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# BELL HOOKS' "ENACTMENT OF NON-DOMINATION" IN THE "PRACTICE OF SPEAKING IN A LOVING AND CARING MANNER": AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF A SAUDI "WIDOW'S SON"

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BELL HOOKS' "ENACTMENT OF NON-DOMINATION"  
IN THE "PRACTICE OF SPEAKING IN A LOVING AND CARING MANNER":  
AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF A SAUDI "WIDOW'S SON"

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A thesis  
Presented to Eastern Washington University

Cheney, Washington

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree  
Master of Arts: English  
With an Emphasis in  
Teaching English as a Second Language

By  
Braik Aldoshan  
Spring 2017

THESIS  
Of  
Braik Aldoshan

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Date

## Master's Thesis

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### Abstract

The Prophet Mohammed lost his parents when he was a child, and because he was an orphan, he believed that anyone caring for an orphan would hold a special place in the hereafter. Often when children in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia lose the father, as the author did, there is a stigma attached to the boy with no father, and a tremendous hardship is placed on the family. Having married at age 11 to her third cousin 10 years her senior and giving birth to three children, and expecting another child, his mother became a widow. He analyzes his own life and "liminal" passages—the thresholds to literacy and academic success while raising seven children of his own. The study is also a rhetorical analysis of the material conditions of his mother's life from age 18 until the author reached college age. He employs bell hooks' "marginality as a site of resistance" (p. 276) which can be an effective position for self-advocacy. His mother, a Bedouin, has had the perspectives of an outsider—an illiterate widow—and an insider—a Saudi woman with all the Islamic respect the culture gives their women. In Saudi Arabia, however, it is common for a widow to give up her children to her brothers-in-law and to remarry, but in this autoethnography the author reflects on being raised by a young mother who defied all odds and resisted the expectation to remarry. hooks argues that the "primary means of creating non-dominating alternatives is enactment...that interactions with family members provide an important arena for enactment," (hooks, 2016, p. 282). She also defines non-dominating ways of living, suggesting that "parent-child interactions offer another opportunity to enact non-dominating ways of living" (p. 282). By "speaking in a loving and caring manner" his mother won in court because the judge gave her custody of her four sons when she explained her eldest son's disability and special needs. At 14, the author became his mother's guardian but has practiced "non-dominating ways" by helping her to raise the siblings and earn a degree.

### **Acknowledgements**

First, I would like to thank Dr. LaVona Reeves, who directed this thesis and who has a special place in all my family's hearts. I came to Eastern Washington University to start the master's degree in 2015, and she worked continuously with me to improve my English. Completing a master's degree has been my dream, and my family's dream, too. In fact, the master's degree is a bridge to a new dream of earning the Ph.D. in English. Dr. Reeves taught me academic skills and modeled practical skills to be an English teacher when I interned in her class, Composition for Multilingual Writers and in several courses in the program. I could not have overcome many obstacles I encountered in my academic life without Dr. Reeves' support and guidance. Dr. Reeves has great experience in teaching English as a Second Language because she speaks French and Japanese and has taught ESL in many settings in the TESOL world. It is not only I who witnessed that Dr. Reeves is one of the best professors of English in the United States, but also my friends, EWU alumni from Saudi Arabia, who always say that I'm lucky because of the mentoring I have received from Dr. Reeves. They said that Dr. Reeves taught them English 112 and other courses, and she enhanced their writing quality very fast through conferences and instruction in class. Clearly, by admitting me to the program, Dr. Reeves gave me the chance to achieve my dream. Further, in this thesis project, Dr. Reeves met with me weekly for about six months and has walked me through, step-by-step, ways to employ qualitative research methods—narrative inquiry, autoethnography, phenomenological research, critical ethnography, and constructivist grounded theory. Through her intentional teaching and dialogical processes employed in class and in conference, I became a deeper thinker and a kind of social activist like Eleanor Roosevelt, whose biography we studied together in her Composition class the first summer I was at EWU. I have changed because she has always given me many different and difficult questions to think about and has modeled different lenses through which to examine my life and my mother's life. By emphasizing liminal passages or thresholds through which my mother and I passed, I have written a literacy narrative and other research papers under Dr. Reeves' guidance. In Dr. Reeves' Contemporary Rhetorical Theory class in 2017, I was introduced to bell hooks' rhetoric of marginality and

resistance, which I have applied in this thesis, gaining new understanding of my mother's courage and strength. I cannot really express how much I appreciate Dr. Reeves' care for my family and for me since I came to EWU, but I want her to know that her long hours of work and compassion for us have not gone unnoticed by me and my family.

My deep gratitude is also due to Dr. Tracey McHenry, the Department Representative on the Graduate Study Committee. I loved Applied Linguistics because of her teaching style. I also heard about her before I took this class. Many Saudi alumni of the TESOL program told me about her positive attitude and her values. Dr. McHenry also taught me some speaking skills in her class, and her suggestions and comments contributed to enriching this research project. I would like to acknowledge all the concerns she expressed and the help she gave to my family, especially to my daughter, Joharah.

I would also like to thank Nichole LaTorre, who interned in English 112 the summer of 2015, when I arrived at EWU. Dr. Reeves asked her to be a peer tutor to me since we were both new to the graduate program, and Nichole already had ESL teaching experience and the M.A. in Asian Studies, so she could guide me and provide support before I began taking graduate courses that fall. Nichole helped me revise eight major papers that first summer in Dr. Reeves' composition class and has been a wonderful peer mentor throughout the program.

Finally, I would like to thank Professor Mary Parker for accepting to be the third member of the Graduate Study Committee, for attending my presentation at the Spokane Regional ESL Conference, and for reading this thesis and providing valuable feedback to me.

### **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this work to my family members: my mother, Joharah; my wife, Amrah; and my seven children: Abdullah, Joharah, Hadiyah, Elan, Wateen, Aleen, and Azain, who support me in all aspects of my life. My wife and my children tried to be quiet when I was working on this research project for more than one year, during which my youngest son was born. I remain amazed with the eldest children's ability to learn English so quickly.

I would like also to dedicate this work to Judith and Thomas Mahoney—an American couple who are like parents to me because they have lived in Turkey, and they understand our culture. I spent beautiful times in Cheney with them while studying at EWU. Our friendship developed quickly and in my heart, I tried to be like a son to them, helping them through illnesses and hardships. It is difficult to say good-bye to them, but I do not have a choice. We will meet again someday.

## Preface

### Language Learner

In my country, Saudi Arabia, students are first taught the English language in intermediate school—seventh grade. However, a recent Ministry of Education directive now requires that English be taught starting in the fourth grade. For as long as I can remember, it has been my dream to learn English, and I finally started when I was twelve years old. In my intermediate school, teachers used to teach English using the Grammar Translation Method. Cook (2003) wrote that “grammar-translation [is] the teaching of an additional language through the learning of rules and vocabulary lists, and the written translation of graded invented sentences” (p. 128). This included the alphabet, numbers, greetings, and general questions. However, the teachers taught us using primarily Arabic, but very little of the target language (TL) in our classroom. We had only four hours of English per week, which limited my ability to practice speaking English inside or outside the classroom.

When I went to high school, Saturday through Wednesday, we had an English class every day where I started to study grammar and vocabulary. Unfortunately, we were not asked to write journals, paragraphs, or essays in English. In Arabic K-12, we did not write much either. Composition was not taught in either language, so I was disadvantaged when I came to study in the United States because American students had been writing almost every day K-12. Saudi English teachers, however, were mandated to teach only grammar and vocabulary. We never read books in English or watched newscasts or movies in English either. We filled in blanks— isolated word lists or translated from English to Arabic—but never wrote whole sentences.

I was admitted to King Abdul-Aziz University to study academic English and literature. My professors, most of whom were educated in America, began our instruction at the rudimentary level. Their pronunciation differed from that of my teachers in intermediate and high school. All my classes were about English except for two classes that were about French. Although they were difficult in the beginning, I found them very interesting.

In 2013, I decided to come to America and improve my English by studying with American teachers in three different English programs in the United States. First, I studied at the LADO Institute in Washington, D. C. for nine months. I made friends with native speakers and international students from China, Colombia, and Brazil. We all spoke English exclusively for practice. My friends and I spoke English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). Cook (2003) defined lingua franca as “a language used for communication between people speaking a variety of languages. Formerly, this term referred to a language which was not the first language of those involved.” English was not our mother tongue, but we spoke English fluently through not always correctly. Even at Starbucks, we spoke only English just to be able to understand each other, and that helped us to improve our spoken English.

Next, I transferred to Washington State University (WSU) to study Academic English after I began speaking English fluently. During my ten months at WSU, I met a teacher named Margret Mount, who advised me to transfer to Eastern Washington University (EWU).

Finally, I contacted Dr. LaVona Reeves and asked for her advice. She advised me as to what steps to take for admission into the graduate program. I was selected and began my studies in the TESL option in the Master’s of Arts in English Program. My writing has improved considerably at EWU, as well as my speaking, reading, and listening skills.

### **Why I chose to learn English**

I loved the language, and I wanted to make my mother proud of my success. In Saudi Arabia, people accuse widows of not knowing how to raise their children, and their children could be unsuccessful in their academic lives. My grandfather called me “widow’s son,” and, sadly, this expression is common in our society. I knew that I was a widow’s son, which means that the boy will be bad—a thief, a rude person, or a failure in his life. This hurt deeply and I wanted to prove him wrong because widows’ sons could be teachers, professors, deans, and presidents of universities.

Another reason why I wanted to study English is because Saudi Arabia is a developing country, and to get a good job, a person should speak English well. Many

companies across the Kingdom are managed by Americans, so workers must speak English. Additionally, Saudi universities now require students who want to earn a college degree to pass the English proficiency tests such as the IELTS or the TOEFL.

### **Cross-cultural Experience**

My cross-cultural experiences began when I was in high school. I loved to watch American movies for fun, and I learned from movies more real English than I learned in English classes. I also enjoyed some lessons on YouTube which taught me how to form sentences in English and differences between English and Arabic.

When I decided to travel to the United States in 2013, I lived with an American family in Virginia. I dedicated my time to learning English and American culture from them. When I attended the LADO Institute in Washington DC, I had to leave the house at 7:00 A.M. to catch the metro. I enjoyed listening to different people talk during the commute. Another thing that helped me to sharpen my English skills was reading the newspaper—there was a man in the metro station in Virginia who distributed free newspapers, so I took one every day and read it on the train. I would take the metro back home at 3:00 P.M. and would read and listen to others again. I was lucky because the family I lived with had children who were always asking me about Saudi Arabia, which helped me to practice my language. I would ask them about the United States as well. I cherished this family and our time together.

