagements with libraries.

Finally, and perhaps most important of all, there exists another, theoretical, reason for considering journeys. This has to do with conceptions of place. Doreen Massey maintains that places, whether streets or whole continents, should not be viewed as 'areas with boundaries around' (1991; 28). To do so, she argues, is problematic both because it ignores the wider geographical context of the place which is being considered and because it privileges some sense of an internal history over the role of social relations in the sense of a 'meeting place'. Places, for Massey,

> can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region or even a continent. And this in turn allows a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local. (1991; 28)

Viewed in this way, some consideration of the networks in which libraries exist and their links with the wider world seems important. 'The routes and networks that link up the places set aside for work, private life and 'leisure' (Lefebvre, 1991; 38) are reported upon in the women's travel stories. The routes to the libraries of Hall Green and, elsewhere, the paths the women traverse and the networks of public transport which serve these libraries, form an important part of the context for understanding the place which we call a library and the place of the library in women's lives.

The accounts feature descriptions of the physical journeys made to the library and I consider these first. I then discuss the metaphorical journeys which women make within the library before considering the role of the journeys in the creation of places. The discussion in this chapter incorporates, then, journeys of different kinds – emotional, narrative, metaphorical and physical.

Women often described travelling to a library on foot and by bus. I take these modes of travel as my headings in the following discussion.

4.9 Journeys on foot

As an embodied rhythm (Lefebvre, 2004) and as part of the complex polyrhythmy of place (Edensor, 2010b; 69), walking is a way of existing and of increasing one's knowledge of an environment (Sennett, 2018). When academic attention is paid to walking, it is often knowledge and understanding which becomes the focus. Psychogeographer Ian Sinclair's (2003) journey around the M25 on foot, although a circular path, was a way of coming to understand the terrain. Meanwhile, his walks in the footsteps of the poet John Clare were a way of coming to understand the man (Sinclair, 2006). Such attention to walking has also been marked by an interest in not only rural space but in urban areas and in 'participation in public life' (Solnit, 2002; 176).

Within the narratives that I collected, walking is a mode of travel which the women refer to frequently, and value highly. Reflecting on her library use as she was growing up, Halima recalls,

> I could walk there.

And now,

> I walk all the time because I can't drive.

Janette told me,

> It's local libraries, that's what you need. You can walk down to the shops and go to the library at the same time.

Meanwhile Anne reflects,

> Being able to go to the library…I would walk to the one in Kings Heath. It was walking distance and bicycling distance.

And Margaret told me,

> The library - it's such easy access. Especially if people don't drive.

The narratives reveal women talking about what they are *able* to do; 'I could walk', 'you can walk', 'being able', 'it was walking distance'. A local, community library is implicated in these accounts. Such a library affords one the ability to make the journey on foot, and, in many of these accounts, with the absence of other transport, the ability to make the journey at all. The narratives indicate the proximity of the library then, but they also suggest the everyday nature of the journey. It is one bound up with everyday activities, with a visit to the shops, perhaps, and it is one which takes place with some regularity.

The journey to the library is also an early journey that women describe making when they move to a new place. Janice, for example, moved to Australia for a time and, in a new place, remembers taking her children to the library's film screenings:

> They used to have a big film screen, a projector and show films - 'Ham and Eggs'. I can still see it now.

And when they returned to the UK,

> And then we came back after five years. And the first thing I did was go the library. Because we moved to Bristol and I didn't know anybody. And I found a thing on wind surfing, so I took the kids windsurfing. Surfing in the docks – and, you know, other pamphlets and things like that.

The women that I spoke to have travelled and lived in many different places; theirs are 'moving histories' (Rogaly and Taylor, 2009) and libraries represent a constant and an important first journey in a new place.

Some of the accounts reveal memories not of a predetermined journey to a library but more of a wandering in which a library is happened upon. Rebecca Solnit distinguishes thus between the wayfarer and the wanderer (2014). Janice, for example, remembers having recently moved house one Christmas:

> I remember we were bored in the Christmas holidays because we'd moved into this lovely little… it was like a miner's cottage but we had two weeks off and we didn't know what to do with ourselves cus it was just a little bit far out, so we walked to this local library.

Jeanette, as I described in Part 1 of the chapter, remembers exploring the local area when she was working in Japan:

> The other memory in Japan is going for a walk around the place that we used to live called Shiki which was like a suburb of Tokyo. I remember being out for a walk in Shiki and there was a building there and for some reason – it must have had a sign on it saying library in English, and I remember walking into this library.

In Filipa Wunderlich's (2010) terms the journeys described here are 'discursive walks'. In these accounts, it is the exploration of unfamiliar areas which leads to the discovery of local community libraries. The situation of the library is important in enabling these chance encounters and walking, in these discursive ways, is an important mode for exploration of this kind. Consequently, references to walking also feature in women's descriptions of their local areas and their accounts of their childhood activity. Sheila told me:

> There are quite a lot of areas of green round here and down in towards Kings Heath and it's very easy to walk out and go on walks. We used to go for walks and you know the section of the road and we were all young together you know, talked and met.

Margaret described walking around Hall Green in the early 1940s.

> We were very independent. We'd walk every day and we'd do it together as a group. We had far more freedom than children today.

Such an account recalls Tim Edensor's belief that 'the rhythm and flow of walking folds body, self, other humans and non-humans, time-space and place together' (2010b; 78). Margaret's memory demonstrates that accounts of walks and walking in the narratives are ways to say something about a place or a time, to comment on experiences of childhood at a particular time.

Indeed, Margaret and Sheila's narratives reveal the way in which walking might forge links between various places. De Certeau (1984) talks of 'transcribing paths'. The sketch which Sheila drew (Figure 4.7), since it was all experienced on foot, acts like transcription of her routes around the area and pairs with the transcription that I have made of her narrative to give a fuller picture of her childhood activity in the area, as 'intertwined paths give their shape to spaces' and 'weave places together' (De Certeau,1984: 97).

Places might also have been woven together on journeys taken by bike. Jeanette remembers,

> As the kids got a bit bigger, it would be a day out. And I suppose really it might be harking back to what I used to do with my mum. A day out would be to cycle to Northfield library, and it would take quite a while to cycle to Northfield because they were on their diddy bikes and we used to cycle through all the parks and Northfield library is a nice big one. It's got lots of kind of new books and we'd spend ages there reading in the library and then getting the books out.

Borrowing Fiipa Wunderlich's (2010) typology for walking, the journey to the library remembered here is somewhere between 'discursive' and 'purposive'. Jeanette and her family's journey by bike was designed with a destination in mind and yet, in taking in the parks between their home in Bournville and the library in Northfield, the journey was meandering and rhythmed by the seasons, the weather, and by a relative lack of time pressure. Here is De Certeau's 'chorus of idle footsteps' (1984; 97), but for the bicycle.

The body and the environment, time and place come together in these journeys. If, following Edensor, walking is understood as a weaving through place, 'the walking body weaves a path that is contingent and accordingly produces contingent notions of place' (2010; 70). The

narratives capture the women's notions of place and their sense of place as experienced through their moving bodies.

The narratives also suggest that these moving bodies are political. The sense that, as introduced above, the local library is a place one is physically able to get to is important for all. But it takes on a particular significance for women in certain circumstances.

Anne, at the insistence of her husband, gave up her job upon marriage. Her local library was important to her at this time.

> When I was going to Hall Green library… that was my escape in my first marriage. Because I had no money, no prospects, but I could just about get there on foot.

The mode of travel here is not an incidental detail but an important part of the narrative. It is bound up with the value of the library for Anne at this time in her life and the particular shape of her day.

Similarly, for Halima, travelling on foot, meant that she could combine the trip to the library with a visit to a friend.

> My life was a bit different to how other Somali girls would be treated, especially other Asian Muslims would be treated. If you were a girl and you wanted to go out of your house you could only go at the front of your house, at the back or to someone's house if your family knew them. I used to go to my friend's house on the way to the library in Golders Green – my friend lived in Hendon so I could go to Hendon Park and also go to her house with the excuse of going to the library. I would definitely go to the library and it was sort of like I was allowed to do that. And in Ilford I had two friends so I could go to one and talk to her and go to the other and then go to the library. And it was ok, cus I did go to the library. So I could socialise and also do what I said I was doing.

For Halima, walking to the library gave her some freedom to socialise. Halima's narrative, like Anne's above, illuminates the mode of travel, linking the activity to certain freedoms. Importantly, the potential of a visit to the library, and particularly a visit to the library made on foot are linked, in both of these instances, with being a woman in particular circumstances. The accounts confirm that, as gendered spaces (Massey, 1994), the spaces and places the women describe are not natural. Rather, 'we live in places that come pre-structured, embedded with particular interests in the context of unequal power relations. Those places

are not operational without practice in them' (De Certeau 1984; 39). Further, our mobilities in relation to certain spaces are gendered too (Massey, 1994). Massey writes that 'the degree to which we can move between countries, or walk about the streets at night or venture out of hotels in foreign cities is not just influenced by capital', and, referring specifically to women's ability to 'walk about the streets', she stresses that:

> Survey after survey has shown how women's mobility, for instance, is restricted – in a thousand different ways, from physical violence to being ogled at or made to feel quite simply 'out of place' – not by 'capital', but by men. (1994; 147).

In this way, the library might be seen as a refuge or a safe space in some way. The women's group which meet at Sparkhill Library see their group and much of the activity associated with it, as a space for women. On one occasion they invited me to an event and one of the women added, 'It's not for your husband – it's just for women'.

If the library is a gendered space which takes on a particular role in these narratives, then gendered too are the practices associated with the journey. The practice of walking to the library is revealed to be classed and gendered and racialised, with men's restrictions on women's movements uniting the accounts of Anne and Halima.

One final kind of walking seems worthy of consideration. That is the walking that took place as part of the research encounter itself. Saba and I walked around Sparkhill Library together. She showed me the areas of the library that she often used and the sections of shelving which housed the books in translation that she and some of the other women had talked to me about.

There is, in this activity of showing something, a sense of ownership of the public library and its materials. Indeed, the possession of a library card and the sense that as a *public* library it is a public space and constitutes public property is a powerful one. Such explorative walking, or 'conceptual walking' (Wunderlich, 2010), is distinct from the walking described elsewhere. Wunderlich defines conceptual walking as 'a reflective mode', representing a 'creative response to our interpretation of place' (132). In research encounters of this kind, walking is linked to thinking and feeling in particular ways; Tim Edensor links walking to 'thinking and feeling in a world in formation' (2010b; 73). Thus, 'sensual and mental processes become mixed' (2010b; 78).

Further, and of particular significance in considering research encounters such as this, when engaged in conceptual walking, we 'heighten awareness by rendering places strange'

(Wunderlich, 2010; 133). The research 'wanderings' in Sparkhill Library had this quality. Being guided around the library by Saba heightened my awareness of the surroundings, alienating myself from a (relatively) familiar environment, and rendering the library strange. Tim Edensor's assertions that 'the rhythms of walking allow for a particular experiential flow of successive moments of detachment and attachment, physical immersion and mental wandering, memory, recognition and strangeness' (2010b; 70) were meant, perhaps, for walking of the most prototypical kind, and yet they hold true for the walking of the research encounter. The detachment and attachment and the feelings of recognition and strangeness are likely to occur in different ways and at different times for Saba and I, but the description seems to resonate with our activity of exploring the spaces, examining the shelves and for our whispered conversations, as walking becomes 'a heuristic for finding out about a place' (Pahl, 2014).

4.10 Journeys by bus

Mostly we relied on the bus service.

Anne

On the morning of 6 February, 2017, I arrived at Kings Heath Public Library to find a sign saying that the library had closed at short notice to enable the staff to discuss the 'future direction of the library service'. The consultation period for the libraries had just ended. People arrived and read the sign and left. Some seemed concerned about what it might mean. Some walked back in the direction that they had come and others headed to the bus stop. One man standing next to me announced that everything had 'been terrible since Thatcher'. I wrote these notes in my research diary on that day:

> *Waiting outside of the library today 6/2/2017*
>
> A man was standing outside for a while telling everyone that all of the libraries would probably close and this is what they (the staff in the meeting) were probably talking about. He came to stand next to me and told me that everything had been terrible since Thatcher and that life is very hard for poor people and that there is no money for anything which poor people need - like the library - and there was a sign on his local swimming bath to say it was closing. He looked over to the people now

> gathered at the bus stop and said that he thought they would be getting rid of bus passes too.

The man clearly saw the changes to libraries as linked to other disruptions. He senses arrhythmia; a more general feeling of marginalisation. In this context, with people arriving at the library by bus and then, with the library closed, returning to the bus stop to await the next bus, buses and libraries are drawn together.

It is perhaps unsurprising that in so many accounts of using libraries, particularly public libraries, women talk about the public transport which take them there. Buses are, for the geographer Alistair Bonnett, a defining feature of the street for those who 'cannot, or wish not to, use a car' (2000; 27). Indeed, cars are not actually mentioned in any of the narratives apart from to say that buses are, or were, important because of the absence of a car. Ferhat, for example, remembers:

> We used to live in Stetchford. So we used to come to the library by the Swan Centre. We used to catch the bus because we didn't have a car, so it was like an adventure for us. We'd all get on this bus and go to the library

Women describe the nature of these journeys and their activity. The French writer Georges Perec, observes that buses are well suited to reading (2008; 184). Reflecting on her time studying for an English degree, Halima feels the same:

> I couldn't just sit there and read the books that I wanted to take out – I'd rather carry all of those books home with me. And it was a long journey – I'd take the number 11 from there so it's a long trip. I'd like the trip because I could read on the bus.

Jeanette, meanwhile, described the journey home from the library taken by train. If, as the artist and illustrator Quentin Blake stated the train 'speaks to the imagination' (2005; 25) then, much like the library, the train spoke to Jeanette's imagination. She saw the train ride as an opportunity to organise the readings for her doctorate:

> I used to love those days out [in Leuven's libraries] because I'd get there and photocopy maybe 50 articles and then come back on the train and put them all in their plastic wallets.

In their 'travelling incarceration' (De Certeau, 1984; 112) the activities associated with the library continue, with Halima reading her course books on the bus and Jeanette filing her papers on the train.

Jill remembers the materials borrowed at the library being useful for bus journeys:

> I used to borrow digital books as well. If I was going in on the bus to work, I couldn't read things - it used to make me feel sick. So I used to listen to digital books. At that point it was cassettes. So a Walkman. My husband still borrows CDs here. I'm very much a radio person. I like the spoken word.

Such accounts confirm not only that 'lives do not stop whilst being mobile' (Jiron, 2010; 129), but that as women move from the rhythms of the library to the rhythms of the bus, certain practices associated with the library might spill over into the everyday activity of travel. That is not to say that they are the same kind of space. The bus, as a 'mobile place' (Jiron, 2010; 129) is different to the library, of course, and one with its own rhythms; 'machine pulses' and the 'metronomic swish of windscreen wipers' (Edensor, 2010a; 6). In 'losing one's footing' (De Certeau, 1984; 112) on the bus or the train a different rhythm is entered into. And yet, perhaps there is something continuous in the move from library to bus. Certain 'familiar and comfortable mobile environments,' Tim Edensor writes, 'lull drivers and passengers into a state of kinaesthetic and tactile relaxation'. They 'facilitate a disposition to dream' (2010a; 6). Such a state might also be connected with libraries.

As with journeys on foot, the sensual and mental process overlap once again. Inspired by *Wanderlust* (2014), Rebecca Solnit's history of walking, Tim Ingold sees reading as 'mind-walking' (2011). He compares the journeys made in our imagination through creative or artistic activity and those movements made in a physical environment. Ingold's metaphor allows for a particular appraisal of Halima's reading on the number 11 bus. In reading her library books on the long journey home she is engaged in journeys of two kinds so that travel and reading converge.

This convergence and 'spilling over' of practices is not simply a useful metaphor. It takes on further significance given that women's accounts of their engagements with libraries and their accounts of journeys made by bus converge in important ways. One theme which is present in both, and which I introduced in Part 1 of this chapter, relates to visibility, identity, and specifically feelings about a public identity. Anne remembers her bus journeys to school when she was young:

> And that's what fascinates me because I was having to go to school in what was really a high-risk area – bombed out Sparkhill was not choice. And I think I tried to make myself invisible at the bus stop.

The bus stop holds a significant place in Anne's memories. It is interesting that in Sheila's sketch above (Figure 4.7), very few landmarks are labelled and yet the bus stop is one. Anne's remark suggests that the feelings of anonymity which some women identified as being valuable in a library, seem also to be felt in the places of transit (Jiron, 2010) or 'non-places' (Auge, 1995) associated with bus travel. In travelling by public transport, the urban Geographer Paola Jiron identifies a 'thin or abstract identity' (2010; 132) where the cultural theorist Joe Moran describes bus journeys as producing 'minimal wordless communities' (2005; 27), aligning with Jean's feeling that she was able to make herself invisible. 'People are capable,' Jiron writes, 'of being isolated within conditions of co-presence, are able to be alone in the midst of multitudes' (Jiron, 2010; 143).

Although Anne is more likely to have had a simple bus stop rather than a bus shelter, contemporary accounts of the place and status of the bus shelter are relevant here. Moran writes that 'it would be difficult to find a piece of modern architecture that inspires less interest than the bus shelter [yet] it is an omnipresent object of everyday life' (2005; 5). This sense of the bus stop as ignored and of bus travel, more generally, as an ignored area of life is interesting given that Anne views the space as one in which she too might be invisible. Once again, accounts of libraries and accounts of bus use converge, or, rather, particular accounts of libraries converge with particular accounts of bus use in potentially telling ways.

More significant than the bus stop for Anne is the bus service itself. She told me,

> A: Mostly we relied on the bus service..
>
> K: And where were you living when you were in Birmingham? Moseley?
>
> A: Moseley yes. Off the 50 bus route.
>
> K: 50?
>
> A: 50, 48 and 35. So I could get off the bus in Moseley. After one year at Queensbridge which was absolutely state of the art my parents were given an ultimatum. Either I could give up my grammar school place, or travel to Waverley grammar school, Golden Hillock Road, Small Heath. And in educational terms, my mother, who was the real driver for education and my father away, she actually battled with Birmingham City Council and said you give us this ultimatum, you at least find the transport costs, the bus fare to get Anne to the new school.
>
> K: And how old were you then?

A: I was 14. And all the time we were travelling on the buses on the 50, 48 and 35 (laughs).

Anne *relied* on the bus service. The list of bus service numbers is imprinted in her memory and she repeats them so that they bookend this section of the narrative; '50, 48, 35,' she recalls. There is a stress on *reliance* in the accounts of both the library service and the bus service. And, like libraries, buses here are linked to educational desire and access. Buses are part of Anne's story about schools and provided the means for Anne to go to grammar school. They also both rhythm Anne's life at this time; buses with their schedules and routes have particular rhythms, and, like libraries, rhythm the lives of those who use them.

The bus routes are significant to the individual lives of the women. But there is also an awareness in the narratives that the bus routes might be culturally significant too. When Halima tells me that she would travel on 'the number 11' she knows that this is, at least locally, a well-known bus route. Once called the 'Outer Circle' route (Figure 4.9), the number 11 is now a popular Birmingham reference. It was alluded to, for example, in Jonathan Coe's novel *Number 11* (2015), in which the title stands for, amongst other things, the Chancellor's address on Downing Street and the Birmingham bus route (Figure 4.10 – a number 11 bus can be seen on the right of the image). The route was designed to travel the margins of the city, connecting the suburbs. Thus, like the libraries that the women value in Hall Green, the route occupies a space on the margins of the city.