### **Language Teaching Experience**

I had experiences tutoring Arabic students when I was an undergraduate English major at King Abdul-Aziz University. English was my favorite subject, and I was getting A+ in all of my English classes. I got married when I was in high school, and I took on major responsibilities early in life, as I will explain in this autoethnography. Soon, when I was at the university, I was going to school and working daily. After I arrived at EWU, I applied to become an intern. During the fall quarter of 2015 and again in the fall quarter of 2016, I interned in English 112, Composition for Multilingual Writers, with Dr. Reeves. She taught me the importance of how to improve both the students' writing and my own by writing in English every day (Reeves, 2011). She taught us the expression,

*“Nulla dies sine linea”* which in Latin means: “Not a single day without a line.” Dr. Reeves provided time for the seven interns and 30 students to write journals of 100 words every day in class in just five minutes. She wrote with us and shared her writing with us. In addition, Dr. Reeves was asking us to write an essay every Friday in class. What I noticed was that some students at the beginning of the quarter could not write more than one or two sentences in five minutes, but at the end, students were able to write more than 100 words in five minutes. Practicing writing was important to Dr. Reeves, and she is one of the professors who played a major role in my academic life.

During the winter quarter of 2016, I was an intern in English 112 with Nichole LaTorre, who is a graduate instructor at EWU who has taught English for about seven years, including five years in China. She also had students write daily journals and Friday essays, but she was even more interested in teaching reading skills while collecting data for her master’s thesis with Dr. Reeves. I learned from her how to teach ESL students reading skills. Having been an intern with two expert teachers will help me as a future English teacher in Saudi Arabia.

### **Language Teaching Philosophy**

Learning a foreign language changes the learners’ perspectives on life and may even increase their understanding of values, beliefs, and worldviews (Rockstrom, 2017). There is a strong relationship between language and culture, and it is a bridge to pass on the historical teachings and traditions from generation to generation. Teachers should encourage their students to write or speak about their culture and connect that to the new culture and language they have studied in their classrooms. Like Sultan Albalawi (2015), I want to try to use multimodality to teach English in Saudi Arabia at the university level because students will enjoy watching videos, listening to songs, and conversing in English. Like Dr. Reeves, I believe that we learn by writing every day, and we learn to speak by speaking every day with our peers in class. Practice is needed in order to function in the language. Students also need opportunities to perform in English by role playing and even presenting important scenes from the textbook—biography seems to be interesting to some students, especially if the person being studied is important to the faith and culture. For example, I would like to write a basic book about The Prophet

Mohammed's (peace be upon him) or Fatima, his daughter's life in English and then work with my students to study their lives and their teachings in English.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

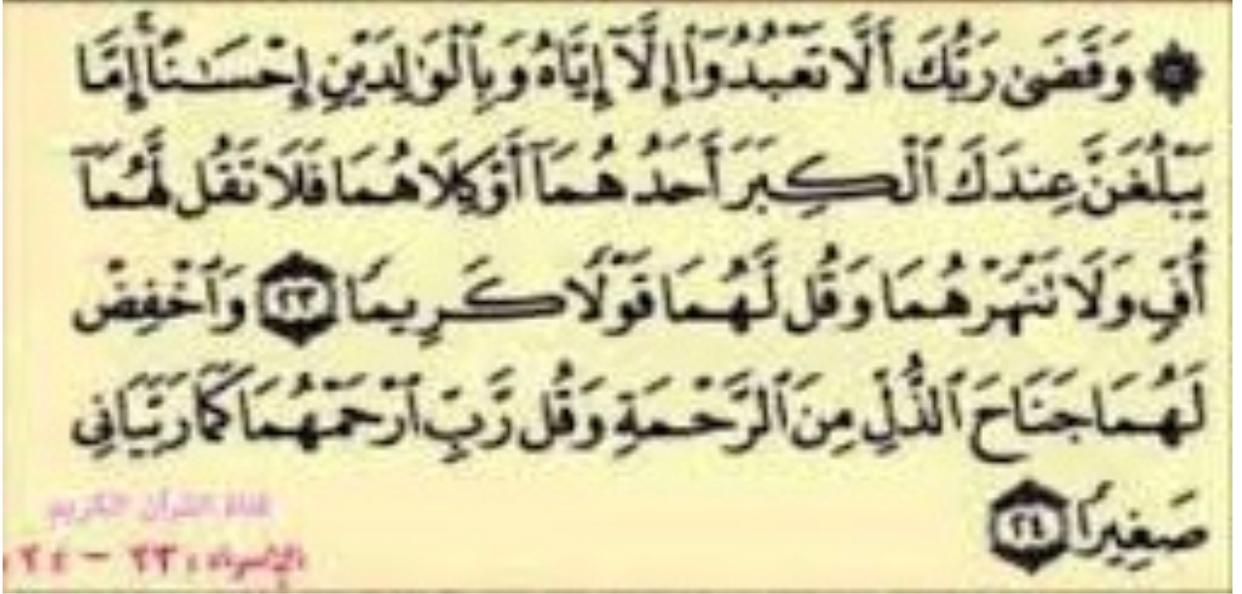


Figure 1: Quran, El-Esra, verse 23, 24

Thy Lord hath decreed, that ye worship none save Him, and (that ye show) kindness to parents. If one of them or both of them [is] to attain old age with thee, say not 'Fie' unto them nor repulse them, but speak unto them a gracious word. And lower unto them the wing of submission through mercy, and say: 'My Lord! Have mercy on them both as they did care for me when I was little.' (Quran, El-Esra, verse 23 & 24)

In Islam, it is believed that fathers play a major role in the development and education of children—as do mothers. Fathers must choose the best schools for their children, motivate their children to study hard, and hold discussions with the teachers. Before Islam and the unification of the tribes into one country, inheriting and forcing widows was common abuse, but Islam forbade that. However, it still exists in some Arabic countries. For example, in the south of Saudi Arabia, fathers often do not ask their daughters if they want to remarry or not. Further, women usually cannot choose their husbands, and their fathers sometimes force them to accept the husband the father has

chosen, which is against *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* passed in the United Nations in 1948 with Saudi Arabia abstaining on the vote. Widows are sometimes forgotten or even shunned in some places in my country, especially if they choose not to remarry and to raise children alone—which is very rare if there is no child old enough to work and to support the widowed mother and younger siblings.

Saudi's tribal cultures sometimes do differ from what the religion teaches. By law, Saudis are Muslims, and in Islam, Muslims have to take care of the orphans and the widows (Alsoheem, 2017). In the Quran, Allah says, "So as for the orphan, do not oppress [him]" (Quran, ad dhuha, verse 9). That is a command from God not to hurt the orphans, but some Saudis still look down on orphans. Prophet Mohammad—Peace Be Upon Him—was an orphan, and he lost his parents at an early age, but he became one of successful people in the world.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Often when children in the KSA lose the father, as I did, there is a stigma attached to the boy with no father, and a tremendous hardship is placed on the family. In my case, I had to step up and become the "man" of the house helping my mother to raise three siblings and going to work at an early age. As a child, I had many disadvantages because my mother could not go to school to meet my teachers because women cannot enter public spaces without an adult male family member.

Widows and orphans who are living in the KSA are marginalized in cases when mothers decide not to remarry and to keep their children when their husbands die. If a widow wants to remarry, the culture expects her to give up her children to her husband's family in order to remarry. For this reason, her site of marginality provided a space in which somehow—even as a totally illiterate and uneducated woman—she was able to straddle both worlds as a faithful Moslem mother and as a kind of outsider due to her status as a single parent/widow.

### **Purpose**

In this thesis, I explain to readers more about fathers' roles in Islam, my mother's life as a widow with three children and one on the way when my

father died, and my life as the eldest capable child in the family who was just three when my father died. Further, I reflect on my mother's life as a single parent/widow starting at age 18 for her. I explain the laws that govern women in this condition in KSA and possible changes coming (Beekun, 2011). I analyze my own life and my mother's life and "liminal" passages which are defined here: "Of or pertaining to the threshold or initial stage of a process." Both liminal and liminality are derived from the Latin "limen," which means "threshold"—that is, the bottom part of a doorway that must be crossed when entering a building. The OED notes that "liminal" first appears in publication in the field of psychology in 1884, but the idea was introduced to the field of anthropology in 1909 by Arnold Van Gennep in his seminal work, *Les rites de passage*. Van Gennep described rites of passage such as coming-of-age rituals and marriage as having the following three-part structure:

- 1) separation,
- 2) liminal period, and
- 3) re-assimilation (OED, web)

Liminal experiences for me were (1) losing my father at an early age, (2) entering school fatherless, (3) working while in college studying, (4) raising seven children of my own in the U.S. while being a graduate student, and (5) trying to support my mother as an elderly widow who made traditional crafts as a trade.

Liminal experiences for my mother were (1) marrying at age 11 and losing her husband when she was 18, (2) walking into the court to talk with the judge about keeping her four children when she was taken to court by objecting relatives, (3) not giving her children up and convincing the judge that she was the best person to raise her disabled son who has polio, (4) walking through the threshold of single parenting—becoming a mother raising four children on her own in Saudi Arabia, (5) deciding to create a cottage industry at home and having relatives sell her crafts at the local markets while accepting the government pension for widows, (6) having me, her second son, at age 14 become her guardian; and (7) going back to school to gain literacy skills since she had never gone to school when she married at age 11.

## Strategic Contemplation

For this thesis, I practice strategic contemplation (Kirsch & Royster, 2010) and analyze as best I can my mother's strategic contemplation as well, which is defined by Hitt (2012) as a way of thinking and reflecting on life that "reclaims meditation" and which requires "taking the time, space, and resources to think about, through, and around our work as an important meditative dimension of scholarly productivity" (p. 21). It also splits the research process into two parts (or journeys). One is the journey in real-time, real-space, which involves going into a field site to see where the research subject lived (p. 85). The second journey is more "internal and reflexive, providing space for the researcher to engage with his or her own embodied experiences in order to reimagine rhetorical situations and events" (p. 89). Hitt explains that by "focusing on lived or embodied experiences, strategic contemplation moves toward a *politics of location* that accounts for socio-historical contexts, cultural traditions, and the lived experiences of both research subject and researcher" (p. 2). In the present study, this meant going back in time to the 1960's when my mother was born and the 1980's when I was born and examining the tribal customs that were observed in the South of Saudi Arabia, despite the unification of the tribes into one country in 1932 as explained on the embassy website:

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is founded on strong and stable footings based on the faith in Allah, the workings of the Holy Book (The Quran), and the teachings (Sunnah) of Prophet Mohammed (Peace be upon him); furthermore the development of the Kingdom has taken a leap forward telescoping time and allowing the country to attain within a few decades its outstanding position in the world today. In 1351 H (1932), in agreement with the desire of his loyal people King Abdel Aziz established a strong and large country consisting of 80 % of the Arabian Peninsula, King Abdul Aziz named it the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, after he unified the country, gathered its people and spread security, justice and peace in its vast territory. The first day of Libra (corresponding to the 23rd of September of every year) is the national day of this young nation.

(<http://www.saudiembassy.or.jp/En/SA/Founder.htm>)

It is the custom and the law for women to have a legal guardian. I became my mother's guardian when I was just 14 years old, and she was just 29 or so, though her own father

had been her guardian after her husband died. For me, the strategic contemplation took the form of (1) remembering what life was like for my mother as a girl who was married so young and never attended school, (2) imagining her strength and perseverance to raise my disabled brother, (3) honoring her hard work and devoted character, and (4) considering the challenges we faced once my father died, leaving her alone as she was about to deliver child number four. Though time did not permit, I had hoped to spend time thinking about what it was like for my mother and me to go to school together once I finished high school—I was entering the university, married, and working for the family. This strategic contemplation—though we did not know what that meant at the time—provided me with the space I needed to explore my life as an orphan, guardian son, student, and father of seven. It raised my critical consciousness to a higher level and helped me to look at life through different lenses, trying to be fair in my assessment of the Saudi government and the Islamic religion (Al-Mufrad of Imaan & Al-Bukhari, 2017). In the end, I gained a greater appreciation for both and continue to try to understand tribal influences as well.

In Contemporary Rhetorical Theory, a graduate seminar taught by my thesis chair, we discussed the work of Kirsh and Royster (2010), who remind us how important it is to examine women's lives:

When we study women of the past, especially those whose voices have rarely been heard or studied by rhetoricians, how do we render their work and lives meaningfully? How do we honor their traditions? How do we transport ourselves back to the time and context in which they lived, knowing full well that it is not possible to see things from their vantage point? (p. 648)

Voices like my mother's may not be heard if someone does not take the time to write about and honor these women. Charles La Shure (2005, 2017) explained the position of liminality as defined by Turner in "What is Liminality?"

In 'Liminality and Communitas,' Turner begins by defining liminal individuals or entities as 'neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony' (1969: 95). He then goes on to name the non-structure or anti-structure that he continuously refers

to in ‘Betwixt and Between’ through such concepts as the ‘realm of pure possibility’ and structural invisibility. (web)

In anthropology, liminality is a position of marginality at times because the person or group under study is in a place of “pure possibility” and “structural invisibility” which in the case of my mother meant that she was required by law and by custom to turn us over to her deceased husband’s family. Even at the tender age of 18, however, when she became a widow with four sons to care for, she worked within that system to reclaim her power as a mother and to do what others had difficulty doing: keep their young children and raise them as a single parent in Saudi Arabia.

He [Turner] chooses the Latin term ‘communitas’ to express this idea of anti-structure, and refers to social structure and communitas as ‘two major ‘models’ for human interrelatedness.’ (LaShure, 2017, web)

Turner defines these terms in the following ways:

The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men [and women] in terms of ‘more’ or ‘less.’ (cited in LaShure, web)

In Saudi Arabia, at times it feels that Bedouins (Joshua Project, web), women, and orphans are considered “less” than other individuals because they seem at times to live in that situation of “invisibility”—literally for widows in that they may not appear in public without an adult male relative or the male guardian, even when the guardian is a son like me who was just 14 when I became her legal guardian. For Americans, it is difficult to understand how a teen of 14 could have legal rights over his mother so that she could not travel, do business, enroll in college, or work without my written consent. This is the kind of “hierarchical system” I believe that Turner is talking about in his theory of liminality. Being considered an orphan in my culture, despite the fact that I had my mother, put me on the margins as well, but my elder brother was even more on the margins in that he is disabled and has required total physical care throughout his life as a quadriplegic.

The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders. (1969: 96)

This second model of human interrelatedness, *communitas*, has a number of cultural manifestations, of which liminality is only one. The two other manifestations that Turner mentions are marginality and inferiority. To express the relationship of these manifestations to social structure in spatial terms, they are in between (liminality), on the edges (marginality), and beneath (inferiority).

This is the purpose of this thesis, which takes the form of an autoethnography of the second son of a widow with a brief literacy narrative.

### **Assumptions**

TESOL asks researchers to disclose their assumptions about the research topic, the subject/s, the cultures being investigated, and the experiences the researcher brings to the project that may shape the research directly or indirectly. For this reason, I disclose the assumptions I made as I started to write this autoethnography, some of which I had written prior to the decision to make this the thesis topic.

1. I assume that fathers' roles are feeding, teaching, and spending time with their children.
2. Fathers, whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims, have the same responsibilities for their children.
3. Different religions or cultures do not dictate different fathers' roles. I assume that all fathers have similar fundamental responsibilities.
4. I assume widows in Saudi Arabia are living lives that are harder than others because of the Islamic religion and Eastern culture where tribal customs prevail, even today.
5. Based on my limited experience living in the United States, I assume women in the West are freer, and women in the KSA need assistance to secure more rights.

6. Furthermore, I assume many orphans around the world experience difficulties, and they need more interest from their societies and their governments.
7. I assume that customs and traditions may have a bigger impact than the religion in some countries or regions of the world, especially in Saudi Arabia.

## **Research Methods**

### **Autoethnography**

Autoethnography (Canagarajah, 2009a, 2009b, 2012; Viramontes, 2012) is defined as the “study of lived experience within a larger cultural context. It is a kind of academic writing and performance that depends upon deep reflection, reflexivity, and narrative construction” (Viramontes, 2012). It is a kind of an academic writing which scholars do when they want to narrate their own experiences.

It is used in a variety of disciplines typically including anthropology, sociology, and education (Anderson, 2006; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Etherington, 2004; Reed Danahay, 1997; Roth, 2005). The defining feature of autoethnography is that it “entails the scientist or practitioner performing narrative analysis pertaining to himself or herself as intimately related to a particular phenomenon. (McIlveen, p. 3)

The author points out the differences between autoethnography and autobiography:

Autoethnography entails writing about oneself as a researcher-practitioner, but it is not the same as autobiography in the literary sense. It is not simply the telling of a life—not that doing such would be simple. It is a specific form of critical enquiry that is embedded in theory and practice (i.e., practice as a researcher and/or career development practitioner). (McIlveen p. 3)

In this thesis, I tell my story about the time when my father died and how my father’s death changed my family’s life. I also describe my culture and how the father’s existence is important for the family in Saudi Arabia. I did not simply tell my story, however. I analyzed it as well. I also analyzed my mother’s life. I engaged in critical consciousness

as I told the story and framed it within rhetorical theories of resistance and marginality as defined by bell hooks. These theories are discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

### **Grounded Constructivist Theory**

I also employed grounded theory, which is a research approach designed “to discover what problems exist in a given social environment and how the persons handle them” (Mligo, 2013, web). In my case, one of my goals was to question the experiences of widows and orphans in Saudi Arabia, especially questions related to my mother’s life. My mother lived as a single parent in a culture that says women are unable to raise their children alone. Through a grounded theory research approach, I discovered ways to answer some questions about my family’s life after my father’s death, though many remain unanswered to this day.

### **Phenomenological Research**

Mligo (2013) explains that this is “an inductive, descriptive research approach developed from phenomenological philosophy; its aim is to describe an experience as it is actually lived by the person” (Mligo, web). Patton also explains that there is “the assumption that there is an essence [meaning] or essences to shared experience. These essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced. The experiences of different people are. . . analyzed...for example, the essences of loneliness, the essence of being a mother,” (2002, web). The phenomena studied in this project are (1) the meaning of fatherhood as taught in Islam, (2) the essence of being raised without a father in Saudi Arabia, (3) the essence of being a widow with children in Saudi Arabia, and (4) the essence of being a father of seven children.

### **Narrative Inquiry and Intercultural Research (Trahar, 2009)**

Trahar (2009) defines this method:

Narrative inquiry then has evolved from the growing participatory research movement that foregrounds a greater sensitivity to social and cultural differences. "Narrative inquiry embraces narrative as both the *method* and the *phenomena* of

study" (PINNEGAR & DANES, 2007, p.4, my emphases) and 'characteristically begins with the researcher's autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the *research puzzle*' (CLANDININ & CONNELLY, 2000, p. 40, original emphasis).

She then explains how she employs autoethnography:

In my research, I acknowledged the importance of accessing and understanding participants' different social constructions of reality (BERGER & LUCKMANN, 1967), examining issues in depth through exploratory, open-ended conversations, prioritising holistic understanding situated in lived experience. The study also drew upon related methodological and theoretical perspectives derived from the field of international and comparative research, combined with recent advances in critical theory. (Trahar, 2009, p. 40)

The research design came to draw increasingly upon research perspectives and strategies developed and applied by writers such as Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Methodological strategies developed by such scholars prioritise autobiographical experiences and conversations "between theory and the stories of life contained in the inquiry" (p.41). True to many of the principles of a broader qualitative paradigm, however, this eventual methodological positioning was not fully conceptualised before the study began. Rather, it emerged and evolved during the research process itself. Sustaining this methodological agnosticism enabled me to remain open to, and to explore, a myriad of possibilities for conducting intercultural research. Holding on to this "not knowing" was uncomfortable but maintaining the position of the agnostic enabled me to recognize eventually the suitability of narrative inquiry and autoethnography for this evolving study. [6]

### **Research Questions**

Through my thesis, my goal was to explore the following questions.

1. What does Islam teach about fatherhood?
2. What does Islam teach about how to treat one's mother?
3. How did being raised without a father make me different from other men?
4. How does my experience influence my parenting today?
5. What does Islam teach about the care of widows and orphans?

6. What was life like for me as a fatherless child? How was I marginalized by my society?
7. What were the challenges my mother faced as a widow who refused to remarry after my father's death? How was she marginalized by the society?
8. What is strategic contemplation?
9. How did strategic contemplation and writing help me to understand my childhood and my mother's life as a widow?

**Thesis Overview:**

This thesis has five chapters. Chapter 2 is a literature review about (1) culturally responsive teaching (CRT) and child development; (2) fathers, widows, orphans in Islam; and (3) relevant rhetorical theory-- bell hooks' marginal rhetoric, "interrogation of oppression," "site of resistance," and "decolonization"—that will be applied in Chapter 3 in the author's autoethnography of his life and his mother's life as a widow. Chapter 3 is an autoethnography about my mother's life and my life as a fatherless child. Chapter 4 is a discussion of the assumptions and research questions with reflections on what I learned as a researcher. Chapter 5 is the conclusion which includes (1) summary of the findings, (2) limitations of the study, (3) recommendations for future research and (4) final reflections.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of Literature**

Chapter 2 is a literature review about (1) culturally responsive teaching (CRT); (2) fathers, widows, orphans in Islam; and (3) relevant rhetorical theory that will be applied in Chapter 3 in the author's autoethnography of his life and his mother's life as a widow who kept her four children and raised them alone from age 18 when her husband died.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Geneva Gay and Kipchoge Kirkland (2003) wrote about the training that novice teachers need in "Developing Cultural Critical Consciousness and Self-Reflection in Pre-service Teacher Education" as summarized here:

We believe that culturally responsive teaching (CRT) for ethnically diverse students should be a fundamental feature of teacher preparation and classroom practice. CRT involves using the cultures, experiences, and perspectives of African, Native, Latino, and Asian American students as filters through which to teach them academic knowledge and skills. Other critical elements of culturally responsive teaching are unpacking unequal distributions of power and privilege, and teaching students of color cultural competence about themselves and each other. (p. 181)

The authors are asking us as novice teachers to examine our own cultures closely and to consider this in creating curriculum and to be more mindful of our choices:

Our beliefs about the necessity of CRT are based on the premises that (a) multicultural education and educational equity and excellence are deeply interconnected; (b) teacher accountability involves being more self-conscious, critical, and analytical of one's own teaching beliefs and behaviors; and (c) teachers need to develop deeper knowledge and consciousness about what is to be taught, how, and to whom. (p. 181)

When teachers know who they are, they are far better prepared to guide learners and this requires self-reflection:

They explain that teachers knowing who they are as people, understanding the contexts in which they teach, and questioning their knowledge and assumptions are as important as the mastery of techniques for instructional effectiveness.