Figure 4.9 Outer Circle (Harrison, 2019)

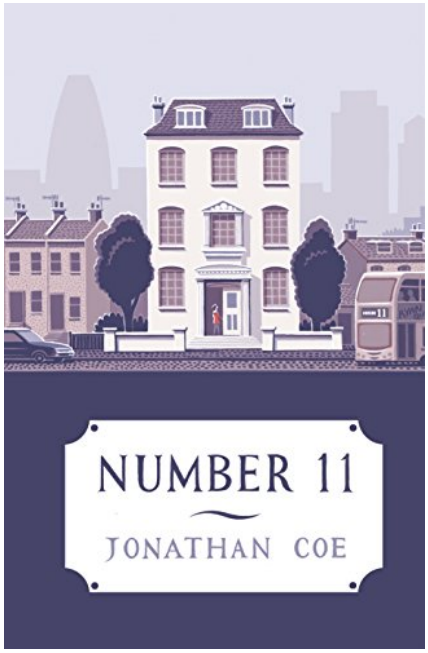


Figure 4.10 Front cover of *Number 11* (Coe, 2015)

The narratives, then, offer important reflections on public transport and yet, as Joe Moran's comment suggests, the bus holds a complicated place in the public imagination. He maintains that waiting for a bus remains an unpredictable, low status activity (Moran, 2005; 7). Geographers seem often to point to the bus as an example of a less celebrated world. Massey, critiquing space-time compression, for example, writes that, 'much of life for many people, even in the heart of the First World, still consists of waiting in a bus-shelter with your shopping for a bus that never comes' (1994; 163). Alistair Bonnett also sees buses as overlooked. Describing them as 'regular and collective' rather than 'arbitrary and individual', he suggests that they do not fit in with 'modernist illusions of atomised freedom' (2000; 27). Joe Moran points to the deregulation of bus service in the 1980s to account for the marginal position of the bus. He writes that deregulation, 'carved up the bus services … with no integration of timetables or ticketing, less provision for unprofitable routes and nobody to blame when the bus did not show up' (2005; 4).

Yet more journeys are made by bus than any other form of public transport (McDonald, 2019). Journeys made by bus;

> account for more than twice the number of journeys taken by rail. But they have low cultural status, because they are disproportionately used by (and just as importantly are associated with) women, children, students, the elderly and the poor (Moran, 2005; 3).

Disproportionately used by and associated with women, children, the elderly and the poor. Moran might be talking here about public libraries and those that value them.



Figure 4.11 Photograph of bus stop outside Sparkhill Library. Source: Author's photograph

4.11 Journeys to the margins of a subject

As well as journeying to the libraries, the women also make journeys of various kinds within a library. Lefebvre defines the act of performing philosophy as 'a *journey* into the purely abstract and conceptual' (2008; 56). In *The Library at Night*, Alberto Manguel compares his time within his library to a voyage. 'The title for this book' he writes, 'should have been "voyage around my room"' (2006; 5).

Springer and Turpin (2016) link the process of research to the physical process of exploration. What happens when we, like them, or Ingold (2011) or Manguel (2006), consider the reading, research and related processes which take place in the library as a journey?

Journeys within the library might find women searching the shelves as Janice describes:

> You go to the shelf and you'd look either side and you'd get that whole, much bigger picture. And with journals they've often got the collection. You'll see, 'ooh they've got this one'.

Janice used university libraries when studying. Others also talked about valuing the physical library over the virtual for the opportunities it posed for encountering materials which were related to their topic of interest but that they had not set out to find. Jeanette valued this serendipitous feature of university libraries:

> You want to see all the books together and think, 'oh that looks interesting and that looks interesting'.

She compared this physical search within a library to internet searches:

> I know they've tried to emulate that a little bit with the electronic things when you do a search you get other things that are similar. I find in Google Scholar you get 'also by this author' or 'things this author has been cited in' and I use that a little bit, but it's not the same, and it certainly doesn't work on the level of the books.

Using, once again, the language of 'wandering', Springer and Turpin reflect on online browsing, finding that digital archives and libraries do not serve 'wanderers' well (2016; 4). Janice and Jeanette's accounts support such a position. Physical libraries offer certain opportunities for 'wanderers'.

That a visit to a physical library requires a journey of some kind is perhaps significant here too. Jabbean tells me:

> Nowadays you've got your phone, so you can get a lot of information. I think we're moving on from books which is a sad thing. Even my kids are saying, 'well forget that we'll just Google it' and I say 'No we'll go to the library. You can research and you can find out'. And it's more exciting than just googling it.

There might be lots of reasons that Jabbean likes the idea of using the library to help her children carry out research, but the idea of moving from one place to another seems salient in this account; 'We'll go,' she says. In educational spaces Catherine Burke has linked movement with thinking in particular ways. She writes 'thinking is often associated with, and arguably supported by, rhythmic movement – walking, rocking, swinging, moving' (Burke, 2017; 193). Maybe the sense of moving oneself towards the source of information is suggestive for Jabbean in some way – a moving towards an answer. For Jabbean and others who value a trip to the library, the moving body is implicated in the practices around library use.

The accounts are united by a concern with exploring the library and widening one's understanding of a subject through reading and research. It is a similar feeling which characterises, more broadly, Janette's understanding of the educational significance of the library. She told me:

> School takes you so far…I don't want things to be neat and complete.

If school makes things quite 'neat' – curricula comprised of modules, units, and portions of content to be digested then Janette values the 'messiness' which the library affords; she wants to go further and perhaps to go in her own direction. This idea surfaces elsewhere in her narrative. Having been a History teacher, she describes forging links between school subjects.

> I taught both History and Geography and I've always seen both subjects together. It's like I always say, It's people and places in the past and it's people and places in the present. History and Geography are part of the same thing. So Geography is totally synthetic. But then you've got to go to the past as well.

Within such a framework, the library is an important site for forging links, for inchoate ideas to develop and for understandings to be deepened by serendipitous finds. Janette's claim that 'school only take you so far', is itself suggestive of a journey and one in which the library offers new directions of travel. The library is an important site to cover ground; to journey to the margins of a subject.

Margaret's description of learning within the library features a similar sense of journey or movement. In Margaret's words, 'whatever you study you can always go deeper'. Likewise, for Jill the library was valuable in enabling her to 'read around' the content of her university History lectures. The library affords the women then, in sometimes quite literal ways, a greater breadth of study, as they appraise shelves of books which might be organised so as to facilitate exploration (Springer and Turpin, 2016). Consequently, as for Janette above, subject boundaries blur and the 'margins' of topics become both interesting and accessible. The library becomes a place in which to revel in the playfulness, even messiness of research and learning.

In women's physical journeys to libraries possibilities open up - turn this way or that, take a route through the park, stop by a friend's house, and so on. These reflect the possibilities which open up for women within the library as they read and study. Journeys to and within libraries converge. One becomes a metaphor for the other as travel within the library

involves both physical exploration and mind wandering. The physical and the mental processes might even come to resemble one another. In Halima's reading of her course books on the journey between the library and her home, on the number 11 bus, the mental activity seems to mirror the physical.

4.12 The journey to the library: place-making and journeys to public identities

For De Certeau, space is 'practiced place' (2011; 131). It is through women's journeys to the library – their spatial practice – that they practice place. Indeed, De Certeau would go further and argue that even aside from the physical journey, the women's stories as 'culturally creative acts' (2011; 123) do some of the place-making work, carrying out 'a labour that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places' (2011; 118). In any case, as women make these journeys to the library, in their physical 'deciphering of space' (Lefebvre, 1991; 38), they are involved in the very 'production' of that social space (Lefebvre, 1991). Walking acts to define the urban environment (Grosvenor, 2019). This being so, there are important consequences for an understanding of the journey.

The spatial theorist Andy Merrifield argues that spatial practice has a role in ensuring social cohesion and continuity (2006; 110). I have argued in the previous chapter that women's accounts of engagements with libraries reveal social continuities – they describe adopting the practices of their mother in taking their children to the library, for example. The accounts offered in this chapter – the women's travel stories – suggest that one of the ways in which the 'continuities' to which Merrifield refers are brought into being, is through the spatial practices associated with the journey. Since places are palimpsests carrying traces of the actions of 'historical subjects' (De Certeau, 2011; 118), these journeys both condition the production of space and associate it with a history. Like the metaphor of a well-worn path, the idea that women's practices around libraries bring continuity takes on a literal relevance as women follow in the footstep of those who have gone before. Here, space is associated with human investments (De Certeau, 2011), so that not only do our attachments grow as we travel through a place (Wunderlich, 2008; 130) but our attachments are what help to create it in the first place.

That the women describe their journeys to the library at all indicates the significance that they accord to these journeys. And these accounts suggest that journeys are actually related

in important ways to women's understandings of the significance of libraries in their lives. An understanding of the place of the library in women's lives might only be possible by 'linking that place to places beyond' (Massey, 1991; 28).

Literacy practices, and educational practices more broadly, are rooted in practices and rhythms of everyday life and the journeys made to and from libraries are an important part of everyday routines. Further and relatedly, the practices associated with libraries might actually continue beyond the space of the library and into these mobile environments of the bus, or the train and so on. Whilst walking around the library or journeying to and from libraries thoughts might drift; 'the body is open to external stimuli and thoughts may turn to fantasy and conjecture' (Edensor, 2010b; 72).

There is something apt about studying journeys within feminist research agendas. Since change is integral to the aims of feminists, feminist concerns are often conceptualized as journeys. We speak of a 'direction of travel', or of movement on a particular issue. Whilst the journeys to the library are important in their own right, journeys of a grander kind are important too. For Sicherman (2010), women's reading should be seen as part of a 'journey to a public identity'. Through private engagements with books women enter the public sphere, implicating literature and, by extension, libraries in the construction of female identities. If reading helps to sustain private dreams, then these can later be 'transmuted into public arts' (Sicherman, 2010). Journeys to the library find a connection, of course, with these grander journeys.

The journeys described in this chapter have been inspired by women's desire to educate themselves and others. I turn, in the next chapter, then, to the library's role in women's accounts of educational desire.

Chapter 5 Energy

Part 1: Rhythms of Educational Desire

Adult education course
Ancestry course
Dentistry degree
Computer class
Counselling course
English Language and Literature degree
Feminism, Gender and Culture course
BA Education
Family Learning English Group
Foundation degree
NVQ Hair and Beauty
Librarian course
Return to study course
Sociology A Level
Part time Social Science degree
Family Leaning English course
Level 1 Maths
Level 2 Maths
GCSE Maths
Make up and Mendhi course
Teaching Assistant Level 3 course
Parents' Community Course
A Level Urdu
DPSI (Diploma in Interpretation)
Mental Health course
Library based computer class
Shorthand typing course
Linguistics PhD
Post graduate qualification in Town Planning
Swansong courses
Teaching diploma
History and Geography degree
Master's in psychology

PhD in Careers Education
Creative writing course
Creative writing evening class
Politics, Economics and Persian degree
NVQ childcare
List of courses that women talked about

I did lots of courses because I can't sit straight

Shahzad

The father of Peter and Jane told the two children that they should join the town library … From books they could get not only information and knowledge, but interest and excitement

Murray 1967, *Books are Exciting*, Ladybird Reading Scheme

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, *time* and *place* were the focus as women reflected on engagements with libraries in their pasts and considered their experience of library spaces. 'Everywhere there is interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy,' Lefebvre writes, 'there is a rhythm' (2004; 15). This chapter takes as its focus the third requirement in Lefebvre's rhythmic triad – the 'expenditure of energy'. For Middleton, 'Energy completes the dialectical triad' (2014; 114). 'Time and space without energy remain inert,' writes Lefebvre (2004; 60).

Libraries themselves are sometimes conceived of as entities which possess energy. In *Reading Rooms of Our Own*, the co-founder of Glasgow Women's Library, Adele Patrick, writes of the library:

> It does feel like an organic entity with a vibrant energy created by the breathing in and breathing out of loans and donations, visitors, volunteers, users and audiences. (Patrick, 2016; np)

In Patrick's description the library's energy is generated by the practices associated with its function – through women's desire to educate themselves and others in particular ways.

My focus in this chapter is the energy which the women have expended in and around libraries. The narratives capture this energy. I write though, more often of 'educational

desire' than of energy. Lefebvre acknowledges himself that energy is **'**a highly general concept' (2004; 65). In order to operationalise this element of the triad in educational terms, I use the concept of 'desire'. Desire in these chapters stands for the energy which women have expended. Desire is not, of course, a synonym for energy but instead stands, within this work, as the educational manifestation of energy.

The narratives reveal the desire that women have to educate themselves and others, and the energies that women have invested and expended in working on these desires in and around libraries. Desire permeates the accounts of library use in various ways and takes many forms. The accounts capture potential energy (educational desire and ambition), energy being expended (women acting on desires) and energy which has been spent (desires fulfilled through education).

The concept of 'desire' has been central to recent educational writing. I invoke here Heidi Mirza's language of 'educational desire' (see, for example, Mirza and Reay, 2000, and Mirza, 2009). The educational philosopher Gert Biesta (2019) links education to desire, arguing that education involves the arousing of desire.

Lefebvre write that 'energy animates' (2004; 60) and desire animates too. Indeed, Lefebvre links desire with energy. He writes of a worker who has 'needs, desires or "cravings", determined in part by the amount of energy he expends, his skill as a craftsman, his qualifications and his love of his work' (2002 ;52). For Lefebvre, desire has a rhythm and also constitutes a rhythm and, in keeping with women's accounts of everyday library use, desire suggests a temporal urgency but also finds expression in routines and habits. Consequently, rhythmanalysis offers a useful way to theorise the educational desire which surfaces in the narratives.

Sue Middleton (2016) identifies, within Lefebvre's work, a 'pedagogy of appropriation' which represents the processes that engage learners in making knowledge their own, in becoming educated, rather than processes that train through domination. In this spirit, the discussion in this chapter, as elsewhere, works with the idea of a learner that is motivated or engaged in making knowledge; who feels educational desire. And, as I argue in Part 2, this desire, like energy, can be passed from person to person giving energy to those who deliver education and those who receive it. As I will go on to show, this has important rhythmanalytical consequences.

Margins are a central theme to this discussion. Each woman speaks from an experience of a society 'still unkind to those of her sex' (Kuhn, 2002; 58), and desire has a clear class

component (Walkerdine et al, 2001). The dimensions of women's marginality relevant to the women's narratives are many and include gender, social class, race, education, religion, and disability. The analysis in these chapters thus operates with a model of the human which acknowledges these sociological dimensions of marginality but, in its interest in desire, also takes seriously the psychological elements of human emotion and feeling and attachments. This has consequences for the view of the learner and of learning which is presented in the analysis. Sometimes missing from contemporary accounts of education practice, the human experience of emotions are central to the women's narratives around libraries and learning. These desires might be individual but they also have a social or a shared component as women act on their desires to educate others or feel in ways which are shared across a community. Emotions such as desire might be universal yet women in marginal positions, the narratives suggest, experience desire in particular ways.

5.2 Desire and the library

Listed at the start of the chapter are the courses which the women talked about in their narratives. Tied to libraries in various ways, there are qualifications, diplomas, certificates, evening classes and groups. The list is significant since it represents the women's 'expenditure of energies' (Lefebvre, 2004) but it is also present to highlight the links which women see between formal courses of various kinds and their local public library. Shahzad, for example, told me that she took a parents' community course, 'so', she added, 'I joined Balsall Heath Library'. There is, in the telling, a feeling of inevitably of joining a library when embarking on new learning of some kind. One entails the other. If libraries and formal study are linked, then so too are libraries and learning, more broadly conceived. Anne made contact with me after seeing my research leaflet in Hall Green library. She told me 'learning has featured very heavily in my life, which is why I came forward'. The project leaflet did not actually refer to learning, only to libraries. Anne's comment reveals a view of libraries and learning as united. Her reflection is consistent with others who see learning and studying as important to their sense of self, as a habit developed over their lives, even perhaps a quest:

> I did lots of courses because I can't sit straight. (Shahzad)
>
> So I've been studying my whole life! (Jabbean)
>
> It's been a habit from childhood, just to want to… be curious for information (Margaret)

These women view the library as a site for desire to be worked on. But the accounts also reveal that the library inspires such feelings. Talat finds the library 'inspires you to study'. In this way the library generates desire. Like the Lefebvrian dyads of sleep and wake and hunger and satisfaction, educational desire, played out in the library, holds a similar, cyclical sway. The fostering of inspiration and a desire to learn exists in counterpoint with the library as a site for existing desires to be 'worked on'. The Ladybird book quoted at the start of the chapter, captures these two principles in reverse, in its distinction between information and knowledge (working on) and interest and excitement (inspiring and exciting interest) (Murray 1967). More significantly, the two elements are present in the vision of Birmingham Public Libraries (1962). *Notes on the History of the Birmingham Public Libraries: 1861-1961* states that:

> Birmingham Public Libraries are ready to meet the challenge of the next hundred years and not only to satisfy but to promote the desire for books.

Such a vision, like a transfer of energy, has a recursive feel – 'a motion carried over from one occasion to another' (Young, 1988) – as existing desires are satisfied within the library and new desires are inspired and momentum builds.

The narrative research encounter itself is also a site of emotional expression and the narratives capture something of the interiority of the women. Consequently, they are thus perhaps well placed to yield accounts of desire. In *Cultivating Humanity*, Martha Nussbaum considers what constitutes one's 'insides' and lists 'desire' as the first facet (1997; 85). Prominence is also given to desire in Annette Kuhn's writing about her childhood memories of the relationship with her mother. Describing her younger self, who feels unwilling and unable to be the child her mother has projected onto her, she writes:

> She feels incomplete, unable to name her own desires, incapable of following a path that feels her own. (2002; 79)

Naming our desires is tied, by Kuhn, to being a fully rounded person, to living a meaningful life and to flourishing. Here, desire is drawn not as *lack* but as the healthy pursuit to know oneself.

Desire might, then, be about aspiration, ambition, even passion, but it is also about need. Needs and desire are, for Lefebvre, rhythms in interaction. Seen in this way desire is not far from disruption and, in rhythmanalytical terms, arrhythmia; something is required in order to bring harmony (again). In *Reading the Everyday*, Joe Moran also writes of needs and

desires. He finds 'they can sometimes not necessarily be named or categorised but are an essential part of being fully human (2005; 117). When Shahzad tells me that she learns because she 'cannot sit straight' there is the feeling of some kind of need to be fulfilled, an itch waiting to be scratched. Henri Lefebvre writes that desire both has a rhythm but also itself constitutes a rhythm – 'it **is** a rhythm,' he writes (2004; 26). Lefebvre's particular concern with *dressage* is surely tied to his understanding of the role of the body in discerning particular rhythms. Shahzad understands her educational desire as manifesting itself in a particular bodily comportment, or, at least, that this metaphor is a suitable one. 'Humans', Lefebvre asserts 'learn to hold themselves' (2004; 39). That Shahzad cannot sit straight suggests discord in bodily rhythms. And yet Shahzad listens to her body and, for Lefebvre, listening to the body is important: 'The body. Our body. So neglected in philosophy that it ends up speaking its mind and kicking up a fuss' (2004; 20). Shahzad feels the desire to learn in visceral ways and she is able to both discern and reflect upon these rhythms. The desire that is felt here is something akin to the philosopher Kate Soper's 'true needs' (1990; 46). These are not the very basic needs – such things as food and shelter – but instead are about the question of what is needed as a condition for human flourishing (1990; 46). What Shahzad is describing is perhaps such a true need.

5.3 A desire to read

One of the ways in which educational desire makes itself felt for those on the margins is through a desire to read. These attempts may be frustrated; the narratives reveal women taking possession of this reading through the claiming of space and a metaphorical or physical distancing of oneself from the rhythms of family life. Halima, for example, remembers:

> I think cus I have a big family, and we usually lived in three-bedroom houses and I shared the rooms with one or two siblings. And it was kind of a joke, except not really a joke because my parents were sad about it, that every time they'd go in a room, I'd go upstairs. Or if they went upstairs, I'd go downstairs. Cus for me like reading or writing would be a barrier and then I'd incorporate listening to the radio with that so it was two things where like I couldn't be physically alone, it was kind of that was impossible but if I wanted to I could have that really.

Sheila also recalls reading at home as a child:

> I did a lot of reading and I remember my mother used to go mad because I would forget what was happening around me because I was so into the book and she'd be saying, 'Are you listening to me?' and I would just be so interested in reading the book.

In *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Class*, Jonathon Rose writes of individuals who remember shutting themselves in their bedroom to write (2001; 87), and one person for whom 'to ask for silence was to offend the life of the family' (p. 90). Halima's desire to read and her desire for metaphorical and physical distance from her family has a similar spirit.

Their narratives, particularly Halima's, are also reminiscent of Annette Kuhn's account of the tensions between her and her mother. Kuhn's education desire, or, in her words, 'hunger' (1995;123) was inspired by the 'bookish' learning of the grammar school she attended and yet as a 'scholarship girl' these practices and ways of knowing were at odds with her mother's. In a different time and place, class-based tensions of a similar kind can be discerned in Halima's account. The library, in offering a free resource (like Kuhn's scholarship place), enabled Halima to adopt literary practices previously alien to the family – a good in itself – and yet the requirement for 'private concentration' brought 'abstraction, forgetfulness' and an 'offhandedness' that gives 'offence' (Rose, 2001; 90). Here we glimpse the living out of the marks of [class] difference (Walkerdine et al., 2001).

Historical concerns about women's reading as a dangerous pursuit (Pearson, 1999, Price, 2013) find their contemporary relevance here in worries about books distracting girls from their duties around the home. Such accounts feature in Jonathon Rose's accounts (2001; 179) and in some ways mirror Halima and her sisters' experiences:

> For Muslim girls, there's a lot of emphasis on them doing a lot of household stuff, helping mum, or going to Mosque. And going to the library gives you an excuse not to do that in a way, even if you're genuinely interested in learning.

Halima, stressing that there were 'too many demands' made of her at home, would do just this. She labels these actions as 'rebellious'. She contrasts going to the library with going to the Mosque, for example, claiming of the former that it is 'an independent choice'. Halima was, in her own words, genuinely interested in learning, but important here too is the fact that going to the library was her choice. Even if in a fairly ordinary way, Halima made up her own mind. The rebellion might be read as a resistance, a taking ownership of her reading and her education but also her life more broadly.

Safina sees the Family Learning Group and the women's' visits to the library as a kind of resistance:

> I'm not talking for everybody but just what I can see for myself, being from an Asian background, some people come from such a huge family that sometimes they need that break to go to a reading club ...for my child … and then there's the free time for the mum, and the children are happy because they're learning something. It's being about who we are as a person, as a woman, making our own identity… and that's what libraries are about.

The library, for Safina, is a site for resisting particular identities and roles.

Another way in which the women take possession of their reading is through documenting what has been read. Janette showed me her reading journal. Photographs of the cover and the first page are shown in Figures 5.1 and 5.2.

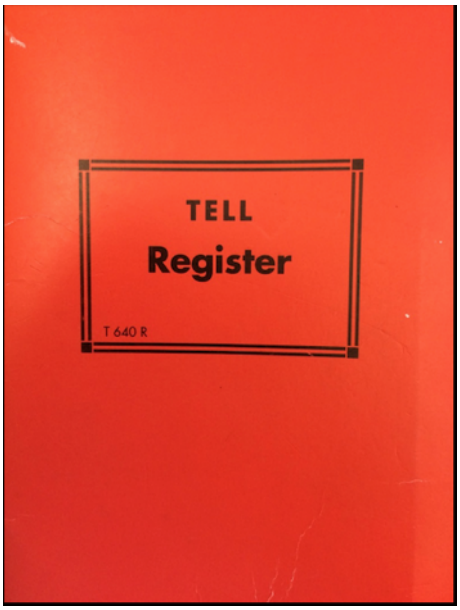


Figure 5.1 Janette's reading diary (cover). Source: Author's photograph

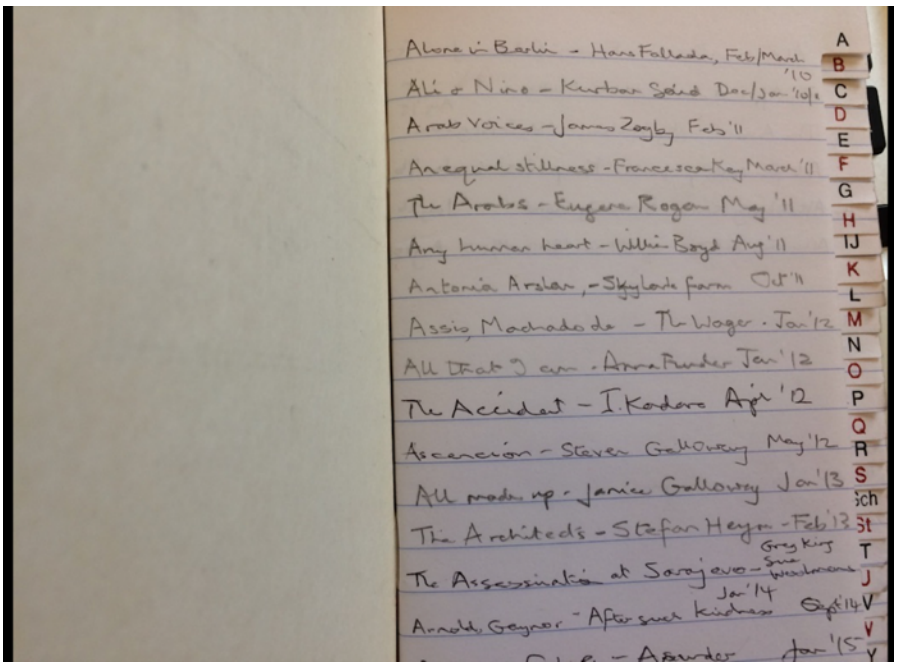


Figure 5.2 Janette's reading diary (first page). Source: Author's photograph

Janette lists all of the books which she reads in the diary, noting the title and the author. The books are organized alphabetically so that Janette can look up a book which she has previously read.

Sheila also described keeping such a journal. She told me:

> In the 1970s I used to write all the books down which I read. After my father died, I stopped writing down books. I started again in 2002.

In these cases, the public library has been an important source of books for the women but here the library also occupies important imaginative space. The author Ali Smith (2015) uses the term 'personal library' to refer not to physical collections of books but all of the books which one has ever read. Of concern for Smith (2015), is the accumulated effect of those books on the reader; the self-authorization which might be implicated in the reading. Perhaps it is this sort of spirit which inspires the desire to record one's reading.

In *Reading is my Window*, Megan Sweeney (2010) documents her research into women's reading practices in prisons. She too found that women often recorded their reading and she also uses the language of 'personal libraries' but this time to describe the 'reading charts' that they produce. This label seems to capture the sense of ownership that might be felt. Janette and Sheila's diaries work in similar ways, perhaps. One speaks of 'keeping' a

journal. The recording of reading undertaken is itself a kind of 'keeping' of the reading; a taking possession of that which has been read.

For the women who were reading in prisons in Sweeney's research, but for others too, time is an important element. If objects of all kinds offer a 'concrete record of time' (Riggins, 1994; 2) then reading journals, like diaries of other kinds, are particularly salient examples. Just as Samia told me that going to the library was 'a good use of time,' the diary might document not simply a list of books but also the spending of time or even time well spent. In Janette's diary, little inscriptions detailing the month and the year in which she read the book can be seen on the right-hand side of the page. These act as reminders of the way in which particular books rhythmed her experiences or were rhythmed by particular significant events or times of year. Sheila also told me that she would include a date, in this case the date that she finished reading each book. Indicating, perhaps, the importance of rituals and record keeping to everyday life, upon the death of her father Sheila ceased this activity. Since time was, in a sense, suspended when he died, habitual routines and rhythms were suspended too. Such a situation reveals not only the practices associated with libraries in the narratives, but it also illuminates something about temporality and the nature of learning. Specifically, it troubles linear accounts of learning and narrow conceptions of human growth.

Sheila spent some time caring for her father towards the end of his life. For women with caring responsibilities educational desire may be frustrated by a lack of time. I considered in Chapter 3 the way in which women identify and carve our *time* for reading, learning and study amidst the rhythms of family life, exploiting the 'miniature gaps' - 'weak time, the stops, silences, blanks' (Lefebvre, 2004; 78). These accounts evidence women working on their educational desire and the library's role in these pursuits.

At the point in her life when Janice had childcare responsibilities, a desire to learn was supported by the local library – as well as by a network of supportive women. She remembers:

> I met someone at the school whose child was in the same class as my youngest daughter and was talking about doing an A level. And she said, 'I've signed you up for Sociology A Level!' Well I didn't know what Sociology was (laughing) and I went 'oh ok' and she said, 'yeah it's tonight at seven' and I said 'well I can't go tonight, my husband's' working in London and he won't be back'. And another person that I'd met called Rashi said, 'well I'll come round and look after them – you go'. So that's how I started A Level Sociology!

> Well I had no idea what it was, but it perfectly suited me actually. It really really suited me. And I got all my books for that either from the college library cus that was an FE college or from the public library – I used the public library quite a bit. … And then I saw an advert in the paper for a part time degree. And I thought, 'ooh I think I could get that. Cus now I've got an A Level. I've got an E – got an E! But I still had one!'

Eurhythmia results from Janette finding a course 'which perfectly suited her'. She talks elsewhere about how, with relatively little income, she relied on the library to borrow books for her studies as she could not buy them. In Janice's narrative the support offered by women – suggesting courses, taking on childcare responsibilities – exist in a network with the support which public libraries offer. Janice's educational desire is fulfilled within the library as various overlapping rhythms coincide.

Such a network of support also exists amongst the Sparkhill women's group who see the women who meet and the services offered by the library as entangled. In this way libraries can be seen as partly constituted in the relationships which serve them. Importantly, this means that when the library does not provide in some way, women report other women taking on similar roles. Sakina, for example, told me that she wants to be able to use computers to exercise her 'desire', in her words, to 'find things out'. Since Sparkhill Library no longer offers formal computer courses, Salma is now informally teaching her these skills when the women's group meet at their Tuesday sessions.

Janice's account above reveals her ability to educate herself because of the presence of the library and the network of support from other women, who help with childcare. These concerns are also present in Safina's narrative. Safina supports the Family Learning English Group at St Paul's Children's Centre in Balsall Heath. The Family Learning English Group educate women for whom English is not a first language, in language skills but also in other areas of life. They work closely with libraries and take the women who attend, along with their children, to visit Balsall Heath library. Safina told me that looking after young children can be a barrier to women being able to study and gain qualifications:

> Family learning centres or adult education centres are willing to help us to support women. It used to be a problem of a crèche or someone looking after your child whereas now they let you bring your child. We help you or we'll keep an eye on your child whilst you are studying. The facilities for the women are better.

Syeda had been attending the sessions:

S: Family Learning English [helps women] learn to speak English. She's really good Hafsha, a really good teacher.

K: What's she been teaching you?

S: How to learn at home and learn with your kids. You learn, then you can help them.

I consider women's desire to educate others in more detail in Part 2, below, but educational desire here incorporates the desire to improve one's own language skills and the desire to help one's children learn. The concerns of this group therefore unite women's concerns with self-education and their desire to educate others. The Family Learning English Group see the Library as a site in which to support women to work on their educational desire, who might otherwise have their attempts thwarted.

Another way in which educational desire is sometimes frustrated for those in marginal positions is by being alienated from knowledge, knowledge production and from what counts as knowledge (Middleton, 2014; 129). As social and political constructs, feminists have long been interested in knowledges and ways of knowing.

Samia, who I talked to at Kings Heath Library, experienced such alienation when she moved to the UK. Born in Sialkot in Pakistan, Samia moved to Birmingham in 2000. She told me that she gained her qualifications in Pakistan and finds that despite having 'done well', the qualifications often 'don't count'. Samia's attempts to further herself are frustrated by employers' narrow view of educational attainment. She describes feeling frustrated that employers ask, 'did you do your GCSEs here?' Starting again, Samia has now taken a teaching assistant level 3 course at the adult education centre after seeing a leaflet at the library. She has also taken courses in make-up and Mendhi.

Samia uses the library to study and to educate her children. On the morning that I met Samia she was sitting at a table with her two young children. She had encouraged her daughter to choose a book to read. Her baby son lay on the table in a warm sleep suit and she entertained him with the rattle of her car keys while the little girl read *Burglar Bill* by Janet and Allan Ahlberg (1977). When the girl came to the end of the book she looked up and they started talking but, with Samia's attention elsewhere, the baby, like the baby in Burglar Bill, started to cry. Her mother suggested that she write a summary of what happened in the story and returned to entertaining the baby, looking up only when the little girl had a question for her. The diverse rhythms (Lefebvre, 2004; 36) present in this very ordinary scene have to do with education and with family – the jangling of the keys, the

turning of pages, the attention back and forth from one child to the other. And yet these rhythms seemed rooted in a story of a grander scale which has to do with alienation and educational opportunity as well as an understanding of the library as a site for educational desire to be worked on and possibly, through imploring the little girl to write about what she had read, for wrongs to be righted. Samia has found her status as a Pakistani woman to be a marginalising one, alienating her from important opportunities. She has been made to feel literally and metaphorically 'out of place' (Middleton, 2014). The library, for Samia, is thus a place in which to challenge this lack of opportunity for herself and her children. Since it was in the library that she saw the advert for the adult education course which she has taken, her account also reveals the way in which a local public library might also inspire educational desire in very practical ways.

Such alienation from knowledge and knowledge-making might take other forms. Margaret is 81 and feels that she is sidelined from activity which involves computers. Gesturing to those sitting near us using the computers in Hall Green Library, she says 'the jargon is different'. She explains, 'people who are in this century and in with the time, I feel they're all moving quicker. And I'm slow, in a way, and lagging behind*'.* Here, there is a body of knowledge which Margaret feels alienated from. She experiences this, rhythmically, as a lack of synchronicity with those around her; she is out of step, lagging behind. Indeed, with regards to change and rhythms of everyday life, Tim Edensor (2010a) cautions against hyperbolic accounts of a speeding up of experience pointing to an unevenness through which access to speedy communication and travel is acquired. Margaret has been attending computer courses at Solihull Library and has plans to have her computer linked to the internet:

> My niece is coming and she's a whizz kid and she's coming for Easter so she could set it up and get me into the 21st century.

Despite feelings of marginalisation with regards to technology, Margaret's educational desire has not diminished. Indeed, her anticipation of a visit to the Library of Birmingham she feels as a longing:

> I'm longing to get into the new library. I've been once for a quick look but I'm longing to get back and see what they have to offer.

5.4 Halima: Educational desire and strategic education

In the accounts above, the women have a desire to learn but are alienated in some way because of their marginal position. The library in each case plays an important role in enabling the women to work on their desires. Perhaps the most salient example of such a situation comes with Halima's account.

Halima's parents were refugees to the UK from Somalia and had, in Halima's words, 'a desire to learn'. She enjoyed reading and writing as she grew up and applied to study English Language and Literature at university. Halima describes her 'bad experience' of undergraduate study, where she found her efforts unrewarded and her interests not reflected in the curriculum.

> I had a tough time with that because everything I thought, I read, and I knew, and was passionate about wasn't exactly what the course was dealing with. There was a lot of classic literature which was denser and harder to understand.

The knowledge and experience and interests which Halima brought to her university course were, she felt, not valued by the institution. Her educational desire – her passions, even – were not satisfied; even her own thoughts seemed to be out of rhythm with the content of the course. Halima's 'ways of knowing' (Belenky et al.,1986) were not those which were celebrated. Consequently, Halima's skills in writing, which were an important part of her sense of self, had to be reconsidered.

> There was a realisation of the limitations of my abilities, like with creative writing. When I was young, I used to write little stories and little poems because I didn't have much else to do so it was something.

A significant part of the learning which took place at university, was in Halima's view, her realisation of the limits of her abilities. Halima's early attempts to educate herself were found to be wanting. As a young, black, working class woman, Halima sees herself as occupying a marginal position; a position which may have contributed to her experience of alienation at university. In *Women, Class and Education*, Jane Thompson (2000) describes the way in which women's already marginal position is further intensified. Indeed, Halima also contextualises her experiences at university in terms of her own and her parents' background and the conditions of her schooling, so that her 'marginalities of experience' combine (Steedman, 1986; 17). Her parents were not in a position to help her to pursue her own interests. She told me:

> I've always gone to state schools, so teachers were kind of … teaching assistants were with kids that needed them and teachers were with everyone else. My parents... my dad is very intelligent but he's more intelligent on a finance side cus that's what he's been.. his career is like finance, money and business. I'm the only one that's gone to university for Arts stuff. Like one went for economics, one had gone for science, food heath stuff, so if I wanted to learn, I couldn't get it from my parents, and I couldn't get it at school. It had to be independent.

Studying for her undergraduate degree, it was the module on gender for which Halima felt particularly ill-equipped.

> There was this one feminism, gender, and culture course. Like now I could easily do that course but at the time it was all alien to me. We had to read Simone de Beauvoir and I couldn't understand it. Now with my exposure to everything… It was like, I'm not exposed to this stuff.

Halima's feelings of estrangement here are reminiscent of the doctoral student in Sue Middleton's research who joined her supervisors' reading group and after having been 'a good reader' in the past felt alienated from the academic language with which she was confronted (2014; 138). Halima's rhythms of educational desire were confounded by her marginal position as someone who 'wasn't exposed to this stuff'.

It is interesting here, of course, that it is Simone de Beauvoir that Halima points to as an example of an impenetrable text; Jeanette having also described her reading of Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* to me. Jeanette came to *The Second Sex*, a book which 'meant so much to so many' (Soper, 1990; 175) at the right time, finding it to be a memorable and significant text and Halima, at that time, did not. The lack of synchronisation between Halima's feelings of readiness and the requirements of her course to engage with such writers have a classed dimension and link to structures to which Halima herself points. Halima reflects that she could now, 'easily do that course'. Indeed, in *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Mary Belenky and her colleagues (1986) stress that women's life experiences offer an important source of knowledge. Educational desire here, is bound up with specific practices around learning, life experience and understandings of the self. Halima's reflexivity around the circumstances of this time is doubly fitting given the nature of that module. Halima's life experiences across various domains - her education, her work experience and relationships, and importantly her own independent reading and research means that she would now feel confident studying this material and to study in the way that was required.

It is her experiences of the education system, and, perhaps, accompanying anxieties around educational failure (see Walkerdine et al, 2001; 132) which have shaped Halima's approach to her siblings' education. She has been keen, for example, to influence their reading practices:

> I've tried to get my younger siblings into classic literature and get them into more serious stuff. My eight year old sister just finished all the Harry Potter books. Yeah, so she finished them over the summer, and I know she reads and I know she likes reading but the stuff she reads is stuff like that. I've been trying to let her read and find her own pace and get into classics in her own way.

In rhthmanalytical terms, Halima's educational desire for her siblings is felt as an urgency to read in a way which might bring educational success. Halima has now to balance urging her siblings to read in certain ways, whilst allowing them to find their own rhythm, 'getting into classics' in their own way. She reflects on the tension inherent in this. Heidi Mirza writes 'if education is a battlefield then the women are postmodern warriors…strategically using this social and cultural knowledge drawn from their experience to educate themselves and their children' (2009, 154). Halima is strategic in her efforts. Samia, in encouraging her daughter to read and write in the library in the school holiday, is also perhaps strategic in her efforts. And elsewhere, Anne described her mother's desires in ways which are in keeping with the metaphor of the battlefield. She remembers being told that she might 'lose her place' at the grammar school:

> My mother, who was the real driver for education, with my father away, she actually battled with Birmingham City Council and said you give us this ultimatum you at least find the transport costs, the bus fare to get Anne to the new school.

What distinguishes these accounts from the often-cited fighting for one's child, associated perhaps with middle class parents (see Walkerdine et al, 2001; 126), is precisely the 'hard won' experience of those on the margins, which accompanies it.

Certainly, in the case of Halima and Samia, the strategic efforts are 'drawn from' experience; Halima's undergraduate experience of impenetrable texts and her education in the knowledges which are rewarded by schools and universities and Samia's understanding of the qualifications and skills rewarded in the employment market. In one woman's account in *The Heart of the Race*, she must 'learn to take the system on' in fighting for a better education for her children (Bryan et al., 2018; 84). These women seem also to be taking the system on in their concern with preparing their family for their educational futures.

Halima is, however, aware of the differing contexts for her education and that of her siblings. For example, she contrasts their access to resources as follows:

> The access to things over time, for the little ones through us has been ... we've been able to share more books.

The divide between the home and the school with regards to cultural and social capital, is perhaps smaller between Halima and her siblings than between her parents and her siblings. Having been educated in the UK, Halima provides not only the access to resources; 'we've been able to share books', but also an important link between the worlds of the home and the school. Despite Halima's parents having had, in her words, 'a desire to learn', they were unable to support Halima in the way she now supports her sisters. Libraries have played a part, then, in both her own independent efforts at self-education and in this education of others. If the educational institutions of the school and the university are sites in which Halima describes experiencing 'a realisation of the limits of her abilities' and finding that everything she 'thought and knew and read and was passionate about' was irrelevant, then the library is framed in a different way in her narrative.

When I spoke to Halima she had recently been reading regularly in Hall Green Library. She reflected:

> **H:** … I think the attitude I have towards reading now is I want to read to be better.
>
> **K:** a better person?
>
> **H:** …no like intellectually better.