Critical racial and cultural consciousness should be coupled with self-reflection in both pre-service teacher education and in-service staff development. (p. 181)

Pre-service ESL teachers, Brenda Aguilar (2016), Adriana Sanchez (2016), Sangho Lee (2012). All three thesis writers focused on their cognitive and spiritual growth (Canagarajah, 2009a.), emphasizing the parents' values (Canagarajah, 2008b) they observed and emulated that prepared them for careers in teaching. Aguilar provided "both emic and etic views of the orchard community and cultural practices" and she discussed "the values of respect, hard work, and responsibility taught to her and her three siblings by her Mexican-born parents who have worked for the same company in the orchards for 25 years" (p. iv). Sanchez described the ways that her parents supported her behind the scenes because they worked many hours in the orchards and sometimes could not attend PTA meetings or teacher conferences. She called this "invisible support" and suggested that teachers would do well to know how orchardist parents are working so hard to provide all their children need to succeed in school and in life.

In the present study, the author engages in self-reflection to understand his lived experiences as a widow's son in order to better serve Saudi students in the university system in Saudi Arabia. He focuses on parents' roles; children's emotional, cognitive, and spiritual growth; and rhetorical theory that serves as a foundation to the literacy narrative and autoethnography that appear in Chapter 3.

### **Fathers, Widows, and Orphans in Islam**

#### **Islam's Teaching About Fathers**

Fathers have many rights in the Islamic faith. Their children have to obey them unless the fathers ask their children to disobey God. The Prophet Mohammad said, "There is no obedience to the creature in disobedience to the Creator" (Sahih Al-Bokhari). On the other hand, fathers in Islam have to do their duties for their families, who are considered their "wards" as explained here. Ibn 'Umar (May Allah be pleased with them) reported: "I heard a Messenger of Allah (Peace Be Upon Him) saying, all of you are guardians and are responsible for your wards. The ruler is a guardian and

responsible for his subjects; the man is a guardian and responsible for his family; the woman is a guardian and is responsible for her husband's house and his offspring; and so all of you are guardians and are responsible for your wards" as explained in two books, one by Al-Bukhari and another by Muslim (web).

Suhaib (2016) wrote about five roles a father in Islam must play to be considered a good father:

- 1) passionately love their wives,
- 2) spend time with their children and wives,
- 3) be men of integrity,
- 4) communicate as families, and
- 5) keep their children and wives number one in their lives. (web)

These five roles make all family members happy.

Furthermore, fathers have influenced their children's lives, and fathers are responsible for their children's morality, health, and education. In Islam, fathers must teach their children to treat the others well, and fathers must teach their children to respect others. Muslims' greeting is "*Assalam alikom wa rahmat Allah wa barakatoh*" which means "Peace, mercy and blessings of God." That means to me that Islam is a religion of peace. Muslim fathers command their children to be virtuous. In Islam, people should greet all people, even if they are strangers. Prophet said, "O people, spread peace, feed the hungry, and pray at night when people are sleeping and you will enter Paradise in peace" (Sunan Ibn Majah 1334).

Many studies were written about what Islamic faith says about fathers' roles. One of those studies is done by Franceschelli (2014), who works at University of London, UK, and who wrote:

Muslim communities in the UK as the site of intergenerational transmission and seeks to understand how these parents pass on values to their children. Based on 52 semi-structured interviews with 15 Muslim families, the findings suggest that Islam was mobilized by parents to inform the transmission of a sense of morality, support children's education and reinforce family ties. (Franceschelli, 2014)

Great fathers in Islam are those who reflect these five characteristics. First, fathers must be men of integrity. Fathers must not lie because Fathers are examples and teachers to

their children. The Holy Prophet—Peace be upon him— said that the best thing a father provides to his child is good manners and ethical training (Ayatullah Ibrahim Amini, Chapter 1) Practice lying one of the bad manners. In addition, the Prophet was asked if a Muslim could be miserly and he said: “Yes.” He was asked if a Muslim could be a liar and he said “No” (How to Be a Father, Hadith). In Quran, Allah says, “Oh you who believe why do you say what you don’t do? The most disliked thing to God is that you say what you don’t do (As-Saff 61:2, 3). This verse in the holy Quran means if fathers want to ask their children to do anything good, fathers must do that. For example, if fathers smoke cigarettes, and fathers want to advise their children to quit smoking. Their children could say, “Why do you smoke?” The father must model the behavior he wishes his children to follow.

Second, fathers must spend time with their children to teach them, to watch them, and to play with them. Fathers who play with their children are building happiness in their lives. Abraham- Peace be upon him- was accompanying his son, Ismail, when Abraham built the Kaaba. Fathers should ask their children to do the work together. For instance, fathers could ask their children to help them in their duties. The goal of asking children to help is to teach the children how to do that alone in the future. In school, some teachers ask their students to present a lesson. Teachers can teach all the chapters, but teachers want their students to practice teaching.

Third, Fathers should passionately love and respect their wives. The fathers must not yell to their wives in front of their children because children would follow this negative behavior as adults, and this would reflect on the family of origin. When Prophet Mohamad—Peace be upon him—was asked, “Who is the most beloved person to you?” the Prophet responded: “Aishah.”. The good environment also has a good influence on children’s lives. When children see their fathers screaming, yelling, or hitting their mothers, children could do as their fathers in the future, or children could fail in their lives. Some children leave their houses because they could not help their mothers when their mothers cry because of their father’s harsh treatment. Protecting all family members is one of fathers’ roles in Islam.

Next, fathers must take charge, and they have to work hard to feed their families. Fathers are responsible to spend money on their families. Abu Said Khudri, who is one of

the companions of the Prophet, said “that the Prophet said: There are two habits which are never present together in a believer: miserliness and bad manners” (Tirmidhi). Fathers must be generous with their families.

Finally, communication within the home is the essential role for fathers. That means the fathers should meet with all of the family and discuss the issues affecting their lives. In some Muslim countries, it is common to see some injustices and violations among families’ members. The fathers should meet these issues with their children. In Arabic countries, some men think that they are better than other men, and women’s roles only are limited to staying home, cooking food, and raising their children. Fathers should clarify to their children that are not in Islam, and it is not correct. The Prophet’s wife, Khadejah, worked in the business. The last will of the Prophet Mohamad—Peace be upon him—asked men to deal with women in a good manner. He said in his famous farewell sermon delivered at `Arafah: “Fear Allah with regards to women, you have taken them in the trust of Allah and have made their private parts halal with the word of Allah” (Sahih Muslim, Hadith# 1218,2/889). That is what men must understand. Brothers and sisters should be treated equally in their homes and in their cultures.

That means the fathers are examples for their children, and children do what they are taught by their fathers. “The concept of ‘Islamic capital’ was developed to add...to Bourdieu’s ideas of family spirit and cultural capital in order to capture the dynamics between parents and their children” (Franceschelli, 2014). The author explained his study, and he wrote, “In the context of multicultural Britain, these findings shed light on the diversity of parenting to inform family support grounded in the understanding of different communities.” Furthermore, fathers must spend enough time with their children. Franceschelli, 2014 stated “A number of studies suggest that fathers who are involved, nurturing, and playful with their infants have children with higher IQs as well as better linguistic and cognitive capacities” (Pruett,2000, as cited in Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006, Section 12.2, para. 1). It also means fathers’ existence is important to their children’s lives, especially what is related to the IQs (Intelligent Quotients?) In addition, Benedict Carey, 2007, *New York Times*, wrote, “Psychologists have long believed that growing up in an institution like an orphanage stunts children’s mental development but have never had direct evidence to back it up” (web). Psychologists

have thought that living in orphanages stuns children's mental development, but they did not have scientific evidences, and they did not find what proves their ideas. Carey (2007) reported on research done with children raised in orphanages and others raised by foster families in Romania, and they found that children who were placed in foster families developed higher IQs than the children who were left in orphanages. Both Carey (2007) and Franceschelli (2014) found that fathers play major roles in children's mental development, but fathers must spend adequate time playing with their children to foster good mental health.

Some studies say the fathers' responsibilities in the family are significant to make positive changes in their children. Fathers' influences could be related to success the children in their education. Joseph H. Pleck (2007); Natasha J. Cabrera, Jacqueline D. Shannon, and Catherine Tamis-LeMonda (2007), Aqeel Khan, Roslee Ahmad, Abdul Rahim Hamdan, and Mohamed Sharif Mustaffa (2014), and Micah C. Chepchieng, Teresa C. Kattam (2012) agreed that fathers play major roles in their children's education, and fathers' presence in their children's lives has great benefits (Pleck, 2007; Cabrera, Shannon & Tamis-LeMonda 2007; Khan, Ahmad, Hamdan & Mustaffa,2014; Chepchieng & Kattam; 2012). Pleck (2007) made a study about fatherhood, and he discovered that fathers' involvement has positive consequences for children's development. He analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of fathers who integrate with their children, and they found that fathers' presence makes a major difference in their cognitive and emotional development.

That coincides with what Cabrera, Shannon, and LeMonda (2007) wrote. They stated that fathers have essential effects on their children's cognition and emotional development. Both studies prove that fathers' existence is important to their children to develop their cognitions and to enhance their education.

Chepchieng and Kattam (2012) also wrote that fathers' death has affected children's psychological well-being. The authors did a study in Kenya, and they did a comparison between two groups. A sample of 110 pupils, 55 students are orphaned, and 55 students are non-orphaned. In the end, they concluded that the group of orphaned pupils suffered from the absence of their fathers, especially the boys. Interpersonal skills

were less developed in the 55 orphan subjects. That study confirmed that fathers' existence is important, and the findings were consistent with the previous studies.

One of the fathers' roles in Islamic faith is to teach their children to behave the others with good morals and virtues. The Holy Prophet—Peace be upon him— said: "The best thing a father provide to his child is good manners and ethical training" (Al Tirmidhi and Bayhaqi). Fathers should encourage their children in schools to achieve their dreams. In Malaysia, Khan, Ahmad, Hamdan, and Mustaffa (n.d) wrote a study examining the predictors of academic achievement: role of parenting style, educational encouragement, gender and ethnicity among special education students. They found that parenting styles and educational encouragement contributed to develop students' education. Supporting children and working with them side by side have great impact on their achievements, their wishes, and their dreams.

Good fathers also passionately love their wives. The Prophet said: "The best of you is the one who is best to his wife, and I am the best of you to my wives" (Vol. 3, Book 9, Hadith 1977). In addition, Megan E. Barli, Ann C. Crouter, and Susan M. McHale (2007), Meike Slagt, Maga Dekovic, Amaranta D. de Haan, Alithe L. van den Akker, and Peter Prinzie (2012), Honig, and Park Kyung-ja (1988), and Jewelle Taylor (1981) agreed that relationships between the parents have influenced the children's lives. The authors prove that martial love helped to overcome all problems which may be present in homes. Moreover, the writers mentioned how good relationships between their parents could change children's behaviors for the better. Hein (2014), Tufekci Aysel (2002) and Arve Gunnestad and S'lungile Thwala (2011) agree that teaching children Islamic faith plays good role to be gifted children and creative. Hein stated five factors for gifted children's creativity, and she wrote, "(3) Quran-related learning experiences were positively related to gifted girls' [children's] analytical" skills (p. 264). In many verses in the holy Quran, the God, Allah asked people to think, learn, study, meditate, and consider.