Here, the library is a 'source of the self' (Taylor, 1989); a place to glimpse the 'desired self' (Smith, 2015) and the 'possibilities of becoming other' (Middleton, 2014; 181). In short, the library can once again be seen as a site for educational desire to be worked on.

The library has been a significant space for this reading and research, but is also space which Halima associates with particular kinds of thinking:

> Like that time [I was in the library] I was just trying to make some notes planning for what I can do next. Like I have to find a job… and it's just been swimming in my mind and I keep meaning to come to the library to sit down and work through it.

Lived space (Lefebvre, 1991) is invested with certain potentials, as Halima engages in meaning-making, both within the library and now, around the library. A space for reflection is offered up when nowhere else will do. Halima's understandings of the library as such a space also inform her support of her siblings' education.

> The one thing that's been important for me, which I have been showing my siblings is that even though they might not have a lot at home, they have a lot elsewhere.

It is the 'elsewhere' – places like the school library and the public library – which have been valuable to Halima as she has navigated the education system from her marginal position. They have helped to foster her educational desire and helped her to work on her desire 'to be better'.

There are, as Halima's and other accounts reveal, revolutionary potentials in this view of the library. For Margaret, the library is once again, an 'elsewhere'. Reflecting on her schooling in the 1940s, Margaret says that 'the school system was quite hard…to get a degree you were in the top structure ..hit and miss.. so we found out for ourselves'. Reserved for those 'in the top structure' university education was not an option open to Margaret. She, and others, 'found out' for themselves. The library was an important site for this finding out – for this exercising of educational desire.

Even when the women were engaged in formal education, they remember the library's important supplementary role. Reflecting on the role of the library in her youth Janette told me:

> School only takes you so far. You want to make up your own mind.

Like Margaret who was finding out for herself, Janette here is furthering something which has begun at school. Crucially, this is not cast as simply reading around a subject or even extending one's understanding. Instead, it is a challenging; a making up of one's own mind about a particular subject. The library here supports self-education of a particular character. There is the reconciling of new material with old, which fits, of course, much educational theory, but there is also a feminist reading where knowledge is made one's own; a 'taking ownership' which has long been linked to women's education (Coates, 1994). When Virginia Woolf wrote about the 'power to contemplate' (2004; 123) she might have been writing of Halima, or Margaret or Janette. Woolf is often cited in relation to her recognition of the importance of metaphorical and physical space for women writers, but her interest was also in reading and thinking. In explaining her reference to 'five hundred a year' and the 'lock on a

door' required by women, she writes that she is not thinking only of material things but the 'the power to think for oneself' (2004; 123). Janette sees the library as a space to think for herself. Within the library, in the space of the lived, received understandings can be challenged and other ways of knowing are born.

'Making up your own mind' has to do, then, with making something one's own. But 'making up your mind' might also be read in a more literal sense. It might be that, after school, in her local library, Janette was making her mind. She was making herself. I return to the library's role in 'making' of various kinds below, but here, in enacting education desire, Janette is involved in poiesis of an important kind; the library is a site for learning about oneself and even becomes a resource for creating one's self.

5.5 Summary

Educational desire rhythms the women's narratives around library use and the women's lives. In conceiving of the energies which women expend in acting on educational desires, what become visible are rhythms in interaction. The accounts are steeped in a desire to read, to learn, and to be educated. There is urgency and ambition in these stories, but desire also finds expression in the women's everyday habits and quiet routines around studying, borrowing books and the recording of reading. I use the language of educational desire to capture the sense of educational aspiration but also the desire to learn and to be in some way altered, allowing for an expanded view of the educational significance of the library.

Speaking from one or multiple marginal positions the women's narratives offer reflections on frustrated desires and longings. They reveal 'frustrated, frenzied, unrealised possibilities' (Lefebvre, 1995; 124 in Moran; 2005; 117). But they also challenge these positions in and through the library and realise their potentials. The accounts highlight different ways of knowing, acts of resistance, or thinking for oneself and using the self as an instrument of understanding (Belenky et al., 1986). Eurythmic states (Lefebvre, 2004; 68) follow, or cooccur with, the working on and the fulfilment of educational desire. When bell hooks (1984; 149) suggests that the margins might be reclaimed from traditional use as a marker of exclusion, and instead seen as a 'central location for the production of counter hegemonic discourse', she might have been writing of engagements with libraries. Library education is empowering. If women's education enables women to 'claim power' (Chartier and Cavallo, 1999; 114), then the library emerges as a powerful site for these endeavours.

I focused particularly on Halima's narrative above. Halima's educational desire resonates with Jane Thompson's (2000) description of women's education as 'education for women intent on changing the possibilities of and circumstances of their lives'. Halima, and other women, exercise this educational agency to try to change the possibilities and circumstances of their lives or the lives of others. The library emerges as a site which both fosters and hosts this kind of ambition.

Desire, and its fulfilment, finds expression in pleasure and in joy. Calls have been made for more attention to be paid to the pursuit of joy in striving for a socially just curriculum (Griffiths, 2012) and in *An Introduction to Modernity,* Lefebvre asks 'can we believe in the creative virtues of pleasure?' (1995; 259, in Merrifield 2006; 37). The narratives, as spaces of representation (Lefebvre, 1991), contain an affective kernel (Merrifield, 2006; 110). That the library brings pleasure is evident both in accounts of processes in this chapter - the enjoyment derived from their library use - and in descriptions of states described in the previous chapters - affirmations of love for the buildings, spaces, and resources which constitute the library.

At Hall Green Library Jabbean told me:

> My daughter just loves books. She loves turning the pages already.

And Janice said, of libraries:

> God, I have a passion for them.

I began this chapter by considering the diaries or journals which women showed me. These documented the books which they had read and when they had read them. We often term this reading, 'reading for pleasure'. And, indeed, the women use this expression too. Anne, for example, says that her reading undertaken in the library when she was young was 'a mix of reference material for school and reading for pleasure'. And yet the women report much pleasure being derived too from the reading undertaken for formal study. Witness the list of courses which open this chapter. Jeanette claims, of studying in the library; 'I can't think of anything I'd rather be doing'.

Part 2 Women as Educators in the Library

> What is so extraordinarily suppressed here is women in the culture, women as participants and transmitters and as makers and readers of culture. (Miller, 1990; 45)

5.6 Women as Educators

In *A Feminist Manifesto for Education*, Myriam David arrives at the simple statement that 'learning may take place in many different and unexpected contexts. It cannot be captured in one locale or institution' (2016; 174). In the first part of the chapter, the women's narratives revealed the library to be an important context for women's learning. Libraries, it concluded, are a site for women's educational desire to be fostered and to be worked on. But the narratives also suggest that women have a desire to educate others within the space of the library and it is this concern which I take up in this chapter.

Carolyn Steedman, writing of school education, describes the impulse which a teacher feels to influence a child as a 'moment of desire' (1992;186). Lefebvrian in feel, Steedman's remark suggests something quite subconscious perhaps. This chapter considers these moments of desire felt by women within and around libraries and explores the way in which women have acted on them. As Lefebvre recognises, these desires have a rhythm and themselves, constitute a rhythm. Indeed, with reference to desires, moments and impulses, Steedman's (1986) conception of the desire to educate aligns with a rhythmanalyst's perspective.

In Part 1, I considered the desires which rhythmed women's educational engagements with libraries. In Part 2, I consider the desires which women have to act as educators within the library. The focus thus moves from the energies which women have invested in their own education to the energies invested in educating others in various ways. What is the nature of the education which the women describe? What kinds of desires rhythm this activity? And what are the consequences of this activity for an understanding of the role of the library in women's lives? In answering these questions, I draw on two vignettes. The first explores Talat and Suriya, the leaders of the women's group which meet at Sparkhill Library, and their educational activity, considered in light of their reflections on their time as teachers within schools. The second vignette finds Salma preparing to share her own artwork with the group.

Rhythmanalysis is more sensitive 'to moods than to images' and more interested in 'atmosphere' than 'particular events' (Lefebvre, 2004; 87). In this spirit, I draw the threads

from the two vignettes together to consider the character of this education, identifying shared rhythms and tracing the understandings of the library as a site of particular kinds of cultural learning and women's education. What are the moods and atmospheres discernible in these examples of women acting on their desires to educate within the library?

5.7 Talat, Suriya, and the Friends of Sparkhill Ladies' Group

Talat and Suriya are the founding members of the Friends of Sparkhill Ladies' Group, a women's group which meets each Tuesday at Sparkhill Library. The group, as discussed in Chapter 3, socialise within the library, raise money for charities, and educate one another. I met the group each week for three months, talking to the women and joining in with some of their activities. The group educate one another in a variety of ways but, as the founding members of the group, Talat and Suriya seem to lead and show a desire to educate. They see the library as an important site for this activity.

Within this section I consider the two women's understandings of the place of the library in women's education and the nature of their practice through a specific part of their narrative; their accounts of particular 'moments' (Lefebvre; 2004) as teachers in British schools. In rooting their current educational activity in their pasts, the stories are significant for an appraisal of the women's understandings of the educational significance of libraries. Specifically, the stories work to establish something of the educational philosophy of the women and to emphasise the role of the group and its value in offering education of a particular kind and of celebrating the cultural heritage of the women who meet.

If pedagogy is 'both the act of teaching and its attendant discourse' (Alexander, 2004; 7), then the narratives represent some of this attendant discourse. Their narratives reveal an incorporation of the ideals of feminist, even perhaps Lefebvrian pedagogic practice (Middleton, 2014) in their past and current activity, as they operate on the educational margins. In this way, Talat and Suriya's work within the women's group seems to have its antecedents in their approach to formal education. The narratives reveal the desires which rhythmed their practice, then and now.



Figure 5.3 Photograph of Talat. Source: Author's photograph.



Figure 5.4 Photograph of Suriya. Source: Author's photograph

When I spoke to them, both Talat and Suriya told me about their past experiences as educators before moving on to talk about the library and the women's group. Concerned, as narrative research is, with the meaning given to experiences (Trahar, 2006), the fact that Talat and Suriya see their story as starting with their time as teachers indicates its importance.

Born in the 1950s, Talat and Suriya moved to the UK from Pakistan and worked as teachers in British schools and colleges. Talat told me:

> I'd been teaching at South Birmingham College for 18 years. So I had a lot of students and they used to, when I was teaching, now I'm retired, so they said we have to have a function for black history month and if we decide to have a Mushaira – a very nice cultural tradition – we don't know how to invite poets and what to do. We have to do everything. So, I used to say, 'yes I will do everything. You just fix the date'. I used to invite all the poets and my students were the audience. So they used to be very grateful and I enjoyed it. And I used to tell their teachers, please exempt them for two or three hours to come.

This story is followed by a description of the depression which Talat experienced upon retirement. It was this illness which led to a friend taking her to the library and ultimately to the beginnings of the women's group. The story of the Mushaira acts to establish Talat as a busy, creative teacher who took on organisational responsibilities within the college. This serves, in terms of the narrative, to contrast with an empty feeling upon retiring, to explain how the women's group began and also to root the activity and the ideology of the women's group in earlier events in Talat's life.

Suriya also worked in colleges in Birmingham before becoming involved in the women's group. She recalls:

> For five years I was teaching in Al-Huda girls' school, that was in the Alum Rock area. I did a small course to come to adult education doing the classes for South Birmingham College, Matthew Boulton, and Joseph Chamberlain, classes in Urdu, and Islamic Studies to GCSE and I was forced into doing textiles (laughing). The textiles teacher left and there was no qualified teacher. Instead of teaching, I think I learned more than teaching! I had the first class, the first group of ladies. The level we were doing was how to put the zip on, how to put the poppers on the blouse and this and that. And the ladies weren't interested in that. They said, 'show us how to do the shalwar kameez'. So we had a problem. I said we can't do that. We don't have

> any syllabus for that. So, I said if we make a syllabus on your basis for shalwar kameez would you be happy? Then I did the syllabus for two levels; level 1 and level 2. They approved it. I made my own folder, sent it to the examiner and then I've been teaching that! So in some centres, if they do textile classes, they follow the syllabus that I wrote! (laughing)

Talat and Suriya's stories align; they are both working within a Birmingham college, planning for educational activity which caters for their predominantly British Asian students. In both cases it seems there is no one else to do the work – it is 'up to them'.

5.8 Women's education, pedagogy and rhythms of educational desire

Talat and Suriya's narratives reveal an incorporation of ideals of feminist pedagogical practice. Although I do not see it as a unitary concept, in this section, following writers such as McCusker (2017), I refer to feminist pedagogy in the singular. Those working within poststructuralist frameworks have been sceptical of some of the claims of critical and feminist pedagogy, arguing, for example, that 'strategies such as student empowerment and dialogue give the illusion of equality while in fact leaving the authoritarian nature of the teacher student relationship intact' (Ellsworth, 1989; 306, see also Ringrose, 2012). Nevertheless, such researchers have also acknowledged the value of certain feminist pedagogical ideals such as learning alongside students (see Ellsworth, 1989, Starks, 1994), and have recognised that critical pedagogy may be empowering for students if students are 'agents who enact their own goals' (Mayes, 2010; 193).

The young women in Suriya's textiles class were 'not interested' in the tasks which had been assigned. The skills required – 'putting a zip on', 'putting poppers on the blouse' – recall feminist writing on girls' education (Middleton, 1993, for example) but also, for me, my own mother's reflections on her girls' school education in the 1960s. She felt she was 'kept down' by the stifling requirements of the curriculum. She recalls choosing to study cookery to avoid sewing and then being told in her first cookery lesson that they must make their own aprons before they could begin learning the principles of cookery. In quite a general way, schools are perhaps teaching 'domesticity' (Skelton and Francis, 2009) or in Oakley's (1981) terms 'teaching femininity'. One might view the activity of making the traditional Pakistani clothing, the shalwar kameez as no different to this. Importantly, though, making the shalwar kameez

is, as Suriya tells it, a task of the students' choosing. Student choice surfaces as an important idea in both historical and contemporary education writing. In another geographical context, Middleton and May (1999) recount changes which led educators in New Zealand to write a new student-centred syllabus. They write:

> Consistent with the shift towards progressivism in high schools by the early to mid 1970s, the department for education was introducing new syllabuses in which the post war version of equality and opportunity ('equal means the same') gave way to one of education for diversity – cultural pluralism and student choice (1999; 86).

Suriya achieved similar aims in her syllabus design, making the learning relevant for the young women.

In *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Belenky et al. conclude:

> education can help women develop their own authentic voices if instead of imposing their own expectations and arbitrary requirements they encourage students to evolve their own patterns of work based on the problems they are pursuing (Belenky et al., 1986; 229).

Suriya, in her teaching of the textiles class, saw the demands of the existing syllabus as just such an arbitrary requirement. We might say Suriya was creative or even critical of the existing framework, that she was, what Madeleine Grumet (2013; 100) called challenging the idea that 'curriculum design is a rational activity'.

Further, Belenky et al.'s language of work based around *goals* and *problems* echoes Suriya's account; 'we had a problem'. The previous chapters show how the pursuing of problems is a common theme in the women's narratives around their use of libraries. In this case, of course, the 'problem' only arose because Suriya chose to listen to the thoughts of her students. Consistent with the open and democratic approach to education celebrated in feminist approaches to education (Weiner 1994, McCusker 2017), it was the students' comments which prompted Suriya to re-write the syllabus. bell hooks' (1994) ideal that contributions within the classroom should become resources is realised here as the students experience the recognition which might be seen as characteristic of a democratic learning community (Fielding, 2007).

The practices described here chime with an emancipatory pedagogy, or 'pedagogy of appropriation' (Middleton, 2017) advocated by Lefebvre. Such a pedagogy, according to Sue

Middleton, involves students ‘asking their own questions’ (Middleton, 2014; 179) and choosing ‘their own resources’ (Middleton, 2014; 179). Such a pedagogy has, of course, to do with the teacher as much as with the students. Here we find the desirable situation of professionals thinking ‘about matters for themselves’ (Alexander, 2004; 11). If ‘critique *is* a pedagogy’ (Middleton, 2016; 424), then both student and teacher take their role in ‘resistance’ of various kinds (Middleton, 2016). Considering this practice in yet broader terms, Martha Nussbaum lists ‘experiencing works and events of their own choice’ as one of ‘ten central capabilities’ for human flourishing (2011; 33).

Suriya taught this course having had no experience of textiles teaching. Her comment that she was learning as much as she was teaching at this time reveals, I think, not only that she was having to learn new skills as she went along, but also a contentedness, perhaps even a celebration, of a classroom organisation in which the roles of teacher and learner are not strictly demarcated. Approaches of this kind have traditionally been associated with progressive and feminist educational practice (Spender, 1982, Ellsworth, 1989, Starks, 1994). Spender, writing in the 1980s, went as far as to state that the terms ‘teacher’ and ‘learner’ ‘become meaningless in a feminist context where all are teaching and learning’ (1982; 150). Such an arrangement certainly prefigures the collaborative spirit of the activity of the Sparkhill women’s group.

Nevertheless, and with contemporary cautions against celebrations of ‘empowerment’ in mind, there seems to be a respect for the students in these narratives. It is telling, I think, that there exists such an ambiguity in the referent of Talat’s ‘they were grateful’. Is it the students that are grateful or the staff that asked her to plan the event? And, likewise, in the addressee of Suriya’s question ‘if we make a syllabus on your basis for shalwar kameez would you be happy?’ This question might have been addressed to the young women who were dissatisfied with the course, or it might be her question to the exam board. My point is that it seems equally likely that they are concerned with the feelings of the students as with those in positions of relative power and, this situation seems have its equivalent in the activity of the women’s group where they plan for activities with the women in mind.

5.9 Working on the margins

As discussed in Chapter 2, there has been a relatively small but important tradition within education research of documenting the activity which takes place ‘on the margins’. Such research has highlighted the activity of disenfranchised groups such as the working classes

and ethnic minority groups (Stone 1981, Mirza and Reay, 2000, Rose, 2001, Gerrard, 2015). Women's educational agency 'is often practiced in informal and marginal circumstances outside of mainstream, formal institutions' (Aiston, 2010; 4). As often invisible institutions (Robinson, 2020) whose educational significance is not well understood, the activity of individuals or groups who meet in libraries can, in academic research, be overlooked.

Although Talat and Suriya's activity described in these narratives takes place within the setting of the school or the college – formal, mainstream institutions – it is education which stands outside of the prescribed activity of any existing school curriculum. The syllabus which Suriya designed was completely novel and catered to a specific group of students working within a particular context. Similarly, the Mushaira which Talat planned seems to sit outside of the normal day to day activity of the college; it is presumably some senior member of staff whose speech Talat adopts when she says, 'we don't know how to invite poets and what to do'. The event seems to have been planned as a response to some perceived demand; 'we need to have an event for black history month'. And the children would usually be elsewhere; 'I used to tell their teachers please exempt them for two or three hours'. Thus, although the Mushaira is traditional in Pakistani culture – and Talat stresses this in her description, given for my benefit, saying that it is 'a very nice cultural tradition' – it stands outside of the traditional British curriculum and the usual activity of the school.

Talat's work at the college thus mirrors her work within the women's group where she once again organises poetry readings and other cultural events. The description of the Mushaira also establishes continuity with her current work in terms of her philosophy towards education. Talat sees poetry and literature as important educational tools and this comes through in her narrative elsewhere. Writing nearly forty years ago, Amrit Wilson's account of the British education system ignoring 'non-European high culture and history' (1978; 96), chimes with some of the women's experiences of education and yet it exists in counterpoint to the activity of Talat in this role and the current activity of the women's group where Pakistani languages and cultures are studied. I will revisit the idea of the library as a space in which women might study and celebrate non-European culture below.

But perhaps more importantly, the stories also demonstrate Talat and Suriya's commitment to educating others in ways which are culturally relevant. Both the Mushaira and shalwar kameez are important parts of Pakistani culture. Thus, and consistent with other accounts of marginal educational activity, a bridge is forged between the students (many of whom have Pakistani roots) and the culture of the college. In Richard Pring's terms, the women show a respect and support for 'the distinctive cultures within the school community' (2007; 511).

Audrey Osler found Muslim teachers working in Birmingham to enjoy a 'point of contact' with Muslim children that they taught because of their shared faith (2003; 154). And Sarah Aiston could have been describing Talat and Suriya's educational practices when she wrote:

> when women's educational agency is practiced within formal institutions the activity often straddles the institution and the community, encompassing a far broader range of educational concerns than might otherwise be formally accommodated within the institution (2010; 4).