For example, in the holy Quran, Allah says, "Now let man but think from what he is created!" (Chapter 86, At-Tariq: Verse 6). The holy Quran has many verses which ask people to think deeply and to analyze the events, so the Quran is the main source of Muslims' creativity. Aysel wrote about a study in a small U.S. town between Turkish

students and Turkish migrants. Aysel found the Islam religion has strong impact in Turkish families in their lives and parenting more than parents' educational level. Arve Gunnestad and S'lungile Thwala wrote about the relationship between religion and resilience in children and youth in Southern Africa. They found that religion "can have a great impact on children in crisis. It can be a source of vulnerability or resilience". Muslims ask their children not to drink, not to commit adultery, not to steal, not to annoy the others, and to forgive people. They tell their children that there is a God, Allah, who sees everything and hears everything, and Allah will ask people about their lives on earth upon their deaths. This instruction makes children think about their lives from an early age and prepares them for a good and wholesome and useful life. Islam teaches fathers how they parent their children, and these teachings have a great impact on Muslims.

In Islam, alcohol and drugs are forbidden. In the Quran, Allah says:

O ye who believe! Intoxicants and gambling, (dedication of) stones, and (divination by) arrows, are an abomination, - of Satan's handwork: eschew such (abomination), that ye may prosper. Satan's plan is (but) to excite enmity and hatred between you, with intoxicants and gambling, and hinder you from the remembrance of Allah, and from prayer: will ye not then abstain? (Quran, chapter 5, Al-Maeda: Verse 90-91)

Drugs and alcohol have bad impacts for families, and the Prophet Mohamad forbade drinking alcohol and drugs. Julia Dehn (2017), Instructor, Behavioral Science Department, Dutchess Community College NY wrote about paternal alcoholism and consequences for the children. Julia Dehn agreed with the Muslims that addiction to alcohol had bad effects for children. Dehn stated there are 20 millions of children who are alcoholics in the U.S., and 11 million of these children were under the age of 18. The reason in Dehn's study was that children lived in an alcoholic environment. In the article, the author reported that the children were deeply affected by their parents. The children who are alcoholic could be prone to extensive social, psychological, educational, medical and future socio-economic struggles. In the end, the author recommended to develop an intensive program to focus on healing the alcoholic children.

However, fathers' existence and paternal alcoholism (Dehn, 2017, web) do not always have bad influences. Some children could be successful without fathers, or their

fathers could be alcoholics. Freedman wrote about Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962), First Lady of the United States (March 1933- April 1945), and he stated that Eleanor lost her parents when she was almost 10 years old. Her father also was an alcoholic. Eleanor Roosevelt is an example for a woman who is great. President Truman (1884-1972) called Eleanor “the First Lady of the World”. Eleanor Roosevelt played important roles in Americans’ lives, especially in women rights, civil rights, and human rights. She also was one of reasons why President Franklin Roosevelt became one of the best Presidents in the United States. After 30 years of marriage, Eleanor Roosevelt discovered her husband, Franklin Roosevelt, that he was with Lucy Mercer in a love affair, and Eleanor forgave him. Eleanor is a positive role model. She was the mother of six children when she found Lucy’s love letters, and she preferred to stay with her husband. In Islam, the Prophet Mohamad is the best example for a child who lost his or her parents. He was not six years yet when he lost parents.

Freedman (2012) also wrote about Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), the President of the United States (1861-1865), is one of the best presidents in the United States. His father was a farmer, and he could not write, but he was a church member known for his honesty. Abraham Lincoln had a high ambition, and he became a president who helped Americans, especially African Americans. He ended the slavery. Frederic Douglass (1818-1895), African American, did not know about his father, and when he was infant, he was placed with his grandmother. His mother was rarely visit them at night after her day’s work. It was not allowed to her to visit him, and the penalty is whipping of not being in the field at sunrise. Frederick Douglass struggled to get African Americans rights, and they became free. He went to meet Abraham Lincoln to explain to him what African Americans encountered, and what were the obstacles. Finally, African Americans became free because of Frederick Douglass. Fathers play major roles in children’s lives, but it is not always.

Mothers in Islam have more of an effect on children than fathers. Children are asked by Allah to obey her. In Quran, Allah says: “And We have enjoined upon man [care] for his parents. His mother carried him, [increasing her] in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Be grateful to Me and to your parents; to Me

is the [final] destination” (Luqman, verse 14). In addition, the Prophet Muhammad said, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him: “Your Heaven lies under the feet of your mother” (Ahmad, Nasai). That mean the children must do all what their mothers want them to do. Furthermore, there are another hadith (the second source in Islam after the Quran) is about how Muslims should treat their mothers. A man came to the Prophet and said, ‘O Messenger of God! Who among the people is the most worthy of my good companionship? The Prophet said: Your mother. The man said, ‘Then who?’ The Prophet said: Then your mother. The man further asked, ‘Then who?’ The Prophet said: Then your mother. The man asked again, ‘Then who?’ The Prophet said: Then your father. (Bukhari, Muslim).

In this hadith, there is evidence that Muslims care about their mothers more than their fathers. Since they take care of their mothers more than their fathers, they want their mothers to be satisfied with them. In some Islamic countries, mothers stay with their children more than fathers, so children are often influences by their mothers more than their fathers. It is written:

And abide in your houses and do not display yourselves as [was] the display of the former times of ignorance. And establish prayer and give zakah [charity] and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah intends only to remove from you the impurity [of sin], O people of the [Prophet’s] household, and to purify you with [extensive] purification. (Quran, Al ‘Ahzab, verse 33)

Some Islamic countries believe this verse is a commandment of God for all women to stay in their homes, so some Muslim governments do not give opportunities for women to be educated and employed as men are.

Eveleyn Milings (2010) wrote about the role and influence of the father on his child in biological and non-biological relationships. In the article, Milings wrote about a study of six participants (three women and three men). The method was qualitative approach. Milings stated psychoanalytic literature and other theoretical approach says that mothers are most influential parent, and mothers are prime caregiver. In the cases of the study, Milings wrote, “...mothers are not a stand-alone figure, but interact with fathers to create either a blameworthy foil to enable him to conduct his undesirable

behavior” (web). That means the mothers need their husbands to help them to parent their children.

### **Widows**

Although Islam gave women great rights, Saudi’s divorcees and widows suffer from countless obstacles, the bad laws, and traditional and culture which they encounter every day from the society and the government. Arjuwan Lakkdawala (2008) Arab News, wrote about her story as a single mother who lives in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. She described how Saudi society ignore widows and divorcees. Arjuwan’s husband divorced her, left her with her five sons, and refused to provide care of support. Saudi mothers are not accepted in the role of both parents. Her eldest son stays out late, and his grade dropped. She wanted her husband to take charge of his children, especially in the school issue. Umm Hatim is is another divorced Saudi mother, and is worried about her three children, especially her son’s friends. Umm Hatim said it is hard for the mothers in Saudi Arabia to be as a single parent. Saudi society think women should stay at home and look down on the advice given by women. Finally, Arjuwan wrote about another widow, Fahmia, who agreed that it is very difficult to her to raise her son. Her son had bad friends, who are involved in drugs, and she spent a lot of time to prevent him from getting involved with his friends. In the end of the article, Arjuwan reported that mothers’ troubles could be more if their children are boys because mothers won’t able to visit them in the schools. In Saudi Arabia, visiting boys in their schools is the fathers’ job.

The largest obstacle in Saudi Arabia facing widows and divorcees constantly is the male guardianship system, prohibition on driving cars, and lack of opportunities for employment, especially political jobs. In Saudi Arabia, men control women’s lives from birth until death. Yvette Darlene (2016) wrote about things Saudi women are not allowed to do. In the article, he reported that Saudi women cannot drive cars in Saudi Arabia. Driving car is important for single parent. For example, if one of mother’s children get sick suddenly at midnight, the mother call one of her relatives to go to the hospital.

Second, the male guardianship system is a major obstacles which Saudi women complain about. They cannot travel or go to public places alone. Moreover, they cannot make power decisions, such as opening a bank account. Banks require permission from

the woman's male guardian. The male guardian usually is a father, a brother, a husband, or a son. Hugh Miles (2015) wrote about how Saudi women suffer from the male guardianship system. The author focused on divorced women and widows in Saudi Arabia. In the article, he stated that some divorced women could not register their children in the schools because their ex-husbands did not come to schools, and some of their ex-husbands did not give them the ID. Women in Saudi Arabia do not have independent ID, and women still are related to their husband, even if their husbands divorced them. Women's names and their children are written on the family ID card. In 2015, the Al Riyadh newspaper reported that the Interior Ministry in Saudi Arabia would issue family identity cards not only for men, but also for divorced women and widows to be able to register their children in schools, and to solve some problems which they face, but the Saudi government has not fulfilled this promise yet. It may be forthcoming, however, based on recent reports in the media.

Finally, women do not have enough opportunity to find suitable jobs, especially political jobs. Hugh Miles (2015) reported that Saudi women should struggle to get their rights. Miles recommended Saudi government to give women their rights to identify themselves as heads of their families, and he wrote that women should be equal with men in everything. In 2013, King Abdullah appointed 30 women to work on the Shura Council, and women can vote. Some have won local elections and are serving in local governments. Some conditions of women's lives have not changed yet, as Arjuwana (2008) explained that government does not offer jobs for women because the Saudi think the best place for women is their homes. Many educated men and women believe that Saudi women should struggle to get their rights, and they should follow what American women did. In the article, "The Struggle for Women's Rights in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century" (Crocco, 2014), the author wrote how American women in 1900 struggled to get their rights. American women before 1919 could not vote, but nowadays, women can vote. Saudi women were given suffrage only about five years ago, but many still do not vote. There is a need for women to understand the reason to vote and the issues on the ballot. Even though Saudi women are respected and honored, the culture is slow to encourage them to enter politics, despite their high levels of education.

A number of reports on the status of Saudi women have appeared in the past two years or so, and as explained, women were granted suffrage by the last king. Recently, women have voted and have run for public office successfully, so progress is being made, but one of the greatest obstacles is the guardianship system that "...bars women from traveling abroad, obtaining a passport, marrying or exiting prison without the consent of a male relative, remains the most significant impediment to realizing women's rights in the kingdom, according to a report released Sunday by a leading human rights group" (Batrawy, 2016, web). With time, it appears that conditions will improve for women and the Saudi men will continue to support and help women to pursue careers while raising children, as some earlier generations of women have done.

Human Rights Watch, which interviewed 61 Saudis inside and outside the kingdom over the past nine months, discovered that some of the women fear the male guardian but hope for more freedom in the future as men join their struggles for equality in the eyes of the law:

The Human Rights Watch study takes on increasing significance as the kingdom works to implement its 'Vision 2030' and 'National Transformation Plan' to wean the country off its dependence on oil, including government targets to boost women's participation in the workforce. (Batrawy, 2016, web).

As many Saudi women are being educated and delaying marriage, with their right to vote and opportunities to run for office, there is much hope for them:

The report also comes just seven months after Saudi women were allowed the right to run and vote for the first time in the country's only local elections, for municipal council seats. (Batrawy, 2016, web)

It is clear, however, that women's future rests to a large extent on the goodness of the male guardian: "The report finds that even with these greater opportunities, a woman's life in Saudi Arabia rests largely on 'the good will' of her male guardian — often a father, husband, brother, or in some cases her son" (Batrawy, 2016, web). As reported in the present study, the author/son was only 14 when he was given guardianship of his

widowed mother, which seemed like a good thing to her but possibly made her feel less like the head of household and more like a minor dependent, especially since she could not work outside the home and struggled to feed her four children—one of whom has a physical disability, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

## **Rhetorical Theories**

### **Decolonization**

In rhetorical theory, bell hooks explains that “decolonization means more than simply engaging in the critical interrogation of oppression. It also requires an envisioning and development of ‘new habits of being, different ways to live in the world’ in bell hooks' words, and this is what the author’s mother did--engage in critical interrogation of societal expectations and tribal pressures. hooks argues that the "primary means of creating non-dominating alternatives is the best way to overcome obstacles, and she asserts "that interactions with family members provide an important arena for enactment," (hooks, 2016, p. 282).

Hooks also defines non-dominating ways of living, insisting that "parent-child interactions offer another opportunity to enact non-dominating ways of living” (282), and this is what the author experienced as he tried to help his mother and fill his father's shoes when he died. At the same time, his mother modeled an "enactment of non-domination" (Elias, 2012, 2013) as a member of an "oppressed group", and did "practice speaking in a and caring manner” and this worked because the judge gave his mother custody of her four sons when she explained her son’s disability and special needs. Since widows can sometimes feel they have no power, acting in a loving and caring manner actually gives them power (hooks, 2003), and sometimes they can be heard and can be victorious.

### **Marginality as a Site of Resistance**

Marginality, for hooks, is a “site of radical possibility, a space of resistance . . . a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse” (p. 276). This means that through enactment in loving and caring ways, women on the margins in Saudi Arabia can gain power and can create a safe space of resistance by seeing the culture from the inside and from the outside. It offers great potential because individuals located

in the margins look “both from the outside in and from the inside out” (p. 276). “Their vantage point or structural position provides a bifurcated or double vision of both their own knowledge and the knowledge of the dominant culture” (p. 276).

“Marginalized rhetors and, in particular, black women, are at the center of hooks’ theory” (p. 276). “Acknowledging the perspectives from which rhetoric is produced is one important ingredient in rhetorical theory, but hooks believes that the theories developed need not be confined to particular identities” (p. 277). In the case of the author’s mother, like some other widows, were able to make a strong case in court that allowed them to keep their children and remain unmarried for the rest of their lives. In the case of the author’s family, there were no daughters, just four sons, so the mother had fewer complications than widows with daughters because then the guardian son would be the one to grant permission for his sister to marry.

### Chapter 3

#### The Literacy Narrative and Autoethnography

In the United States, it is common practice to ask students to write a literacy narrative of their lives, particularly in English 101, so that students can reflect on their own journey to learning to read, write, speak, and listen in ways that foster literacy.

Mary Soliday defines this kind of writing here:

At the most basic level, the plot of a literacy story tells what happens when we acquire language, either spoken or written. But literacy stories are also places where writers explore what Victor Turner calls ‘liminal’ crossings between worlds. In focusing upon those moments when the self is on the threshold of possible intellectual, social, and emotional development, literacy narratives become sites of self-translation where writers can articulate the meanings and the consequences of their passages between language worlds. (1994, p. 511)

Though my mother was an illiterate Bedouin woman who had never been sent to school when she married at age 11, she knew much of the Quran by heart because she heard her parents reciting the prayers five times a day, and they asked her to memorize them.

These prayers—*assalah*—served as a foundation for her oral literacy in Arabic: *Fajar* (dawn), *Thuhor* (noon), *Asr* (evening), *Magreb* (sunset), and *Isha* (bedtime).

When I was about five years old and already an orphan, my mother started teaching me these prayers, so at six I could recite some Quranic verses and prayers. As I began to learn to read, I brought books home, so my mother and I were learning to read Arabic together after school. At first, we were working hard on how to write the Arabic letters, words, and numbers. We studied picture books to learn new vocabulary.

Throughout my entire childhood, we studied together, and she learned to read and write with me and my siblings as we did our homework after school. Soliday writes:

Reading and writing literacy stories can enable students to ponder the conflicts attendant upon crossing language worlds and to reflect upon the choices that speakers of minority dialects and languages must make. Stories of self-translation involve representing difference, and the representation of difference is at the core of today's struggles in the humanities over competing versions of multiculturalism. (p. 511)

As Bedouins, we speak a different kind of Arabic, but all Saudis will understand us, and we understand them as well. Being educated alongside my mother gave me a great appreciation for reading and writing, seeing how happy my mother was to be able to read and write as time went by. Once we started learning English in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, I brought English homework home, and my mother tried to learn English with me as well, but I was not a good English teacher for Mother. Still, she learned some English—the alphabet, some basic expressions, and some vocabulary.

### **Culture and Life of Bedouins**

Let's take a trip to the desert to see what life was like for Bedouins like my parents and ancestors of past generations, as described in the Joshua Project, which I find to be very accurate:

Traditionally, the Bedouin's home, the tent, is divided into three sections by curtains: the men's section, the family section and the kitchen. In the men's area, guests are received around the hearth where the host prepares coffee on the fire. This is the center of Bedouin social life. Tea is served as a welcome drink; coffee is usually prepared after the meal and is the last drink before the guest leaves. The serving of food and drink represents the generous hospitality of the host. The men pass the evening trading news and discussing their animals. (2017, web)

Even reading this gives me some pain because I had no father to make the coffee and host men in the family and community. Even though I had my mother, it seems that we boys missed out on that warmth of family—even camping out on the desert nowadays when the Bedouins no longer live in the tents on the desert for the most part. We did not get the chance to camp out on the desert with our parents because my father died too young and the male relatives did not bring us into their lives or give us the care we deserved, possibly because our mother insisted on keeping us and raising us on her own. We learned in English 112 with our professor that Eleanor Roosevelt also lost her father—in fact she lost both parents and a baby brother before she turned 10—but her Uncle Theodore Roosevelt, U. S. President, filled in for his brother and Eleanor's deceased father. He tried to include Eleanor and her surviving brother by inviting them to family parties and even to the White House when Theodore lived there as President. They were

never forgotten by their father's brother, so I sometimes feel disappointed that none of my father's brothers did anything to care for me and my three brothers.

But I want to return to the description of the Bedouins here because I think my readers will want to know more about us. In the tribal tent, we see what women were doing:

Separated from them [the men] by a curtain, the women gather in the family area and kitchen along with their small children to bake bread and prepare the main meal. A dinner of rice and chunks of mutton or lamb are then served to the gathered guests. (Joshua Project, 2017, web)

This scene is still the same today for most Bedouin families—whether living in the city or on the desert, but it was not the case for my family since there was no father in the home. It meant many nights without the full meal, without the mutton on the table. Still, my mother provided all she could to put food on the table. For this, we are most thankful, and for this we find this description of us as very accurate even today, when we no longer live on the desert for the most part:

Women occupy a very important position in Bedouin society. Not only do they raise the children, herd the sheep, milk the animals, cook, spin yarn and make the clothes, but they also weave the cloth that constitutes the tent. (Joshua Project, 2017, web)

Sadly, however, as boys we never had the opportunity to go camping on the desert or to sit with our father around the fire as the men did in the old days as described here:

The Bedouin men gather around the fire, sharing stories and sipping coffee. They might discuss falconry, the saluki greyhound and Arabian stallions, all animals the Bedouins are credited with raising, as well as other matters of importance to the tribe. (Joshua Project, 2017, web)

As far as I can recall since I was only three when he died, I never heard my father sing or recite poetry or light the incense as described here from times past:

Traditionally, one of the men recites poetry or sings. To mark the end of the evening, the host burns incense in a *mabkhara* (incense burner) passing it to each of his guests to inhale and fan their clothes. Poetry has been a central cultural form of expression for the Bedouins throughout their history. In early centuries of

Islamic history, Bedouin poetry represented the ideal standard for other literary achievements, as well as for the Arabic language. (Joshua Project, 2017, web)

Still, I must say that my mother did all she could to be both mother and father to us. What my mother also brought to our family life is a kind of strictness in our behavior, probably because she knew that neighbors and family might have expected the worst of her boys.

The Bedouins do have a very high standard for their children as explained here:

Bedouin society has a strict code of honor, which dictates proper behavior for all members, including children. Because of the demanding nature of the Bedouin lifestyle, children are expected to assume a considerable amount of responsibility in order to help their families survive. (Joshua Project, 2017, web)

It can be said that my brothers and I took on a lot of responsibility to help Mother, and that work has made us stronger and better people today. The authors explain the change over time: “Although modernization has changed the Bedouin lifestyle somewhat, emphasis is placed on teaching children to carry on traditional ways of life, and the advancement of modern technology is not considered important to children's education” (web). With the stabilization of the majority of Bedouins in Saudi Arabia—where most families live in a more urban settings and live in houses or apartments, technology nowadays plays a major role in the education of children, which we recognize as change for the better for the most part. Still, we struggle with the stigma that comes with the status of being Bedouins historically:

Modern societies have made the traditional Bedouin lifestyle less attractive since as it is demanding and often dangerous. Because of that, many tribes have settled in urban areas. It is not uncommon to see a young Bedouin building a house and living in it; however, his parents will pitch their tent in the garden, where they will live very happily until the end of their days. (web)

This is what I imagine my mother's parents would have wanted since they loved the outdoors and enjoyed traditional ways of life, but my hope is to build a big house for my mother, my wife, and our seven children someday.

As explained in this thesis and as experienced by my family as I was growing up, we received government assistance for widows:

Governments have a strong tendency to regulate Nomadic lifestyles since it is only then that taxation works. Providing services for the people also works best in an urban setting. Today, the Arab world has one of the highest rates of urbanization in the world. (web)

Because we were living in a city, we could receive these services, and we were able to live comfortably, though it was not enough money, and my mother had to work to have her goods sold in the local markets (Figures 3 & 4).

### **What Do Bedouins Believe?**

We are taught from birth that our Prophet (peace be upon him) was a Bedouin, and we are proud that he was one of us:

Islam's prophet Mohammed was born and raised in the Bedouin tribe of the Quraish. The Qur'an, first revealed to Mohammed, was later written and compiled in the Arabic language. The first converts to Islam came from the Bedouin tribes living in and around Mecca. Therefore, Islam is embedded and deeply rooted in Bedouin culture. Although there are pockets of Christians in Bedouin tribes, by and large the word Bedouin is synonymous with being a follower of Islam. Prayer is an integral part of Bedouin life. As there are no formal mosques in the desert, they pray where they are, facing Mecca and performing the ritual washing, preferably with water. Since water is not always readily available, they 'wash' with sand instead. (Joshua Project, 2017, web)

Again, as far back as I can remember, we were told that our Prophet was one of us and that we should be happy and proud to be Bedouins.