This represents another important example of continuity between Talat and Suriya's past and present roles. The women's group, in inviting speakers to their events and in making connections with local groups, organisations and charities, acts to broaden its educational scope and its engagement with local communities. And in the past, in welcoming poets and speakers to the school, Talat might have actually changed the school in important ways. Michael Fielding, writing about radical schooling, reasons that:

> radical schools attract visitors and thereby stimulate and require conversation and wider engagement and these encounters have within them the potential for mutual learning and the enrichment of the public realm on which democracy depends both for its legitimacy and its creativity. (Fielding 2007; 553)

In a different but no less significant way, Suriya's syllabus has changed the education of the students not only in her college but elsewhere: 'in some centres if they do textile classes, they follow the syllabus that I wrote!'

I have focused here on the women's reflections on their work in colleges. Their current activity within Sparkhill Library is perhaps more obviously marginal. They mentor the women in informal, unpaid roles. This shift was a significant one; Talat went from the occupational identity of teacher to retiree, before forming the women's group. She describes experiencing a period of depression in this transition, recalling:

> I got retired on the 7th July, and on the 13th I got depression.

Teaching seems to have sustained Talat in important ways. In a different educational context, that of the Black Sunday Schools, Jessica Gerrard found that women were able to challenge the roles and identities ascribed to them elsewhere (2014; 99). Perhaps, upon retiring, the library provided a similar physical and imaginative space for Talat to contest assumptions, even if only her own assumptions, about what it meant to be a retiree. Sue

Middleton's (1993) categories for analysing women's life histories (borrowed from Juliet Mitchell, 2015 [1971]) such as education, family, sexuality, career, are organisational in a thematic sense and although they are overlapping suggest temporality too. Adopting these categories here, in considering their work within the library, and by extension these narratives about that work, the women are able to make connections between their 'careers' and their 'post career' lives. Suriya suggests this when she says 'we are both teachers and then retired. And we have this to do. We don't go anywhere else. This is our social gathering and our working'. Although they are not now teachers in a formal sense, it is an identity which is still ascribed to them. Humaira, a member of the women's group, described the little quizzes which Talat gives to them at the end of each gathering. She said:

> (laughing) she is a teacher in the end!

Here I have considered the relevance of two short stories told by prominent members of women's group. The women themselves are, of course, mindful of the relevance of these stories to their later accounts and have told the stories as such. They are 'constructing a story for the circumstances of the telling' (Weiler, 1999; 56). The continuity that is evident to me is no accident; in telling me these stories first the women want the origins of the women's group to be understood in terms of their personal histories as educators, sometimes of girls and women, who are happy to lead and keen to challenge.

The narratives extend back into the women's lives, rooting the activity and philosophy of the women's group in their pasts and anchoring the recent collective history of the women's group to their own personal histories. The stories serve three important and related functions. First, they are a way of reflecting on the group's origins. The women who meet at the Sparkhill Library spent a good deal of time talking to me about how the group began and how it was named. As well-educated, middle class women Talat and Suriya are not perhaps representative of the women as a whole and yet these stories are another way of establishing a context for their accounts and reflecting on the beginnings of the group. Second, the stories emphasise the educational significance of the group and its value in celebrating the cultural heritage of those that meet through accounts of related activity. And third, since 'incidents in a teacher's past might shape later values and practice' (Smart, 2010), the stories establish continuity for Talat and Suriya with regards to their identity as educators. Just as when they were teachers in schools they are now adapting, planning and creating resources and activities with the needs of a particular group of women in mind. Tansin Benn's (2003) research into Muslim women's teaching careers found experiences of discrimination and isolation and women coped by retreating from anything connected with

their Muslim identity. Although the activities described by Talat and Suriya might be conceived of as cultural rather than specifically religious, it is perhaps precisely because their activities do not constitute a 'retreat', that Talat and Suriya find significance in these memories.

The responsibilities which Talat and Suriya take on in the Sparkhill women's group recall these narratives of their time as teachers and their responsibilities to their students. The sense of caring which is evident in the stories finds a parallel in Kathleen Weiler's (1999) analyses of women teachers' narratives. They reveal 'moral guardianship' and a 'speaking out for the good of the community from a position of ethical guide' (Weiler, 1999; 52). Suriya and Talat's activity in the schools was creative and enterprising but might also be seen as a kind of 'speaking out'. Suriya 'spoke out' when she challenged an 'ethnocentric curriculum' (Wilson; 1978; 96) and approached the exam board with an alternative syllabus. Talat 'spoke out' when she requested that students be excused from their classes to enjoy an afternoon of poetry. In line with Mirza and Reay's (2000) view of educational sites as political and cultural places, 'speaking out' is also a fitting description for the activity of the women's group more broadly.

5.10 Salma and her Artwork; cultural learning within the library

> If my memories belong to me, I am certainly not their sole owner (Kuhn, 2002; 6)



Figure 5.5 Salma's work.

When I met Salma for the first time, we were at Sparkhill Library sitting at the big table, around which the women's group congregate. She was telling me about the activity of the women's group and said that she was soon to show the women her artwork.

In this section I discuss how this works as a form of education, before going on to interpret Salma's activity and that of some of the other women, in terms of 'narrative imagination' (Nussbaum, 2006).

This is the beginning of the transcript from our conversation.

> S: I'll get it translated and show the ladies, give it to Mrs Javid and teach them a bit, you know, about Art.
>
> K: What do you mean by get it translated?
>
> S: I'll get it translated…like say, for example, about the work itself, what it's all about, it's history, it's background. Get it translated into Urdu, Urbi, and then show these ladies.
>
> K: Urbi?
>
> S: Urbi is Arabic. We say Urbi.

Salma had been studying for a Master's degree in Art and so when she tells me that she will 'translate it to show to them' she means that she will translate the writing that she has done to accompany her artwork into languages which the women can easily read.

In Roland Barthes' (1977) terms, these pieces of writing provide *anchorage* for the artworks, discussing some of the meanings of the work and perhaps directing the viewer to certain parts of the composition. Like a manifesto, these texts might be political, providing an important context for the work. Salma, in the extract above, describes the writing as the artworks' 'history' and 'background'. She hopes that the translations, read together with the images, give a richer understanding of her work. In this way, Salma's reference to translation could be interpreted more broadly as being about translating ideas to make them accessible for a diverse audience – something which bell hooks sees as central to feminist education (hooks, 1994; 111).

The idea of the accompanying texts as providing 'anchorage', as rooting the image in a linguistic message, is an interesting one in the case of Salma's work since linguistic messages – words, phrases, abbreviations, acronyms – are frequently present within the artwork itself. As we looked through her pieces together, Salma pointed out the words within her work and translated them for me:

> Then I've got Bangladeshi writing, Hindi, which says 'desperate', 'despair'. My brother's married to a Bangladeshi woman so she taught me how to write that down.

Salma's artwork will form the basis of an educational activity with the women's group. But as is evident here, it also already exists in and emerged from a network of women's shared social, cultural and educational activity. One of her paintings features corn and Salma tells me,

> It's a cultural reference. It references the male genitalia but it's part of her now. He is gone but it's still a part of her. In my culture we do laugh at that. Women make jokes about it.

Her artwork also is tied to other women in her family through language 'lessons' from her sister-in-law and Urdu lessons from the women in the women's group. And now, of course, Salma is teaching me. *Urbi* is 'Arabic', she tells me.

On one occasion after talking to Salma I looked back as I left the library to see her pull in her chair next to one of the women as they began to study an Arabic text together. Salma learns from the group and tells me about what the other women have taught her. Showing me a book (Figures 5.6 and 5.7) she says:

> S: That's in Urdu and that's Urbi, Arabic.
>
> K: Is that a library book?
>
> S: That's one of the women's. She gave that to me for free, which is very good of her. It's a prayer book. And it's nice and big so I don't need to wear my glasses.



Figure 5.6 Prayer book (front cover). Source: Author's photograph

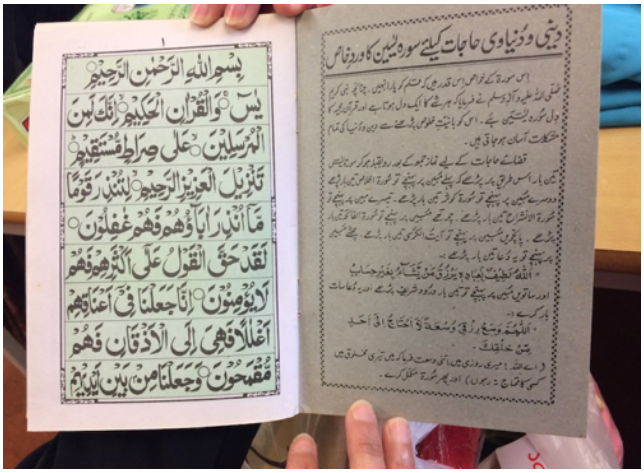


Figure 5.7 Prayer book (inside). Source: Author's photograph

The women's group speak in different languages and dialects and as well as explicit language education they engage in situational and stylistic code switching (Holmes, 2001) within their conversation as they greet a new arrival or chat to a friend. This linguistic soundscape is evident in the recordings that I made in the library and mimics the multilingual nature of Salma's work as different cultures and histories come together. Salma's concern that her work should be 'translated' before she can teach the women about it comes to hold some significance. Salma has been educated by the group in various ways and now Salma will be the educator. Like they have done before for her, Salma intends to make the work and her writing about her work accessible.

The next time we met, Salma showed me a piece of work she has produced which represents her feelings about being sixteen years old:

> So this one, My Meri Meeti Sola means 'My Sweet Sixteen'. These are the all the things that I can remember from when I was sixteen years old. The naivety of the banana on the floor. You can slip - very clumsily. This is Madonna. I remember that. It was the Blonde Ambition. I remember my sister recorded that. It was on BBC or Channel 4. It was from the 80s but even when I was in my teen years it was still quite popular, so I still carry that in my head. And the bullet vests you know, danger. Danger can occur at some point in your life.



Figure 5.8 My Meri Meeti Sola.

The creation of her artwork is a way of remembering a past time and a past self, and now, in the act of telling me about her work, the work acts as a trigger of memories and an object, eliciting reflections. Salma's work was not created with my project in mind. Yet her sharing of her work with me represents the bringing of the private into the public, and her plans to share her work with the group represents a movement from private space to public space. Since Salma's artwork represents her past, memory is important. Annette Kuhn suggests that 'all memory texts call to mind the collective activity of remembering' (2002; 6). This statement resonates with Salma's artwork or 'memory texts' in multiple ways since Salma documents not only her own memories within her work but also a mood, a 'structure of

feeling' (Williams, 1977) perhaps, about a particular time and place. She says of Madonna's Blond Ambition, for example, not that she loved the record but that 'it was still quite popular' and 'so I still carry it in my head'.

The combination of the artwork and our conversation is, ultimately, 'a mode of meaning making' which has to do with 'representation and identity' (Pahl, 2014; 24). I ask Salma to talk to me about libraries and her life and she shows me her work. Telling me about language and culture and art as she does is a way of telling me about herself. Soon, when she shares her work with the women, it will be a way of telling them about herself. This situation takes on a particular significance within the library.

5.11 A Narrative Imagination

Within the library, or through the library, women learn about themselves and others through their reading. Nussbaum (2006) claims that engagements with literature, in cultivating the powers of the imagination, contribute to the kind of judgement and sensitivity needed to produce responsible or just or democratic citizens. Nussbaum terms these powers the 'narrative imagination' or, elsewhere, 'the literary imagination'. Central to the narrative imagination is 'the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person very different from oneself, indeed a whole range of such persons' (2006; 309). The narratives reveal this kind of thinking taking place. The 'possibilities of becoming other are glimpsed in the moment' within the library (Middleton, 2014; 181).

Janette told me about a novel that she'd read recently which is told from the point of view of a baby in utero. She found the playful narrative perspective to be thought provoking and memorable. This kind of shifting perspective is perhaps an extreme example but is suggestive of the way in which this altered thinking might occur. She has stepped into the shoes of a very different person.

Halima also reflects on her reading:

> When I was a teenager I used to be interested in true crime and the holocaust - not in a morbid way just to understand what went wrong for these people.

Similarly, Sheila told me about a novel she had been reading, set during the second world war:

> I shouldn't think this, but I sometimes think the kind of people who were there, I think I wonder if there are people in Germany or Austria who are like those people that were there in the 30s. That that vein is running through. It's one of those things that I think about you know ... I don't know, but I suppose it's going through a war, and I've read so much about concentration camps, it's there in your mind. And one of the things I've thought - they've been having lots of people move from Syria and they have had so many from Syria which I think has been marvellous, they've helped people to live there, the refugees and I think there might be the idea that they want to say sorry for the earlier generations and what they did. I've probably got it all wrong, but those things go through my mind.

Halima and Sheila are reflexive here about the links between their reading and their thinking. The things that 'go through' Sheila's mind when she reads involve a making sense of certain individual and shared historical moments and linking them to contemporary contexts. Halima too is engaged in sense making. And this is not only the product of the reading but indeed it is the purpose. Halima did not read about the holocaust because of a general interest in the events of World War II. Nor is she fascinated by horror; she stresses that her interest is 'not morbid'. Instead, she reads 'to understand what went wrong for these people'. The reading is framed as a concern with comprehending something incomprehensible; a making sense of the actions of others. Halima is 'cultivating the powers of the imagination' (Nussbaum, 2006).

These engagements with the materials of the library, then, seem to suggest a fostering of the kind of imaginative powers which Nussbaum describes and which she sees as an important part of existing in a democratic society. And yet the educational activity and the interactions of the kind fostered in the women's group might, I think, also work to foster a narrative imagination. The sharing of works of art, the oral presentations, the discussion, the teaching, all encourage this imaginative practice. In this way, within the library, perhaps, through their reading but also these other interactions, we learn about people different to ourselves 'whom it would be all too easy to treat as alien objects without the sort of psychological and historical complexity we habitually impute to ourselves' (Nussbaum, 1997; 97).

If the development of the narrative imagination has to do with a greater understanding of others, then Talat identifies such an outcome as being tied to the library in other ways too. Within the library, Talat tells me, one can learn about religions other than one's own:

> And I read books about religion here as well and so it increases your knowledge about other religions. This helps people to live in harmony – a multicultural atmosphere. Some people are restricted to their own religion – 'this is the best and I know the best'. You have a chance to compare with others and basically every religion teaches you good things. There are small differences but there are similarities, especially between Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

Within the library, Talat has a chance to 'compare with others'. This is about engagements with books in this part of Talat's narrative and yet it parallels the interactions between the women and the learning that takes place from one another and about one another. So much of Talat's narrative has to do with the desire to know about other people and so much of the desire in the women's group is to grow an understanding of one another. It's the reason why Talat asks people to talk about themselves and the reason why Salma wants to show the women her, often autobiographical, artwork. 'Reading', within the library takes on, therefore, a broad meaning. Rose (2001) writes about people 'reading their culture'. Through Salma's sharing of her artwork and the activity of the women more generally, there is the potential for much cultural reading. Through learning about themselves, as I considered in Part 1 of the chapter, and though learning about each other, as we see here, the women become a reader of other people's stories (Nussbaum, 2016).

As part of Salma's plans to teach the women about art, she is also planning a trip for the group. She plans to extend this cultural education to include a museum visit.

> And I would like to book a date. There is a Museum in town, and the Ikon, and I can get charity money and fund it.

How does this sort of educational activity relate to that described above? Salma's plans involve exposing the women to something some of them have never before been exposed. In directing their attention towards 'objects of beauty' they will be engaged in the sorts of activity which the philosopher Iris Murdoch (1970) terms 'an unselfing'. The group's learning about Salma's Art and the Art of others echoes Murdoch's conception of a progressive education. Such an education involves turning our attention away from oneself to objects of value and Art is crucial to this, for Murdoch. And yet, seemingly counter to this position, I have stressed the role of the library in learning about oneself and one another. How to reconcile these two positions? The library, it seems, simultaneously offers a site for self-learning and introspection and yet also encourages the unselfing which comes with having one's attention drawn to objects of beauty. In Part 1, of this chapter, I considered the way in which women in studying in more or less formal ways turn their attention and energies to

that which they see as valuable – whether that be an A Level, a degree or a creative writing course – and yet they were simultaneously learning about themselves and bringing themselves to that learning. The narratives suggest that 'attention to matters of the psyche' does not necessarily entail 'a retreat from the world of collective action' (Kuhn, 2002; 10).

When Lefebvre writes of 'art becoming a means of transforming the everyday' he views art as a tool for 'real life' (2003; 28). Salma views her art as a tool too. Kate Pahl (2014; 24) writes of a future where, rather than calling a meeting, people might enact a community concern through theatre for example. In a similar way, Salma tells me about her life and about her understandings of the role of the women's group through conversations about her artwork. Her artwork is a mode of meaning making which has to do with representation and identity. It is striking that after showing me the pieces of work she says, 'So, it's what I've learnt. Coming here', suggesting that Sparkhill Library and the women's group have taught her about art or about herself. This is autobiography as pedagogy (Miller, 1996). Since the work represents her understanding about her own life, like Janette making herself in the library in Part 1, the library and the materials and the relationships have made Salma.

And, as an educator, she is keen to know that I have learnt something too. 'So I hope you've learnt something interesting?' she asks. It is clear to me that she does not only mean something interesting for my research project but something interesting for me, too. And I have. She has taught me about language, about Freida Kahlo, about flags, and about rude cultural symbols which she has included in her work. Consistent with the women's way of including me in their usual practices, Salma, through the research encounter, exercises her desire to educate by educating me too. Within our conversations, I realise, we have been engaging in a little of what the women's group do. Discussing Salma's work and her plans to share her art with the group has been a way for me to learn, in Salma's words, what the 'women's groups means' and 'what makes it important'.

If through learning about Salma's art one can learn about the group, the work perhaps becomes a metaphor for the women's group. Indeed, the different languages coming together on the canvas echo the multilingual interactions of the group. The stylistic and situational code switching in which the women engage mirrors Salma's code switching on the canvas. And central to the women's group and to Salma's artwork, there is a uniting of individual pasts with shared histories; a making sense of oneself and one's culture. Kate Soper writes that 'art derives its strength from its critical and tragic dimensions' (1990; 14). There is distress and desire, hope and longing in Salma's work. Rhythmanalysis is concerned with endogenous and external time (that which is within and that which is

outside). In a similar way, memory, within the artwork, within the group and within the library more generally, bridges ‘the divide between the inner and outer worlds’ (Kuhn, 2002; 10).



Figure 5.9 Salma’s work

5.12 Women as Educators in the Library

Women, in these vignettes, act as educators; they plan and deliver educational activity within the space of the library. Through stories about the past and through accounts of desires for the future, libraries emerge as sites for women to act on their desire both to both be educated and to educate others.

Part 1 revealed how women occupying marginal positions might have their educational desires frustrated. The library, in this context, offered a site for women to work on their desires from the margins. The accounts offered in Part 2 reveal that, from their space on the margin, within the library, women educate one another in often unacknowledged ways.

Sometimes drawing on counter knowledges, they operate ‘between, under and alongside the mainstream educational and labour market structures’ (Mirza, 1997; 274) in hidden counter publics (Fraser, 1990).

Viewed in this way, suggestions that libraries struggle to clarify their role in learning processes (Goulding, 2008) or that, as educational scholars, we do not have a good understanding of the educational significance of libraries for girls and women, take on a particular significance. It becomes likely that we not only lack an understanding of the learning which takes place within the library, as troubles Goulding (2008), but that we also lack an understanding of the wider educational significance of libraries, for individuals and for communities.

This education, these accounts suggest, has a certain character and distinct rhythms. It values student contributions, the pursuing of problems, learning alongside others, ‘cooperation over competition’ (Spender, 1982) and learning within an all age environment (Posser and Kruger, 1990). ‘Educated rhythms are human, therefore, social rhythms’ (Lefebvre, 2004; 43) and social rhythms organize the activity of the women as they form inclusive environments within the library. The practices described by Talat and Suriya and Salma in this heterogenous group, are marked by a spirit of ‘conviviality’ (Neal et al., 2018).

This education involves the women learning about themselves and about one another and sometimes, and in line with Lefebvrian pedagogical ideals, it might involve engagement with the arts (Middleton, 2014; 181). Here the library becomes a site for the development of a ‘narrative imagination’ (Nussbaum, 2006) not only through the reading which is linked to the library, but through the kinds of educational practices, cultural learning and creative pedagogies described above.

Through engagements with books, the library offers a site for the development of a narrative imagination in quite a pre-figurative sense. Often, through reading, for example, one is encouraged to take the perspective of another. Something similar might be said about groups such as the women’s group. Since the women read not only books but one another within the library, they invite one another to notice and desire and care about new things. In this way, the library simultaneously offers a site for self-learning and introspection and yet also encourages the unselfing which comes with having one’s attention drawn to objects of value or beauty.

The library, then, is a space to foster and 'work on' one's own educational desire but also to act on one's desire to educate others. Anne's reflections on her family's philosophy around education are relevant here:

> Our background was that the more you learnt the more you would enable yourself and enable others.

The processes described in Part 1 and Part 2 thus become linked. Within the library women educate themselves and they educate others. Anne's articulation here, and the examples above, seem to nicely capture the fact that the desire to educate oneself is not simply a project of self-improvement, of self-advancement (Mirza, 1997) but more radical and revolutionary than that, even if in quiet everyday, ways. Black puts it well: the 'ultimate ends of knowledge are primarily social, altruistic and aesthetic – not individualistic, acquisitive and material' (1996; 268). Education, in this context, is 'an opening out towards the possible' (Middleton, 2014; 179), for those occupying marginal positions.

Janette told me about a 'story group' she started when she was a librarian in Bristol. I asked her what happened to the stories that the group wrote together and she told me that she gives them out to children that she meets; 'I say write another'. And she gave one to me to read with my children. In this way the desire to educate continues into new contexts as other children are inspired by the stories created by the young people with whom she worked.

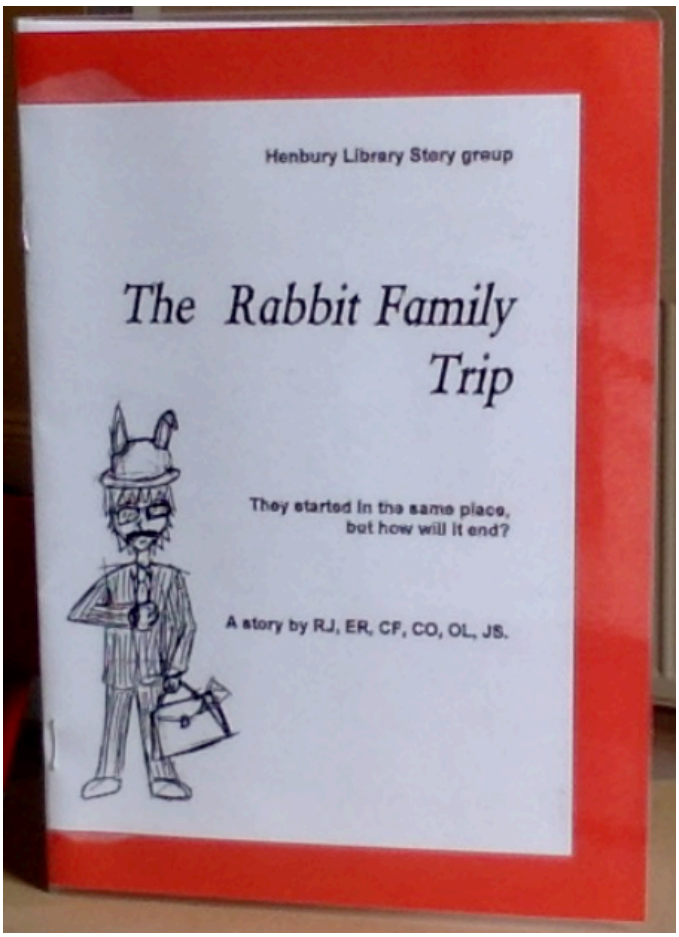


Figure 5.10 Story produced by Janette's Story Group. Source: Author's photograph

In a similar spirit, at the end of our time together, Salma urged me to share her work:

> You should show it to your daughters!

Salma feels a desire to extend this education to others, to impress upon those inside and outside of her immediate circle the power of art or the importance of attending to the experience of others. Like Janette, Salma's educational desire makes itself felt as a desire to educate in ways that go beyond the immediate context of the library and instead create a cycle of learning. Through this continuity, and since repetition is inherent to rhythm (Elden, 2004a), the rhythms of educational desire build momentum. Since her work includes sexual themes, she concludes;

> It's art so everything is done subtlety. It's education.

5.12 Summary

Rhythms require time and place and energy (Lefebvre, 2004) and I have put each of these elements in focus in these chapters. But, of course, these components are not rhythmically separable. These vignettes reveal the energy which women expend in educating one another but the spatial and temporal context for this activity is important. The women's pursuits are grounded in a sense of place and a spirit of community. And they are grounded in their own and other's histories.

Humera, one of the members of the group that meets at Sparkhill Library, tells me that the group 'works wonders' for the women. She says that Talat 'boosts' their 'energies'. There is the feeling that the women are changed in important ways by the activity of the group.

This has rhythmanalytical consequences. The distinction between cyclical time and linear time is the distinction between 'rhythmed time and the times of brutal repetitions' (Lefebvre, 2004; 73). Lefebvre writes of the latter that this repetition is tiring, exhausting and tedious, while the return of a cycle has the appearance of an event and an advent' (2004; 73). Talat brings cycles. The activity of Talat and Suriya and the women's group rhythms women's lives and, in countering the tedium of linear time, boosts their energy and arouses their educational desire. This is what Lefebvre means when he speaks of the everyday as the site of conflict between rhythms (2004; 73).

In these chapters I have allowed 'desire' to stand for the manifestation of the third required element in Lefebvre's triad – energy. If Talat is able to give energy to the women in her own 'moment of desire' as an educator (Steedman, 1992; 186) then she also awakens desire within them. And if the educational task is, as Gert Biesta (2019) suggests, the arousal of desire in others then, within the library, Talat meets Biesta's challenge. And, if it is 'energy that animates the human' (Middleton 2014; 114), then it does not seem an exaggeration to say that the women giving energy to one another as they educate themselves and each another within the library feels not only educational but lifegiving.

Chapter 6: Methodological reflections

6.1 Research in Whispers

..no one spoke above a whisper (Hardendorff, 1979; 8)

In this chapter I offer some methodological reflections. In the second part of this chapter I consider the way in which this rhythmanalytical research was itself rhythmed in various ways. But first, in this first section, I reflect on conducting research within a library, on the significance and consequences of talking to women in hushed voices; of researching in whispers.

I have titled this section 'Research in Whispers'. Libraries are not always quiet places, of course, and, my recordings capture so much of the noise of the library; babies crying, background conversations with staff, teachers giving instructions to visiting school groups. And my conversations were sometimes noisy; my meetings with the women's group at Sparkhill Library, for example, sometimes involved talking loudly over one another and laughing. But often, when libraries were quite quiet or when people nearby were concentrating, the whole research encounter took place in a near whisper. I considered the auditory properties of the library in Chapter 4, but I refer again to this here, in reflecting on the research methods, because the whispered conversations seem to change the nature of the research through changing the relationships which were forged.

Whispering is a prosodic speech feature, a 'paralinguistic' tone of voice (Crystal and Davy, 1976; 71). Stylistically, it is associated with confidentiality, intimacy or with 'ingroup' communication (Cirillo, 2004). Producing speech in a whisper gives it a 'special status' (Mondada, 2012). When meeting a woman, often for the very first time, the early part of our conversation was a negotiation, deciding how we would work; we would feel our way. And this encounter took on a different feel because of the context of the conversation.

Of course, the women and I were not, usually, communicating in confidential or intimate ways; we were simply whispering to be quiet. And yet, perhaps, precisely because whispering is associated with intimate or confidential speech acts, the nature of the conversation might have been altered and the relationship that was forged took on some of those qualities. There is, immediately, a sense of something being shared as we are talking about libraries but also both acting on a cultural understanding of the library as a place in which to be quiet if others are quiet. (An ethical consideration that I grappled with through

my whispered conversations was whether we were making an annoying noise for others in the library.)

The proximity which is implicated in research conducted in whispers is also significant in bringing a feeling of closeness to the research relationship. We would sit huddled together somewhere. This proximity takes on a particular poignancy at the time of writing where the social distancing measures which are in place due to the Covid-19 virus would prohibit such practice. Viewed in this way, the research took place at a moment in time when it could be conducted in such a way.

In their book titled *InterViews* – to emphasize the importance of the space between the researcher and the research participants – Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) stress the knowledge constructed between the interviewer and interviewee. And Gergen (2004) views narratives as a cultural creation produced in the liminal space between the teller and the told. The research methods literature which stresses the *relationship* which is forged is significant in the contexts I have described. Entering into particular kinds of relationships meant that different things could happen. There were consequences for the narratives.

In our discussions two sets of knowledges would come together and links would be made between our lives. In Chapter 5, I reflected on women's role as educators within the library. The research encounter itself is yet another moment of education taking place between women, as the women educate me, as the researcher, in various ways. They teach me about the place of the library and so in a sense, of course, everything that the women say educates me, in teaching me about the object of enquiry. But they teach me about other things too. On the matter of conducting my research, Janice, having conducted research herself, advised me: 'whatever book you're using – put down the whole reference'. The women also educated me on topics which help me to better understand their narrative. Margaret taught me about Catholic theology, and the Women's Group taught me about the languages they spoke. In forming a relationship, we were better able to find common ground and to engage in some of the very practices for which the women described the library as being valuable.

We might even work out meanings together. Janette described her library reading group to me. So, between our first and second meeting, I had been reading Elizabeth Long's (2003) book *Book Clubs,* in order to make sense of Janette's descriptions of the shared reading practices of the group. At our second meeting at the Barber Institute – an art gallery on the University of Birmingham campus – I mentioned that I'd been looking at literature on the topic of reading groups and she said that she'd be keen to read it too, so she noted down

the details. Similarly, Janette would often recommend books and other resources to me. In our conversations there are recommendations for novels which she has enjoyed which she thought I would too – Ian McEwan's *Nutshell*, for example, and, in the context of conversations about the future of the UK's relationship with Europe, she recommended *The European Times* newspaper. We exchanged emails after those meetings, and these continue to feature reading recommendations; had I seen the collection of children's rhymes illustrated by Maurice Sendak? Janette and her daughter had both tracked down nice copies. We had talked about Sendak at length the first time we met. Like my conversations with others – Halima, Jeanette, Janice – the collaborative nature of the research encounter manifests itself, just as it does in the women's examples of library education, in discussions about relevant literature and in learning from other's educational experiences. Thus, in my exchanges with Janette and others, the line between the research conversation and a more general conversation begins to blur. The sorts of practices which women told me that they valued and the ways of working with other women and thinking about the links between texts and lived experience were actually played out in our conversations within libraries.

It would be possible to conduct research asking similar questions to those posed in this project without visiting a library and without speaking to women within a library. But I think it might yield different findings about the library's role in women's lives. In short, I am able to make the claims about the social role of the library, for example, in a particular way because of the methods employed. The research points to the value of collecting narratives in educational settings.

However, and it is important to stress, the situation described above; the forging of relationships within the library was not always unproblematic. I referred in Chapter 2, to the historian Natalie Zemon Davis, and her imaginings about what the three seventeenth century women that she has researched would say about her and her work. They accuse her, she imagines, of being 'after adventures' (1995; 2). Unlike Davis, I was party to some of the women's reflections. At the least complicated level, I was reminded, as I began this research, that the women are thinking about me as much as I am thinking about them. The sociolinguist Janet Holmes (2001) describes the process by which interviewees in a research context might accommodate their speech to that of the interviewer. Whether that was ever the case, they listened to my speech; as soon as she heard me speak, Jill, a town planner, said 'you are from the East Midlands'.

One young woman asked me where I lived and told me I had 'travelled a long way' to her library. And another, who saw my life as being very different to hers tells me 'you're lucky'. I

exist on the margins of some of the women's worlds. Comments such as these raise important ethical questions around the researcher and the researched and force reflections on the extent to which some groups might be over researched or might feel mined for their stories (Reinharz, 1983). In their work on social class and belonging, Ben Rogaly and Becky Taylor write:

> 'what right do you as middle-class researchers have to interview in a working-class area?' That is the question, that unsurprisingly no one asked us. (2009; 23)

Likewise, Linda McDowell reminds us that the personal attributes of the researcher such as the age, class and ethnicity take on a significance in the encounter between researcher and researched (2005; 197), and my thoughts often turned to the question of my place as a middle class, white woman in the women's world.

My concerns around these sorts of things manifest themselves in a variety of ways. I worried, for example, when it seemed that Neha did not understand my explanations of the research process. I referred to her question in Chapter 2; she asked me after we had talked about the project, 'what exactly will you do?' Neha is unlikely to have had much contact with research or conducted research herself. I had to think about how I could explain the process so that she would be able to give her consent in an informed way. I decided at the start of one of our meetings to act out some of the processes involved in research. I pretended to ask her a question and then showed her how I might make a note of what she said, and I showed her the page so that she could see what I was doing with her words. And then I explained how transcription works and how I would then move from a transcript and a set of notes to actually forming statements about her and the other women. This is part of the transcript from our conversation, by way of illustration.

> K: Let me show you how I did it. Like this. And what I do is I write it all down or type it up on the computer. And then I use that to help me write. So I will say 'the women at Sparkhill find the library to be important in these different ways' but, if it was you, I would say, 'A woman called Neha said that the library was…' because you've chosen Neha to be your name.

Neha had been unsure to start with how a pseudonym worked, so using examples like this and acting out the process helped, I think, to explain some aspects of the research process. I hoped that such exercises went some way towards avoiding assumptions about what is understood about research practices which might be taken for granted.

I have called this part of the chapter ‘research in whispers’ to account for the whispered conversations. But it also captures the way in which the research sometimes involved hearing a woman’s thoughts filtered through the translated words of another, and this was another important part of the research process.

Translation is not an objective act. When Salma translates Shaheen’s words, for example, she brings something of herself to the interpretation. Salma, as a younger woman who has had a very different life to Shaheen, listens to Shaheen’s words and interprets them. Even just the fact that she recounts Shaheen’s words to me in the third person, rather than the first indicates that a process of transformation has taken place. Rather than seeing this as a failing of the method or a problem with the use of a translator in narrative research. I see it as an interesting area for reflection. After those conversations I was able to reflect on what Shaheen thought, but also on the thoughts of the translator herself. For example, at one point, Salma said, ‘and I know how she feels’. In this way, ‘structures of feeling’ emerge within the narrative as it is told (Williams, 1977).

If when Salma translates Shaheen’s words she sometimes speaks for herself and she recognises links between the two women, then I see this taking place elsewhere within the narratives, via different means. One way in which this is accomplished is through the use of imagined or stylised speech, which is incorporated into the story telling. Safina, who works with the St Paul’s Trust Children’s Centre, reflected on the value of the library as a place for women with young children to meet.

> …[They can meet] friends and family and other women and children. And they can have their playdates with their children – ‘Oh let’s meet up at the library!’

Safina imagines the speech of someone suggesting the library might be a place to meet: ‘Oh let’s meet up at the library’. Just like the code-switching which women engage in within the library, this stylised speech acts as a ‘kind of quotation marks’ (Holmes, 2001; 38). This might act to make the telling more vivid and to explain the sort of context which she is picturing. More than this, though, I think it works as a tool within the narrative to index that these feelings are not only hers but that others find the library to be of value too. Such an analysis suggests that tools which are used by the narrators to help them tell a story warrant further study. When women translate the words of others and add interpretations and affirmations, and when they stylise the speech of imagined others, they are speaking not only for themselves but for others. The ‘voice’ belongs to a social group rather than an individual (Agha, 2005).

Translating the words of others, and speaking for others, is of course, what I am doing now. The historian Linda McDowell sees her role in exactly this way; as a researcher, she is a 'translator' (2005;199). In 'rendering lives familiar or accessible' she is translating one system of meaning, oral histories, into another – an academic argument, and tries to do so 'without altering its coherence or radially transforming its meaning (2005; 199). This is an ethical responsibility that I too have taken on.

6.2 Rhythming the research

27th January 2017 Birmingham Public Library Consultation ends
14th February Valentine's Day
27th February Birmingham Public Libraries' opening hours reduced
8th March International Women's Day
22nd March Westminster terrorist attack
26th March Mother's Day

As I planned and conducted the project I kept some contextual notes. These included references to the time of the year, national celebrations, current affairs, the weather, as well as notes on local developments such as the progress of the Birmingham Public Library consultation and the implementation of changes. These local and global events did not simply provide context for the research in the sense of 'backdrop'; they actually informed the research conversations. Indeed, references to the same events that I noted in my diaries often appear in the transcription of the narratives.

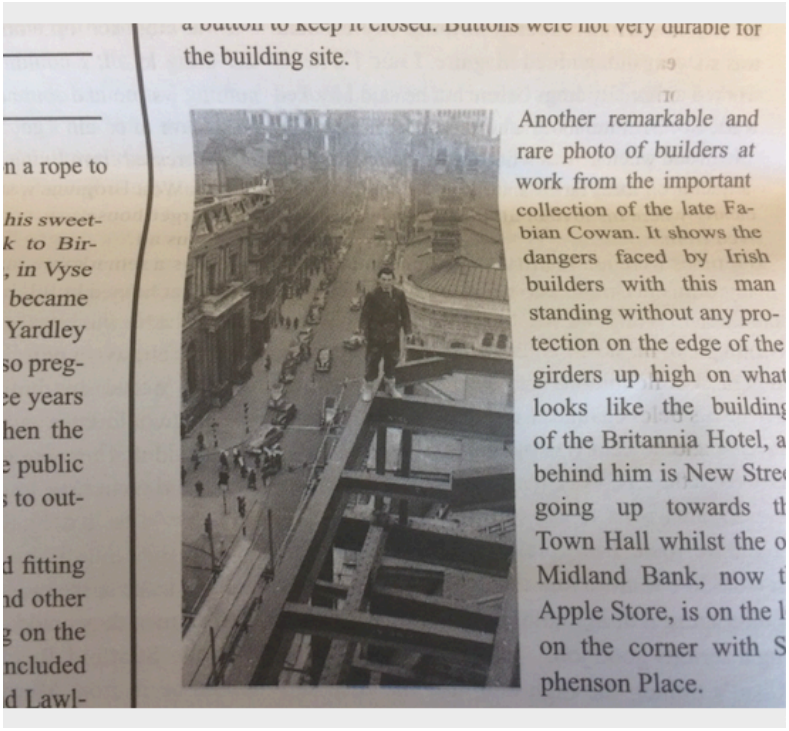
It was winter when I began collecting the narratives and the bad weather defined some of the research encounters. Tim Edensor says in considering the multiple rhythms of place we can identify seasonal, climatic, and tidal rhythms, as well as other non-human pulses of animals and plant life (2010b; 69). Repeated rain rhythmed the early parts of the research, as the following emails attest.

> I am in the office at the moment and, looking at the rain pelting down, am quite glad not to be heading across there. (Anne)

> I'm looking out at a grey rainy day and thinking still of the beautiful sunny weather we had in Austria. It was good for skiing and just walking. Of course the Austrians were moaning it would shorten the ski season, but I was happy. (Janette)

The first time that I met Anne the rain persisted and references to the weather penetrate the narrative itself.

> There's an exhibition in the art gallery and you see there's a man there [showing me the man in the picture; Figure 6.1] on the girders and it's about the Irish community here in Birmingham … We're not Irish, I'm from East Anglia and my father came here as a heating and ventilating engineer … to put the fabric inside the structure that you know as the House of Fraser opposite the church and he worked on the girder framework, in conditions like today.


the building site.

Another remarkable and rare photo of builders at work from the important collection of the late Fabian Cowan. It shows the dangers faced by Irish builders with this man standing without any protection on the edge of the girders up high on what looks like the building of the Britannia Hotel, a behind him is New Stre going up towards th Town Hall whilst the o Midland Bank, now t Apple Store, is on the l on the corner with S phenson Place.

Figure 6.1. Anne's newspaper cutting. Source: Author's photograph

Here, the weather outside the warm cafe in which we sit helps Anne to tell her story of a different time and place.