### **Challenges of Being Bedouins**

Historically, we have had problems, but times are getting much better for all of us in Saudi Arabia:

In modern Arab states and Israel, Bedouins are faced with challenges in their lifestyle, as their traditional Islamic, tribal culture has begun to mix with western practices. Men are more likely to adjust and interact with the modern cultures, but women are bound by honor and tradition to stay within the family dwelling. They therefore lack opportunity for advancement. (Joshua Project, 2017, web)

As modern male Bedouins, we are making progress, and many of us have earned the scholarship to study abroad from our government.

But I must tell my story so that others will not be discouraged if their mothers are widows raising children alone. As I have explained, after my father died, life was hard for my mother and us four children. It is still especially difficult for uneducated widows to find employment in Saudi Arabia. They cannot enter the public places unless they have an adult male family member, they cannot accompany their sons in schools, and they cannot drive cars. The KSA culture treats widows and orphans with care but with caution. Women are sometimes afraid of losing their husbands to a widow. Men are afraid of orphans because of their perceived bad behavior. Widows and orphans need people to stand with them and advocate for their rights. The Prophet Mohammed recommended people to take care of widows and orphans, and he said, "One who cares for widows and the poor is like those who fight in the way of Allah or those who spend their days fasting and their nights praying" which is agreed upon, also in *Adab al-Mufrad* of Imaam Al-Bukhari in the chapter titled "The Virtue of Those Who Care for Orphans" (web). It is true that some of our neighbors did help my mother and brought food to us, and they sometimes gave us money for school activities and supplies.

Often when children in the KSA lose the father, or women lose their husbands, there is a stigma attached to the boy with no father and the widows, and a tremendous hardship is placed on the family. As discussed earlier in this thesis, we had many disadvantages because our mother could not go to school to meet our teachers because women cannot enter public spaces without an adult male family member. My mother chose not to remarry because she did not want to give her children up, but my mother could not find a job. I will try to interpret my literacy narrative first, through the rhetoric of resistance and second, through the rhetoric of marginality. Through these research lenses, critiques the KSA culture, the laws and explain for the readers the hardships my mother and my family experienced because of them.

Widows and orphans who are living in the KSA) are marginalized in cases when mothers decide not to remarry and to keep their children. If a widow wants to remarry, the culture expects her to give up her children to her husband's family in order to remarry. Marginality for bell hooks is a "site of radical possibility, a space of resistance .

. . a central location for the production of a counter- hegemonic discourse” (Foss et al, p. 276). When my father died in 1986, the cultural expectations in KSA for widows with very young children was that she surrender her children to her dead husband’s family in order to remarry. Historically, “Bedouins sell and barter products in order to obtain agricultural food from sedentary peoples” (Joshua Project, 2017, web), so this ancient custom seemed to come easily for my mother whose family taught her the trades.



Figure 3. Baskets like those my mother made for market



Figure 4: Handmade, goatskin beds for infants like those made by Mother

But she was not able to take the items to market to sell them. In Saudi Arabia, women are not allowed to be in public or in the market place without a male escort, and my father had died. Therefore, my uncle had to take these items to the market to sell, so we could earn more money for the family. Inside the home, my brothers and I often watched my mother making these things. She worked very, very hard so that we always had toys and other things we asked for. She was a great mom!

#### **Peaceful and Quiet and Loving Ways of Mothering**

In effect, our home was a site of resistance in the following sense, but my mother remained the center of peaceful, quiet, and loving ways while she struggled to earn money, raise her children, and keep the family together. As explained, our tribe (my

family) and my mother's relatives pressured her to remarry. Other women in the community shunned her and would not associate with her. In spite of this pressure from the family and the neighbors, my mother resisted. She refused to remarry and give up her sons. KSA culture offers great privileges for men and limited privileges for women. To me, it seemed unfair that my mother did not have opportunities to earn a living, and men were treated better in KSA culture. At the same time, as her guardian from age 14, I did all I could to see that she received a formal education after I married and my wife was able to help my mother in our home. They became and still are best friends who have worked hard to help my disabled brother and to raise our seven children as a team.

According to Min Zhan Lu, my critique of the KSA cultural traditions mentioned above, constitutes listening with a "critically affirmative ear (eye)" (2005, p. 11). Let me begin again to explain the situation in my country—which is improving almost daily for many Saudis. In January 2017, the Al-Riyadh newspaper reported that the KSA Interior Ministry decided to begin to issue family identity cards not only to men, but also to divorcees and widows granting them powers that will include accessing records, registering children for schools, and authorizing medical procedures. This would have made a great difference in the lives of my mother, my brothers, and me. To be critical of the laws of the land, I disagree with the privilege men have over women; but I am affirming my mother's resistance to remarry.

These auto-ethnographic writings and the literacy narrative began with the death of my father. In the graduate program, we were required to write a literacy narrative, and I wrote about when I started primary school, I had to go alone every day because a woman cannot go anywhere alone in my country. I explained how I was sad and what made me cry because on the first day of kindergarten other children were holding their fathers' hands: I was alone. In addition, I describe the problems we faced without a father at home and how the culture views orphans and widows as different from others. For example, my grandfather, my mother's father, called my brothers and me "widow's son. Orphans and widows in our society are stigmatized. Holy Prophet married two different widows as was the custom to take care of women alone without a husband in those days.

One of the reasons which made me study hard was an incident during fourth grade. My teacher asked me to tell my father to come with me the next day. I told my mother what my teacher said, and she said, "Tell him to write what he wants on a piece of paper, and then bring it to me so I will know what he wants." The next day, I went to the school, and in the morning of that day, he asked me, "Why did you not tell your father to come?" Then I told him what my mother said. He said, "I don't want to talk with women. I want to see your father. Only your father." He asked me to open my hands and then he hit me with a small bamboo stick. I do not remember how many times he hit me. When I saw my classmates laughing at me, I broke down in tears. I felt that the teacher asked for my father because I did something wrong or I did not study hard. However, the real reason was that there was new rule stating any information concerning a child's education was to be done with fathers, period. I passed the final exams in fourth grade with A+. These days, the Saudi government changed the rules in primary school, so they don't have to do final exams as in the past.

I thank my God because I have a great mother who challenges and encourages the lives of my brothers and me. In my country, Saudi Arabia, women cannot work with men, women cannot drive cars, women cannot talk with foreign men unless she is accompanied by *mohram* (*escort*: her son, her father, her brother, her husband, and her nephew) and women cannot work or study with men in the same place.

My God made everything for my family to make it seem easier than it was. There were some months where we lived on less than \$300. The best blessing that Allah gave me was to make me one of my mother's children: She always smiled, she was always optimistic, and she never blamed anyone if she had any problem.

Losing my father sent my family into a state of extreme poverty. These two factors can change people's lives for the worse. It made us stronger. Some families become homeless or thieves. I'm closer to my mother from the age of three years old as a *mohram* when she was talking with men. That gave me space to listen to the adults earlier than the children who spent their lives talking with their friends who were the same age. This allowed me to develop spoken language earlier than the other children. However, losing my father made my mother wiser and taught her how to act as a mature adult. She did not think of herself as 18 years old. She decided to stay with my brothers and me, and

she did not get married another time so that she could keep her family together. My brothers and I remained number one in her life. That meant she was thinking about us always.

Life has been very difficult for my mother, and I feel sorry for her. Yet, I cannot repay her for all that she gave my brothers and me. Despite our poverty, we remained strong and united because our mother was there and was taking care of us with very limited material resources but with tremendous spiritual resources.

### **Marginality as a Site of Resistance**

Widows and orphans living in the KSA are somewhat marginalized because they have fewer rights than men in Saudi culture and because they do not have a man—husband or father in the home to care for them. Marginality, for bell hooks, is a “site of radical possibility, a space of resistance . . . a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse” (Foss, p. 276). In our case, my mother’s refusal to remarry and to give up her sons were acts of resistance. My mother was silent with her words about what was happening to our family—but my brothers and I could see the pressure she received from our family. Still, as hooks notes, her “enactment of non-domination” meant that she seldom spoke of her crises, but when she did, she followed the “practice of speaking in a loving and caring manner” (hooks cited in Foss et al, 2014, p. 274), even now as I am raising daughters and trying to be a good husband and father.

When I turned 14, I became the guardian for my mother, but she bought a car for me to drive and to transport things to market. It is common for sons age 14 to drive without a license, but with a kind of learner’s permit. So then I could take my mother where she wanted to go, and that gave her some freedom, but I could not have the car keys to go anywhere because she was strict. Like many men in Najran in the South, my mother chose my wife for me when I was 17 and my wife was 14, but we both finished high school while we were married and living in my mother’s home. While still in high school, I sold vegetables and the crafts my mother was making at the market with my mother’s brother. Once I finished high school, I started working full time at the market with my uncle, who always tried to help us as we were growing up. Then we grew our own vegetables in our garden, and I sold them at market on my own, giving the money to my mother to support my brothers, wife, and me. Until we moved to the United States,

my mother handled the budget for all of us, and we all worked together to help my disabled brother and to care for the six babies as they came along.

At first sight, to outsiders, it appears that men dominate women's lives in KSA, but from insiders' points of view, they are protected and respected, as I have done with my mother, wife, and five daughters. In addition, hooks wrote, the position on the margin offers great potential because individuals located on the margins look "both from the outside in and from the inside out" (cited in Foss et al, 2014, p. 276). That means the society offers great privileges for men, and limited privileges for women, but in the home the mothers control everything. Furthermore, hooks argues that this is a position of strength, "Their vantage point or structural position provides a bifurcated or double vision of both their own knowledge and the knowledge of the dominant culture" (cited in Foss et al, 2014, p. 276). For my mother and me, this meant that we could see many different views of our culture and in some ways we became hybrids of Bedouin, single-parent household members, and female influence in the home. Despite the empowerment in the home, however, my mother had little power in the society at large. When my wife entered our home, she became a partner with my mother, and together they ran the home and cared for all of us. They are best friends now and always have been good at co-parenting our children. Since my mother had no daughters, my wife is like her daughter, and they contact each other every day almost every day by AllApp.

Still, the location on the margin for widows and orphans in Saudi Arabia is one of resistance, but it is quiet resistance grounded in hard work. Michel Foucault defined rhetorical of resistance as "a centrifugal movement, an inverse energy, a discharge" (p. 359). Widows and orphans struggle to survive. We are engaged in "writing that listens(watches)" Min Zhan Lu's "critically affirmative ear (eye)" (2005, p. 11). As I have written this thesis I have become aware of "...metadiscursivity and intertextuality enable writers to acknowledge their texts as cultural constructions, thereby making themselves vulnerable to admitting up front the partial nature of their texts. Such practices create gaps, or silences, out of which readers can respond. ...it is this ability to respond that makes revision possible—multigenre texts foster readerly response..." (p. 12). This story of my family's life is a cultural construction and it is writing "that listens"—as I have listened to my mother for my whole life and I respect her position as

head of household, despite the government's refusal to recognize widows legally as the heads of the family.