One February morning I talked to Salma at Sparkhill Library. Discussing one of her pieces of artwork (Figure 6.2) she told me 'there's a lot of rage, a lot of heartbreak going on in this picture'. It occurred to us that it was Valentine's day and she suggested:

> You could give this to your husband. There you go darling. This is your valentine! It's kind of like 'you must die for me'.



Figure 6.2 Salma's 'Valentine's Day'

Thus just as public holidays and national celebrations rhythm the activity of the women's group in Sparkhill Library so too did they rhythm the research. The 8th March brought International Women's Day and I was due to meet Janette. She told me she was planning to go to a special Women's Day talk at the University and therefore suggested we meet after that on campus. Catching up at the Barber Institute, we talked first about her impression of the talk. This discussion, and perhaps some sense of import to the day being fitting for a discussion of the role of libraries in women's lives, seemed to colour the whole conversation.

Fifteen days later, and the day after the 2017 Westminster terrorist attack, I met Margaret. My research diary tells that Kings Heath seemed empty that day and my father-in-law, who took a train to Birmingham to look after my daughter, remarked that the trains were eerie in their quiet. That mood affected our conversation and Margaret's reflections, with her making links between the footage that had been shown on television and her own memories of her career as a nurse:

> We were like that…the police coming together. When we were nursing and after terrible accidents people would come into A and E, but you got on with it.

This led to her telling me about her use of libraries during this time and thus it seemed that the whole line of the narrative was altered by the events of the previous day.

Later, spring arrived in earnest and warmer weather came with it. The libraries were quieter for a different reason. I noted in my diary on April 4th 2017, 'today was sunny and the library was quiet'. Just as people's habits changed with the good weather so too did the research encounters. I met Margaret for a second time and she told me about her memories of Birmingham.

> I remember Princess Margaret coming to Birmingham to open the Maternity hospital. She was stunning and it was about this time of year and she had a beautiful hat on.

Here, the weather outside the library window acts as an aid in Margaret's recollection of the events of that day. Margaret's account recalls Annette Kuhn's assertion that popular memory accounts are marked by the ways in which they 'bring together the lives of ordinary people who are its subjects and its producers with events on a grander, more public scale' (2002; 81).

As Margaret goes on to describe the floral outfits, it is with the fashions of the 1960s, but also with the spring weather as experienced both then and now, in mind. She told me about what she had been doing since we had met. On Mothers' Day, she reflected, she had felt in a mood to reminisce and look at books that reminded her of her family. Her father worked in cinemas and within Margaret's own personal library she has a small collection of books about film. She brought some of the books to show me (Figures 6.3 and 6.4).

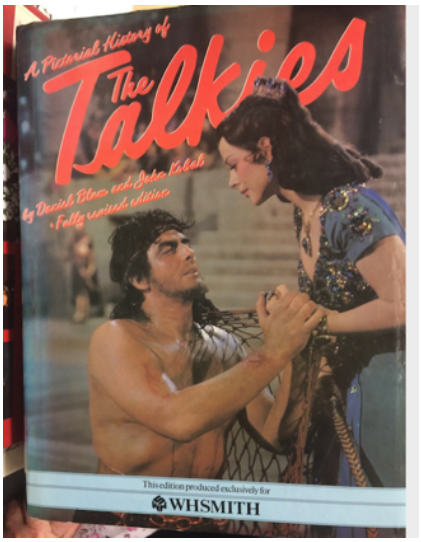


Figure 6.3 One of Margaret's books about film. Source: Author's photograph



Figure 6.4 Photograph from Margaret's book. Source: Author's photograph

She recently enjoyed attending a lecture at the nearby Acocks Green library on the history of Birmingham's cinemas:

> because my father was a cinema projectionist when they had cinema projectionists; I don't think they have them anymore. But there was a lovely lady and they had slides of all the cinemas in Birmingham, which ones had been demolished or turned into Bingo Halls, so that was particularly interesting.

Margaret might not have thought to tell me about the lecture at the Library or about her family history had it not been for Mother's Day.

> I think it was because it was Mothering Sunday, and it was just so lovely just to look back at the pictures.

Local contexts pertaining to libraries also shaped the research. Halima and I met at Hall Green Library on the day that the changes to Birmingham's local library opening hours came into effect. This meant that the library was closing at lunchtime for the first time. On the recording from that day, many conversations can be heard about the early closure with staff issuing reminders about the changes to opening hours as they issue books. This context impacted upon the mood of our meeting. Halima told me:

> Nowadays there are threats of closures so there's like a futility with cuts in funding. If there's a kid somewhere who hasn't got access to books or tv … libraries aren't going to be there for them. It's really sad isn't it. It's just sad.

On a smaller scale still, rhythms within my own life and that of my family impacted on my reading. When my younger daughter started going to nursery school, for example, I was drawn to reading Susan Isaacs' 1937 pamphlet *The Educational Value of the Nursery School* (Isaacs 2013). Even my supervisor's suggestions paid attention to various 'natural rhythms' (Lefebvre, 2004), with the comment that a particular topic to be researched would make for 'a nice afternoon in the library' or the advice to capture photos of the libraries 'while the leaves are still on the trees'.

What then, is the significance of these reflections? First, they suggest that narrative research is able to capture something of the life of the setting in which the research takes place. In the field of narrative methods, there has been recent interest in stories which emerge out of everyday encounters: so-called 'small stories'. And the suggestion has been that these might avoid the stepping away from everyday life that occurs with 'big stories' yielded by, for example, narrative interviews (see Bamberg, 2004). As the examples above attest, far from yielding reflections which are far removed from everyday life, the narratives offer stories which are situated, context-dependent and point to the world beyond. Indeed, this pointing outside of the personal story to something shared or jointly experienced is probably part of the reason that the public rhythms to which the women refer seem so significant. Meeting for the first time and with little knowledge of one another, the weather or the news becomes a point of common ground and we are, on International Women's Day, for example, united by something which we share.

Second, and as a consequence of the point above, the research project itself can be seen as rhythmed in various ways. Of course, social research can never take place in a vacuum, but this research, like the women's engagements with libraries, is so very affected by local and global contexts, by weather, by seasons, in short by rhythms of various scales (Lefebvre, 2004).

Chapter 7 Conclusions: Libraries in Women's Lives

> The concept of a library as an organic community … to which every member, readers, writers, and things written, contributes a due share … out of which the heritage that I have called the golden chain is fashioned. It is more than a heritage, more than a remembrance of things past: for it looks forward as well as backward, binding together both yesterday and tomorrow and impressing the stamp of today on the links as they pass through our hands.
>
> Raymond Irwin from a lecture delivered in 1957: 1958; 20

7.1 Introduction

Three months after I began collecting women's narratives, my family and I travelled up to Scotland for the Easter break. A visit to Glasgow Women's Library in Bridgetown was the highlight of the trip. My daughters sat in child-sized chairs, listened to stories and, with crayons and paper, copied the pattern of the library carpet woven by women at the nearby Templeton Carpet factory.



Figure 7.1. My daughter drawing in Glasgow Women's Library. Source: Author's photograph.



Figure 7.2. My family reading in Glasgow Women's Library. Source: Author's photograph.

Meanwhile, I talked to the librarians and looked along the shelves making notes and taking photos of the many books I wanted to look up once I got home. Before leaving the library, I bought a little booklet called Speaking Volumes, which had been produced for Glasgow International Festival of Visual Arts 2016. Within it, the co-founder of the library, Adele Patrick reflects on Glasgow Women's Library. I read this short text on the train home to Birmingham. And whilst carrying out this project and trying to work out what a library is and what libraries mean to women, the final lines of the text have been playing round in my head.

She wrote:

> What are we trying to do and what do we want people to feel and experience? Ultimately the library is essentially whatever the current constellation of those who work in it, who support it and use it want to make and remake of the basic components: women, books and space. (Patrick, 2016; np)

I had been grappling with these components myself, moving them around on the page – women, books, space – as I began to conceive of this project. It did not occur to me on that train ride home that *time* did not feature in that list. But since then, as I have been studying women's narratives and thinking about the objects and spaces and practices which make up the libraries that they describe, the importance of time and of rhythm have emerged, forcefully, as defining concerns.

Looking back at the text now, Adele Patrick, of course, writes of time and of rhythm throughout the short piece. She writes of stories, history, change, continuities, moments, traces, permanence, and she reflects on particular times of day – the time 'before the library opens and after it closes,' when 'there is a palpable sensation of the presence of thousands of women'.

Libraries are rhythmed and, my project suggests, they, in turn, play an important role in rhythming women's lives. Henri Lefebvre wrote that there is a rhythm 'everywhere there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy' (Lefebvre 2004: 15). I have taken these three elements as organising principles in this thesis. Women reflect on the times, places and energies which they have expended in and around libraries.

7.2 Time, Place and Energy

I set out, in this project, to investigate the role of libraries in women's lives. What is the educational significance of the library and how do women reflect on their engagements with libraries through their lives? I begin in this chapter by summarising my conclusions; by answering these questions. I then move on to draw these threads together, to reflect on the affordances of rhythmanalysis and consider the contribution of this project more broadly.

7.2.1 Time

Libraries rhythm women's lives. This has an educational component but is also true of women's lives more broadly. The library takes its place around routines of study, work, childcare and everyday life. Through the library women enter into shared rhythms and the library brings cycles of activity.

The narratives constitute a combination of the creative practice of everyday life and the dull monotony of quotidian routine (Moran, 2005; 11). It is a certain kind of everyday life which

many of the accounts of library use point to, one which fits in and around the buying of school uniform, taking children to swimming lessons or to the park, and involves getting a bus and taking some home-made sandwiches. The library performs a mediating role between the linear rhythms of the everyday and the cyclical rhythms of women's lives. Library use can bring harmonious rhythms but when libraries are forced to reduce their provision, they themselves can be the cause of disruption and arrhythmia (Lefebvre, 2004; 68).

The continuity in women's practice reveals the library's role in offering connections across time, as grasped rhythms are taken up once again. Against the routine of the everyday, the library is also a site for moments of rupture, for women's personal histories to be linked to broader social histories. In the *Production of Space*, Lefebvre writes that 'the past leaves its traces' (1991; 37). He is thinking here about things being inscribed on space – in homes, in landscapes, in schools and so on. The women's narratives suggest that traces might also be inscribed upon people so that threads are picked up and grasped rhythms are taken up once again.

The library, then, offers an important public space but it also offers public time. Through it, women are linked to particular histories and they enter into shared rhythms. This happens synchronically – so that women see and value others using the library in the same way – and it also happens diachronically – so that women see continuity in practice. They identify shared rhythms with the past.

7.2.2 Place

The places and spaces which make up the library are charged with educational significance. The narratives offer reflections on the visual, auditory and haptic elements of the buildings. The accounts reveal the material forms and the spatial rhythms (Lefebvre, 2004) to be affectively and educationally significant. The 'spatial stories' (De Certeau, 1984) around libraries reveal women's orientations of particular spaces, pointing to the place of the library in everyday life. The library is revealed, through comparisons with other public and private spaces, to offer opportunities for retreat, as women occupy corners and quiet spaces.

The library is also shown to be a site for the search for a place in history as women learn about their own and others' pasts. The narratives reveal the imaginary spaces which the women occupy or seek to occupy. The library here becomes a site for the search for particular and imagined books but also a search for the self. It emerges as a place where one might experience protection in place of constraint and recognition in place of

surveillance and where one might resist dominant ideas about gender or 'race'.

Literacy practices, and educational practices more broadly, are rooted in practices and rhythms of everyday life and the journeys made to and from libraries are an important part of everyday routines. The practices associated with libraries continue beyond the space of the library and into the mobile environments of the bus, or train. Through women's journeys to the library – their spatial practice – they practise place (De Certeau, 2011; 131). In their physical 'deciphering of space' (Lefebvre, 1991; 38), they are involved in the very 'production' of that social space. The journeys, conditioning social space and associating it with a history, serve to offer continuity with the past. Through private engagements with books and library resources, women act on their educational desires finding connection within the public sphere. Thus, the physical journeys which women describe find a connection with their own educational journeys.

7.2.3 Energy

Conceiving of the energies which women expend reading and learning and studying within the library, acting on educational desires, reveals rhythms in interaction. Women feel a desire to read, to learn, to educate and to be educated. There is urgency and ambition in these stories, but desire also finds expression in the women's everyday habits and quiet routines around studying, borrowing books and in the recording of reading. I use the language of educational desire to capture the sense of educational aspiration but also the need to learn and to be in some way altered, allowing for an expanded view of the educational significance of the library.

Speaking from one or multiple marginal positions the women's narratives offer reflections on frustrated desires and longings. The narratives reveal 'frustrated, frenzied, unrealised possibilities' (Lefebvre, 1995; 124). But they also challenge these positions in and through the library. The accounts highlight different ways of knowing, acts of resistance, or thinking for oneself and using the self as an instrument of understanding (Belenky et al., 1986). Eurythmic states (Lefebvre, 2004; 68) follow, or co-occur with, the working on and the fulfilment of educational desire. Libraries are a 'central location for the production of counter hegemonic discourse' (hooks, 1984; 149). Library education is empowering. If women's education enables women to 'claim power' (Chantier and Cavallo, 1999; 114), then the library emerges as a powerful site for these endeavours. The library both fosters and hosts women's ambition to change the 'circumstances' of theirs and others' lives (Thompson, 2000; 8). From the margins, in hidden counter-publics (Fraser, 1990), women educate one another outside of formal, mainstream settings.

When women are educators within the library, distinct rhythms can be discerned. The narratives reveal convivial, social rhythms, creative pedagogies, cultural learning and engagement with the arts. This education is charged with certain potentials. Simultaneously a space for self-learning but also, through engagements with objects and with people a space for unselfing, the library is revealed to be a site for, the development of a narrative imagination (Nussbaum, 2006). The desires and energies which I treat as separate in the discussion of educational desire are revealed to be intertwined so one's desires to educate oneself might be linked to a desire to educate others.

Further, the wish to educate others, to act on a 'moment of desire' (Steedman, 1992; 186) seems to be felt as a strongly held desire, an impulse, so that rhythms of educational desire build momentum, and like the trips to libraries which bring continuity across generations of women, cycles make themselves felt. Here, desire – like energy which can be neither created nor destroyed, only transferred – passes from person to person giving energy to both those who deliver it and those who receive it.

Indeed, desire, and its fulfilment, finds expression in pleasure and in joy. The narratives, as spaces of representation (Lefebvre, 1991), contain an affective kernel (Merrifield, 2006; 110). That the library brings pleasure is evident both in accounts of processes and in descriptions of states; the narratives often reveal feelings of love.

7.3 Rhythming Women's Lives

If time, place and energy come together to create 'rhythm', then women's accounts of times, places and energies expended in and around libraries reveal the library's place in rhythming women's lives and the connection between women's education and everyday lives. Henri Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis* begins, in the very first paragraph of the text, by asserting its objective; it is concerned with 'the analysis of rhythms *with practical consequences*' (2004; 3 emphasis my own). What, then, are the practical consequences of having appraised the women's narratives with a rhythmanalytical eye? In the context of sometimes narrowly defined, impoverished or altogether absent accounts of the importance of the library in women's lives, what has a rhythmanalytical lens offered? Amid concerns that libraries have struggled to 'clarify their role in learning processes' (Goulding, 2008), how does this project further conversations about the nature of learning which takes place within or is linked to a library? What is revealed about the 'social' importance of the library? And finally, how does a

rhythmanalytical study of women's lives contribute to a better understanding of some women's experiences of time?

This project underlines the value of rhythmanalysis for examining narratives and for understanding everyday lived experience. Rhythmanalysis aids with a theorisation of the role of the library and, more specifically, the ways in which the library is important to particular women in particular circumstances; it enables an examination of the margins. I have returned throughout this work to the idea of the margin. Margins have a temporal and spatial significance, a social and political significance and an educational significance. Women talk about the margins of books, the margins of the day, the margins of a room within the library, the margins of the city, the margins of a subject they studied. Tracing these 'margins' might read simply as a neat stylistic parallel in accounts of very different types of 'thing', if it did not reflect so starkly the marginal place of the women who tell these stories, the marginal place of the libraries which they describe, and even the marginality of the 'everyday' itself (Moran, 2005). Consequently, rhythmanalysis aligns with or even perhaps enables a research perspective which is attentive to the margins and which is, perhaps, more critical and socially just.

The library is a classed space and the educational practices recounted in the narratives are classed too. This research, like previous studies (Robinson, 2020, Norcup, 2017, National Literacy Trust, 2011, Beyond Access, 2012, Brewster, 2014, DCMS, 2015, Frederiksen, 2015, Patrick, 2016), confirms the importance of the library for those who are economically disadvantaged. Education policy has been said to deny working class educational agency (Gerrard, 2015). This project, though, illuminates some of the practices and knowledges of a small number of women for whom libraries are of vital importance. The library is a space of collective action, unacknowledged cultural activity, and women's education. It is a site for gendered and classed political struggle as women resist and challenge assumed identities and roles.

It has to be said, of course, that while Hall Green certainly offered a diversely populated suburb within which to conduct this research and the 25 women involved in the project are very different from one another, there may be aspects of classed experience which are not captured. There are women who are not represented in this group. Few, if any of the women would, for example, identify as both white and working class or white and lower middle class and, equally, few could be classified as occupying the most elite groups (as defined by Savage et al. 2015). The women who were involved in the research would describe themselves, I think, as socially liberal in their political views. There are other things that

many of the women have in common too; they might be likely, for example, to have particular cultural interests, and possess the associated cultural capital, and, where they have undertaken paid work, have occupied similar occupational roles, often in public sector positions within education.

These very broad patterns in the social position of the participants are likely to be due to overlapping factors. They might be due to the locations of the libraries in which I advertised and conducted the project. They might relate to the methods of recruiting women to take part. And they might have to do with the patterns of library use and interest in these groups as compared to some other groups. This situation is important to consider because the women who are not represented here might have different understandings of the role of the library, might use the library in qualitatively or quantitively different ways or, might not use libraries at all. Further research with different groups might both help to identify the role of the library for these women and help libraries themselves to understand what particular groups require from libraries.

Nevertheless, for women whose educational practices might be ignored, their histories forgotten, and their knowledges marginalised, libraries are subaltern spaces (McDowell, 1999; 151) and library practices constitute ‘counter publics’ (Fraser, 1990). The physical spaces of libraries are relevant here but so too are the imagined spaces opened up through engagements with literature, meaning that this engagement takes place on different levels, making our understandings of these arenas more complex. The library both inspires and hosts transformative education.

The many echoes of the margins in the accounts serve as a reminder to look to the peripheries socially, politically, and educationally, in order to trace the rhythms of educational desire which reside there. Why do I make this claim? I do so not because the rhythms which are found might be illuminating in educational terms – although that is the case. I make this claim because looking to the margins, and thinking rhythmically, helps to identify and to label some of the impacts of austerity policies on institutions such as public libraries and on those who value them. Indeed, the importance of the library for all, but especially for those in some marginal positions takes on a particular significance in the context of policy which brings reduced library services and library closure. Attending to rhythm offers a way of conceptualising these consequences. This project deliberately captured women’s ideas about libraries of all and any kinds. But with regards to public policy it has a specific comment to make about the public library. Since the closure of public libraries affects some groups disproportionately, public policy decisions regarding library

funding are found here to be gendered, classed and racialized in important ways. At the time that I was speaking to the women in Hall Green, Birmingham City Council were making significant cuts to their library budget. Libraries, are, this project argues, often sites of harmonious rhythms, 'successful places favourable to happiness' (Lefebvre, 1996; 151). And yet when libraries are forced to reduce their provision, discord and arrhythmia (Lefebvre, 2004; 68) is the result.

Through these accounts of arrhythmia, something is revealed about the time in which we live. If the historian Carolyn Steedman knew, in her words, that she 'was worth something' (1986; 122) because of the social system of the 1950s providing bottles of orange juice and school dinners to children, then the women I talked to can only assume that they are not worth something when their social systems are dismantled. Margaret described how community halls in the area have been bought by private groups and turned into things that 'aren't that interesting… well not for us anyway… in the way of education'. Reduced library services are thus one part of a wider picture of change. The women refer, for example, to Sure Start Centres being closed, and Connexions Careers Services coming to an end. 'All of our structures are being taken away,' Margaret told me.

Further, the women's reflections on these services in different times and places allow imaginary threads to be drawn between the women. The library-based careers advice which Janice once offered in libraries, but is no longer funded, is exactly the sort of thing which might have benefitted Neha at the time when she was leaving school and visiting the library for somewhere to go. The women's stories speak to one another's lives.

Through an attentiveness to rhythm, repetition and lived experience, the research furthers a conversation about conceptualisations of time and women's particular understandings of time. Given recent claims that normative accounts of time might be another way to marginalise women (Bastian, 2013), the project confirms that some women at least share a 'more complicated' relationship with time (Segal, 2017, 174) than is sometimes acknowledged, finding cyclic time to be 'more reflective of women's lives' than linear time (Hughes, 2002; 136). In keeping with Lefebvrian understandings of time (Elden, 2004b; xi) more generally, the narratives reveal the shortcomings of a focus on clock time in temporal considerations, as lived time, repetition, and moments come to the fore.

The women in this study perform rhythmanalysis as they reflect on their lives – paying attention to various natural and social rhythms in their narratives; the seasons, the times of day, meetings, and gatherings. They show a concern with endogenous time – the time of the body – and with the cyclic, as they reflect on their, and others', recent and distant pasts. The

time of women's lives and women's education is not linear and successive, but rather overlapping, complicated and contradictory, and the library both rhythms women's lives and takes its place around the rhythms of women's lives as the beats and pulses of work, family, and everyday life make themselves felt.

Indeed, I have come to see rhythmanalysis' concern with endogenous and external time as precisely what makes it so well suited to an understanding of educational phenomena and to the lives of those on the margins. Rhythmanalysis is predicated on a concern with that which is *within* and that which is *outside*. Such a contrast is arguably at the heart of education in its broadest conception. Read even more generally, the endogenous and the external is about a concern, therefore, with how a human fits into their world and the extent to which that world is a place designed with them in mind: a harmonious, eurhythmic place.

The research contributes to conversations about time in another important way. This has to do with the extent to which, and, perhaps as importantly, our perceptions of the extent to which we are engaged in the same activities as one another. *What we Really do all Day; Insights from the Centre for Time Use Research* notes that,

> In 1961 something approaching half of the adult population were having their Sunday lunch at the same time of the day (Gershuny and Sullivan, 2019; 28).

Studying tempograms, the researchers claim that such shared uses of time have eroded over the past half century. They identify 'desynchronization' (2019; 19). This fits into a general trend of sociologists identifying less homogeneity in our activity (Giddens, 1990; Beck, 1992). Ben Highmore offers something of a challenge in this respect, calling for everyday life studies to 'pluralise' the plurality which postmodernism is interested in, insisting on 'the persistence of more residual cultures' (2002a; 33). In this context, it is significant that the current project finds synchronisation. My research suggests that women might be engaged in similar practices in the present ('I see others doing the same routine,' women tell me) but also that women see continuity with the past ('I suppose it goes back to what I used to do with my mother') and so the research points to the shared in significant ways. Lefebvre claims that despite being subordinated to linear time, cyclic time scales 'live on' (2008; 48). My research represents some evidence for this position. Challenging contemporary sociology's stress on desynchronization, fracture and change, this work finds shared practice on many fronts and customs which remain 'deeply rooted' (Lefebvre, 2008; 49). Perhaps, through the everyday rhythms of the library, cyclic time lives on.

Originating within and arising from these observations, this thesis offers a richer account of the importance of the social in accounts of the value of the library. Recent research has sometimes stressed that the library is not simply a place to borrow books but also a 'social space' (Jochumsen et al., 2012). What does it mean to say that the library is a social space or that is that it has an important social role? Conceptions of this might include sharing a physical space with others or describing the library as a 'meeting place' (Audunson et al, 2011). This research, through an attention to rhythm, extends an understanding of the social significance of the library.

Through the library, this project suggests, women enter into shared, social rhythms and social rhythms underpin much of the activity which is described. If education is ultimately a 'social art' (Biesta 2013; 43), then it is unsurprising that many of the women's reflections on education involve others in more or less formal positions of 'educator'. Learning might be collective rather than individualistic, and education, the narratives suggest, often takes place in relationships with others. There is also something deeply social in the energies spent around the library in not only educating oneself and in educating others, but in changing the 'possibilities and circumstances' of women's lives more generally (Thompson, 2000; 8).

The synchronic and diachronic continuity which women see in their library use is itself a version of the social, as traces and ghosts (Pahl, 2014) emerge in women's practice. Through practices involving people and resources the library is shown to be a site for particular kinds of reflexivity (Archer, 2007); for the development of a 'narrative imagination' (Nussbaum, 2006).

In analysing women's accounts of journeys to the library, like the metaphor of a well-worn path, the idea that women's practices around libraries bring continuity takes on a literal relevance as women follow in the footsteps of those who have gone before. Here, space is associated with human investments (De Certeau, 1984) so that not only do our attachments grow as we 'travel through a place' (Wunderlich, 2008; 130) but our attachments are what help to create it in the first place.

Taking seriously women's feelings and desires allows for a richer account of the place of the library which is attentive to the emotions and temporality of learning and its affective dimensions. The communities which are forged are, as 'spaces for feeling' (Broomhall, 2015), groups of women who experience the library and their practices which surround it as shared and communal. The library plays an important role in these contexts, not only because emotional acts necessitate a space or site or because emotional meaning is attached to physical spaces, though that is true, but because emotional structures and acts

are actually ‘shaped by sites that sustained them’ (Broomhall, 2015; 1) and the research supports this position.

The women that I have spoken to are not typical or representative of women; they are ‘individual women talking about their lives’ (McCrindle and Rowbotham, 1977; 1). Nevertheless, certain ‘structures of feeling’ emerge (Williams, 1977). Once again these have a shared, social quality as women’s ‘personal interpretations’ (Steedman, 1986; 6) overlap with the ideas and interpretations of others.

Offered here, then, is a way of conceptualising ‘the social’ in the significance of libraries. The social takes place along not only spatial lines but temporal lines too. And, within this expanded understanding of the library’s ‘social’ role, and by analogy with ‘public space’, I posit ‘public time’. The library offers an important public space to women, but it also seems to offer public time. Just as women share space, women, through the library, share time. They are linked to particular histories and enter into shared rhythms, within both the present and the past. Sometimes this involves women finding time to pursue their own interests or to act on educational desires. The narratives reveal the value of the library in offering a space for women to claim time for themselves in the ‘weak time’ (Lefebvre, 2004; 78), ‘beyond the reach of work and family’ (Middleton, 2014; 93). Feminist sociologists’ concern that women have been designed out of the city (Wilson 1991, Beall 1996) has to do with space and with ‘participation’ (Beall, 1996). An analysis of the narratives reveals time coming to the fore in striking ways in women’s accounts of participation of various kinds.

Routines, cycles and continuity of use over various scales are important in women’s engagements with libraries. And memorable too are particular *moments*. Punctuating the quotidian rhythms of library use, these moments are individual stories of rupture; times of great significance in women’s lives. If ‘the past leaves its traces’ (Lefebvre, 1991; 37) on space then it also leaves traces on people through their practices so that threads might be picked up and grasped rhythms taken up once again.

The cyclic is important to these temporal considerations and I have stressed the cyclic throughout. As the cyclical comes to the fore in this analysis of women’s engagements with libraries, it comes to the fore in the analyses of library inspired learning too. When women stress self-education for the purposes of later educating others or when women draw on past knowledge in their education of others, cycles are at play. The findings of the project thus support a model of learning which differs from a linear trajectory of accumulated knowledge, offering, it is hoped, a richer understanding of the dynamics of learning. Learning in and around the library is sometimes self-managed, it implicates the visual, auditory and

haptic elements, and it is found to be rhythmed by and – interrupted, paused and resumed – around significant life events.

That the research offers a challenge to linear models of learning is fitting, given that Lefebvre, as Middleton suggests, condemns accumulative or quantitative models of human 'growth' (2014; 178), more generally. This view of learning aligns with a Lefebvrian pedagogy; a 'pedagogy of appropriation'. Such a pedagogy is towards development, so is qualitative and discontinuous rather than simply related to 'growth' in the sense of something rather quantitative, continuous and cumulative (Middleton, 2014).

The potentials of libraries revealed here problematise narrow conceptions of value surrounding the library. Libraries might have an important role in skills-based education, for example, but are of value beyond these parameters. In the context of closures of public libraries, it is particularly significant that contemporary accounts of learning in the library might conceal the ways in which libraries of various kinds are of value to certain groups, including women.

7.4 The future

I write this final chapter of the thesis whilst in lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The library has been valuable for many during this time with reports that libraries have 'provided a lifeline' (BBC, 2020). But in a context of women being either unable to visit public libraries or to use libraries in only very restricted ways, the narratives, lives in aspic, stories of particular and varied times and places but all pre-pandemic, take on a new poignancy.

It seems apt to end here by looking to the future. I wrote, at the beginning of the thesis, of the contemporary questioning around the value of libraries given the increase in digital resources and e-books (Facer, 2011, Buschman, 2012). I also wrote of the preoccupation, in some fields, with the need for libraries to transform. Libraries here, are said to need 'reinventing' (Worpole, 2004) so that they are 'future-proof' (Arts Council, 2014a). Like all educational institutions, ideas about what a library is, or should be, are shifting, 'temporary and contingent' (Facer, 2011; 17). And this will always be the case. But the discourses around future-proofing are problematic.

First, and as Rebecca Lossin writes in *The New Left Review*, 'defending the library against the future reveals a deeply pessimistic worldview. It presumes a future necessarily hostile to

libraries' (2017; 109). Second, in the context of public libraries, discourses of future-proofing shift the responsibility from local and central government to libraries themselves who become responsible for remaining relevant. Third, since libraries are tasked with adapting themselves to meet some imagined but fixed future in which, it is implied, in their current form they would no longer be relevant, these debates, surely serve to bring about their demise. And finally – perhaps most importantly and certainly most relevant to this research – these debates about how future-proofing might take place rarely address the question of what is valued about libraries now or what has been valued in the past.

This is not to suggest that libraries should not change or that the future should not be considered. Indeed, it might be that changes to libraries, as to other educational institutions, should be more rather than less radical. Rather, it is to suggest a different starting point for these debates and research agendas.

Adopting Keri Facer's ideas for schools might be a useful starting point. Facer writes of prefigurative 'future building' (2011;15) rather than future-proofing. Her vision for educational futures, and usefully where libraries are concerned, is one which looks beyond technological change. Her writing challenges the idea of a single knowable future which the writing on future-proofing seems to adopt as a given. What, if not a global pandemic, could better serve to underline this point?

It is, as Bradshaw and Hietenan claim, 'unclear what sort of society and economy shall follow' the pandemic (2020; 16). Indeed, much is unclear about the future. On the afternoon of Wednesday 4th November, the day before the second national lockdown, I visited the public library in Kings Norton to change our books. I asked the librarian if they would be closing for the lockdown and she said that they had still not been told. The uncertainty about the future feels particularly acute at present. With these cautions about the unknowable future in mind, what possibilities exist for libraries and what impact would these possible futures have on women? There are a number of possibilities.

It might be that, in the context of the pandemic and the consequent recession, that current threats to the library are amplified, that economic stringency will prevail and that inequality, through lack of access to libraries, will be further entrenched. The speeding up of the normalisation of remote communication and remote information access, for some, which has been necessitated by the pandemic, could be pointed to as evidence of a new era in which the role of libraries and their future form are questioned once again. Evidence for such a view has come in the form of the comments from a Walsall Conservative council leader who

has suggested that Walsall's libraries might no longer be necessary. He said, 'I'm a firm believer that if we haven't used something for the past four or five months, do we really need it?' (Flood, 2020). The future, in this scenario, will be challenging for libraries and, as this research suggests, women would likely suffer.

Or, another possibility is a future less hostile to the library. Libraries have been closed for long periods in 2020, with the 'flows of familiar habits and mundane excitements disrupted' (Bradshaw and Hietenan, 2020; 18). Many libraries have been offering a remote lending service during the lockdowns. In the context of job losses, libraries are becoming even more important for those looking for help applying for jobs and applying for universal credit (Sandhu, 2020). It might be that the pandemic emerges as a moment of rethinking, and more progressive thinking, about the role of educational institutions. Some are suggesting that the virus has exposed many of the problems with austerity, and, more generally, with neoliberal marketized models of organisation (see Grady, 2020). In the most hopeful scenario this reckoning leads to 'alternative ways of living' (Soper, 2020; 316) and a 'more egalitarian future' (Segal, 2020; 30) through investment in libraries. Perhaps this rupture presents an opportunity to revisit the societal and educational import of what has been taken for granted by some, but never by the communities who value them.

The *Libraries in Women's Lives* project suggests that looking to women's pasts might be a good way of thinking about the libraries of the future. Our attachments to libraries, our collective constellation of concerns (Archer, 2000) around them, are part of what has created libraries and part of what will determine their future. Conducting research of this kind is a way to challenge dominant discourses around the place of libraries in women's lives. The project points to the importance of attributing agency to the women involved, feeling our way in the research encounter, and listening to women's understandings of what constitutes valuable knowledge and the means by which learning takes place. If the critique of everyday life (Lefebvre, 2008) is about the cyclic holding sway over the linear, then the act of inviting women to share their narratives, the actual act of thinking about history is itself a way of shaping the future, since the linear is losing some of its dominance. Since 'narrative is part of history yet also contributes to historical processes from within' (Lothe 2000; viii), this research, in its own way, might contribute to change. Conducting narrative analysis and performing rhythmanalysis is a way of performing a 'critique of everyday life'; it's not only a way to identify rhythmic time scales but a way of allowing rhythmic time scales to persist.

And, finally, so that even here on the page the cyclic can hold sway, I return to the beginning of the thesis, to the twelve-year-old girl who told me, in the margin of her page, that she went

to the library every day. Through listening to girls' stories then, and to women's stories now, the place of the library is more readily examined. In his *Critique of Everyday Life*, Henri Lefebvre troubles over those whose memories are forgotten, whose 'origins are lost' (2008; 54). At the end of our time together, Sheila reflected on taking part in the project. 'You've made me think differently about myself,' she told me. I hope that this research goes some way to ensuring that the women's stories of the library and its importance are not 'lost in the fog' (Lefebvre, 2008; 54).

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Appendix A

Demographic information about the four wards, from Birmingham City Council's Ward Factsheets (https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/download/2295/ward_factsheet). These factsheets summarise the 2011 census and 2016 HM Revenue and Customs and Department for Work and Pensions data.

Ward	Popu at on	Ethn c ty 'Wh te' (B rm ngh am 57.9%, Eng and 85.4%)	Ethn c ty 'As an' (B rm ngh am 26.6%, Eng and 7.8%)	Ethn c ty 'B ack' (B rm ngh am 9.0%, Eng and 3.5%)	Ma n anguage s not Eng sh (B rm ngh am 17.3%, Eng and 9.7%)	Peop e w th no qua f cat ons (B rm ngh am 20.8%, Eng and 14.8%)	Emp oym ent rate (B rm ngh am 60%, Eng and 71.2%)	Index of depr vat o n (rank n B rm ngh am, out of 69 wards)	Index of depr vat on (nat ona rank, out of 7511 wards)
Ha Green North (Ha Green L brary)	21509	36.1%	48.3%	3.5%	22.7%	18.9%	61.1%	40	1271
Brandwo od and K ngs Heath (K ngs Heath L brary)	18948	72.6%	16.6%	4.6%	8.3%	13.7%	70.9%	54	1490
Ba sa Heath West (Ba sa heath L brary)	11165	21.2%	43.2%	15.1%	32.2%	25.5%	45.0%	6	79
Sparkh (Sparkh L brary)	20309	11.8%	77.4%	5.0%	41.0%	27.1%	47.9%	30	427

Appendix B

This appendix contains:

1. Recruitment text
2. Flyer
3. Participant information sheet
4. Consent form
5. Interview schedule

1. Recruitment email text/letter text

Dear _____

I am PhD researcher at the University of Birmingham. I am researching the value of libraries for women. I was wondering if you might be able to talk to women who visit the library about my project and see if they would be interested in talking to me about their experiences of libraries.

I include copies of the project flyer, the information sheet and project consent form if you would be so kind as to pass them on.

The only stipulations for participation are that the participant is a woman, aged over 18 years and that they are happy to take part.

Please don't hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions.

Many thanks

Kate Bennett
PhD Researcher
University of Birmingham

Attachment: Flyer

Attachment: Participant Information sheet

Attachment: Consent form

2. Flyer

Libraries in Women's Lives

Do you use libraries?

Have libraries been important to you in the past?

The Libraries in Women's Lives project at the School of Education, University of Birmingham seeks to understand the value of libraries for women.

Please see project information sheet for more details and contact Kate Bennett.

3. Participant information Sheet

Libraries in Women's Lives

The project

This project investigates the value of libraries for women. Libraries of various kinds are experiencing change and, in this context, and at a time of debates about the future of libraries, understanding the value of libraries is important. This research explores the way in which libraries are important to our education and understandings of ourselves in various ways.

This project takes a broad view of what might constitute a library so that it might be a public library or a collection of books or other things in the home, for example. It seeks to explore how the places and objects which make up a library have been important to women through their lives using narrative and ethnographic techniques.

Narratives and ethnographic techniques

I use techniques of narrative research where participants are invited to talk at length about their experiences and memories. I would like you to talk about any experiences which you would like to talk about. This might include - libraries which you have been to, the use you have made of the library, and any ways in which libraries have been important to you through your life. You might have or have had in the past a 'home' library; a collection of books or other materials which you value. I also hope to use techniques called photo or video elicitation where participants are invited to talk about a photo or video recording of a library. If you have any other objects or books or images or items of any kind which you see as being related to your thoughts about libraries, then I would welcome you sharing these.

We can meet in a public place that is convenient for you, perhaps at a library. I anticipate each meeting lasting around one hour and meeting perhaps three times. I would like to record the 'interviews' and to make notes. This material will go towards my thesis. If you consent for me to do so I may also use this material in other writing. You may prefer for your name to be used in my thesis and in any published writing or you may wish to be anonymized through the use of a pseudonym. I will store the data securely and discard the data at the end of the project. You have the right to withdraw from the project at any time before, during or after the data collection has taken place - up to one month after the final 'interview' - and I will discard any data that I have already collected.

Many thanks for your interest in the project.
Kate Bennett

Supervisors: Prof. Ian Grosvenor

and Dr. Kevin Myers

School of Education, The University of Birmingham

4. Participant Consent Form

Libraries in Women's Lives

This is the consent form for participants taking part in a research project investigating the value of libraries for women. Please read the project participant information sheet for more information. Please **initial** the following statements.

I consent to taking part in this research. ☐

I am aged 18 or over. ☐

I consent to the 'interviews' being recorded. ☐

I consent to the collected data being used in future writing. ☐

I understand that I can withdraw form the project at any time up

until one month after the period of data collection. If I withdraw after

data has been collected this data will be discarded. ☐

I consent to my data being stored beyond the duration of the project ☐

(The audio files, and any images and electronically stored data will be deleted and the notebooks will be shredded and disposed of ten years after completion of the project.)

I would like my own name to be used in writing on the project (including published writing).

OR

I would like a pseudonym to be used: _____

Please delete as appropriate.

Name _____

Signed _____

Thank you for taking part in my research.

Kate Bennett

Supervisors: Prof. Ian Grosvenor

and Dr. Kevin Myers

The University of Birmingham

5. Interview Schedule

Libraries in Women's Lives

Narrative data collection and photo/video recording/object elicitation

What do you value about libraries? And what have you valued about libraries through your life?

Which libraries are important to you and why?

Please tell me about your use of the library in your youth.

Do you see your own books or other objects in your home as a library? How is this library important to you?
How do your store your own books?

How do you see your own books/materials as similar to or different from library books and materials/resources?

How do you see this space as similar or different to other libraries (public libraries/school libraries/academic libraries and so on)?

What kinds of libraries have you used in the past?

Which libraries have been most important to you through your life?

Do you feel libraries have been important to you in ways which relate to you being a woman?

Have libraries been important in your learning and education?
In what ways? Which libraries?
How this learning similar or different to learning which has taken place elsewhere?

Have libraries been important in your sense of your understandings about your self?

How do libraries seem different or similar to you in relation to other places?

What do you see as being the value of the public library to women?'

Appendix C

Article published in *Educational Review*, including material from this thesis.

Kate Spencer-Bennett (2020): Libraries in women's lives: everyday rhythms and public time, Educational Review, DOI: 10.1080/00131911.2020.1803796

https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00131911.2020.1803796?needAccess=true