In addition, revisionary rhetoric, bell hooks' marginal rhetoric, Royster & Kirsch's "strategic contemplation" & "social circulation" are all examples of theoretical lenses through which I continue to analyze our life on the margins. "Recognizing that feminist rhetorical practices have been honed particularly on historical rescue, recovery, and (re)inscription, we use this first term of engagement, critical imagination, to illuminate some important questions designed to clarify the scope, nature, and principles of our work" (p. 648).

As rhetorical historians, our questions include: When we study women of the past, especially those whose voices have rarely been heard or studied by rhetoricians, how do we render their work and lives meaningfully? How do we honor their traditions? How do we transport ourselves back to the time and context in which they lived, knowing full well that it is not possible to see things from their vantage point? How do they frame (rather than we frame) the questions by which they navigated their own lives? (p. 648)

In the case of the present study, when the author asks his widow mother how she raised her four children alone in a time that this was not done in Saudi Arabia, she always gives the same answer: "Because I loved you. Because I had already lost your father, and I could not bear to lose you, too." Kirsch and Royster ask us to give voices to those who have had no voice—in this case the widow and the orphan—"to render their work and lives meaningfully" (p. 648).

What more lingers in what we know about them that would suggest that we need to think again, to think more deeply, to think to recognize and articulate 'qualities' of excellence in feminist rhetorical studies, in contrast to prescribing 'standards' of excellence, we draw attention to interconnections among three critical terms of engagement: critical imagination, strategic contemplation, and social circulation. How do we make what was going on in their context relevant or illuminating for the contemporary context? Such questions are not unique to the history. (pp. 648-649)

These questions raised by the authors—both rhetoricians—are very important to the study of the lives of women and the material conditions of their lives.

In Saudi Arabia, the law prohibits women from driving, traveling alone, and working in the same place with men, and women and men have to be separated, while the Islam does not have such a prohibition for women. Min-Zhan Lu reported, critical affirmation is crucial for negotiating the "postmodern" world because, unlike certain versions of postmodern discourse, it emphasizes collectivity and experience. It does not conflate totality, defined as collective political unity, with totalitarianism. It recognizes the importance of experience and history in the struggle for agency. At the same time, it combats essentialist approaches to identity politics poses a subjectivity which is depends on others' acceptance that may not be there when it is needed (hooks, 2001).

My critique of the Saudi Arabia culture is based upon what Min-Zhan Lu wrote about "Critical affirmation" in that Saudis practice some laws such as preventing widows from living with their children, and government does not offer jobs for uneducated widows to earn money for their children. Widows and orphans should be treated as people who are disabled and need help to survive.

Widows are routinely taken to the courts by their dead husbands' family to keep their children. Sometimes, judges accept their requests to keep their children with them, and sometimes, judges rule the other way. If the judges accept widows' requests to keep their children with them, the judges usually say, "Congratulations!!! You win, but if you remarry, your children must be with your husband's family." In the end, because of a mothers' love for their children, they decide to remain unmarried widows.

Saudi widows are marginalized because they are outside the society and looked down upon. They cannot get jobs or keep their children if they decide to remarry. bell hooks wrote, "To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body" (hooks, p. 341). Widows are outside the Saudi culture traditions, and orphans share the space with their mothers because Saudi culture look at the orphans as bad children.

When my mother lost my father, she was 18 years old. My mother told me that my father's family wanted my brothers and me to live with them, and she spent a year in the court. She was going monthly with us and my grandfather (her father) to the court. My mother said that she was crying, and she was asking my father's family every month

in every court session to allow her to keep my brothers and me with her. She said, “One time, I talked with your uncle (my father’s brother) and I asked him to go to the judge to tell him that they give up, and my mother explained to him that my older brother is disabled, and he needs more help to feed him and to wash him. My mother said, my uncle told her, ‘What will people say about us, Joharah? They will say that we do not want to take care of our children. It’s shameful! You have a solution, Joharah, you should marry me to be with your children.’” My mother refused my uncle’s request, and she did not want to marry a man who had a wife. After a year of my father’s death, my father’s family allowed to my mother to keep us.

My grandfather, my mother’s father, did not want my mother to keep my brothers and me with her. In the beginning, he hid his desire because he thought that the judge could make the decision that my brothers and I would live with our father’s family, especially after he saw my father’s family’s wishes. In fact, my grandfather was weak in front of my mother’s tears.

Michel Foucault said, “Resistance operates as power does—by being inventive, mobile and productive” (Foss 359). My mother resisted because she did not remarry, and she did her best to be with her children. Her family tried to force her to give her children up, and they wanted her to give up her ideas, but she did not do what her society wanted her to do. She resisted their attempts to control her life by going to court again and again to keep custody of her children.

My grandfather wanted us, my brothers and me, to be with our father’s family because he was poor and he did not like to spend money. He wanted my mother to remarry; he knew that women cannot get jobs as easily as men. Further, my brothers and I are males, and he thought, my mother cannot teach us to be men, and he looked at society’s views of us as a widow and orphans, especially in 1986.

My mother, my brothers, and I lived a hard life, and we faced bad treatment from our relatives, our neighbors, and our society. The “Widow’s son” was my brothers and my nickname. My mother lived in small circle to flee from society’s criticism. But my mother never blamed herself for her decision to keep her children. Some Saudis think that orphans are thieves, and they do not have good morals. The reason is, some Saudis think that mothers cannot watch their children outside because of the government’s rules.

My hard life was a motivating reason for me to complete my education and to learn English. I want to find a good job to help my mother, who struggled to keep us with her. My mother was not educated, and she did not find a job, but she wove traditional baskets to cover our needs. The subsidy which Saudi government pays to my family was not enough to support us.

## **Discussion**

Three essential sources Saudis look at in their social issues and to solve their problems are the Quran, Sunnah, and culture. They consult all three sources to make a decision. Sometimes, some issues are not forbidden in the Islamic faith, but are not accepted in their culture. For example, in Islam, women can drive cars, women can work with men, children (girls & boys) can study together in the same schools, women can travel alone—except in Saudi Arabia. In addition, in Islam, mothers are responsible for taking care of their children, but if their husbands die, unless the mother has mental problems or difficult circumstances, mothers should be allowed to raise their children. Allowing women to drive is “not a religious issue as much as it is an issue that relates to the community itself that either accepts it or refuses it,” said the 30-year-old prince, who has amassed unprecedented powers since his father, King Salman, ascended to the throne. “The community is not convinced about women driving” and sees negative consequences if it’s allowed, the prince said on Monday after outlining a plan to reduce the kingdom’s reliance on oil (Almashabi & Nereim, Prince Says Saudi Arabia Not Yet Ready to Allow Women to Drive, 2016)

That means the government makes decisions according to the Saudi culture, and they look to specific groups of men to choose how people should live. In this case, Saudi men decided that women cannot drive in Saudi Arabia. Some Muslims do not follow the Quran and Sunnah, and they are often more influenced by what people would say. While some would say that women are restricted in order to protect them, in Saudi Arabia, others would say that women are controlled by men from birth until death. Men made the rules according to what they want, and they never considered women as equal partners in the society. Now, however, women want their rights. In fact, historically, Saudi men looked at women as second-class citizens. Rania, a 34-year-old Saudi woman, said, “We

are entrusted with raising the next generation but you can't trust us with ourselves. It doesn't make any sense.” (New Candidacy, Voter Rights – but Old Barriers, 2015). She hopes to see women treated equally in the opportunity to get jobs and in the respect for their existence in the life.

The Saudi Arabia government should remove the old laws which discriminate against the women, and practice what other developed countries do. In the past, many countries were practicing sexism as Saudi Arabia, but they changed the laws which disadvantage women. Mazen Sidahmad, (2016) wrote, “Thousands of Saudis have signed an online petition calling for the government to abolish the country's guardianship system, which prevents women from engaging in fundamental tasks without the permission of a male relative” but unfortunately, the Saudi government moves slowly and it may not happen in our lifetime.

### **Chapter 3 Conclusion**

In short, in Saudi Arabia, widows and orphans are marginalized. If a widow wants to remarry, the Saudi culture and families often force her to give up her children to her husband's family. Widows often follow the local customs and give their children to a male relative in order to remarry. This can lift the burden of struggling to support her and the others if there is not a male child old enough to work. Widows and orphans face difficult lifestyle choices after losing a husband or father regardless of how badly they wish to stay together. It cannot be determined how many of them choose this path.

I examined Saudi laws, and I believe that Saudi Arabia must reform the laws that place women at the mercy of men, especially guardianship laws. It is clear the laws were designed to protect vulnerable women and children, but there must be some balance so a person can be free to live her life, care for her children, and find employment. The laws for women in Saudi Arabia seem unfair at times, so I would ask that Saudi men step up and help the women to have more opportunities for education, employment, and a more comfortable domestic life, especially for widows. The good news is Saudi Arabia has changed some laws such as voting and education. There are some brave men asking the government to change the far more restrictive laws. Today, thousands of women can travel outside of KSA to complete their education abroad. Additionally, soon educated women may be able to take the lead and help other women gain more opportunities. I

recommend that women do more research on the material conditions of women's lives and work hard to make life better for all Saudis.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Discussion & Reflection**

Chapter 4 is a discussion of the assumptions and research questions with reflections on what I learned as a researcher.

#### **Assumptions**

Before I wrote this thesis, I made the following assumptions which I will discuss here.

- 1) Fathers' roles were primarily (1) feeding their children, (2) teaching their children about the Islamic faith, and (3) spending time with their children, but I discovered fathers' roles are far more than what I assumed. Fathers are responsible for all family members' well-being in every area, and I will discuss this in greater detail in the research question about my role as a father of seven.
- 2) Fathers—whether Muslims or non-Muslims—all have the same roles toward their children, and fathers have honor status in all religions. This assumption cannot be fully discussed because I did not do research on non-Muslims. It is my personal belief, however, that regardless of the religion, fathers must perform these duties for their children and protect them from harm. I was unable to investigate whether fathers hold an honor status in all religions, so I could neither confirm nor deny this assumption in the present study. I can only say what Islam teaches—so long as the person is your parent, you must respect and obey that parent unless he or she is teaching the children to disobey religious laws or the Creator.
- 3) I assume widows in Saudi Arabia are living hard lives that are harder than those of widows in the rest of the world (Brenner, 2017), but I found that this was more because of the local customs in some cases, not because of Quranic teachings or our religion. In fact, our religion teaches us to take care of widows and orphans, not to force them to remarry or give up their children.

- 4) I assumed that women in the West are more free (Chan, 2016), and women in the KSA are in need of help to get their rights. This assumption was correct based on what I found in the literature review and the autoethnographic writings.
- 5) Furthermore, I assumed that orphans around the world all have bad luck, and they need more help from their societies and their governments. This assumption was neither confirmed nor denied. It was a perception based on my limited experience with my own mother, and it should not be generalized to other countries, where customs vary considerably, nor to others in Saudi Arabia. In ethnographic research, TESOL asks us not to generalize from a specific case to the entire society, and I have followed their guidelines. Future researchers, however, could investigate the treatment of widows and orphans in Saudi Arabia and in other parts of the world.
- 6) I also assumed that traditions have bigger impact on lifestyles than religion for societies in general; however, I should not have assumed this because it would be impossible for one to research this systematically.

In the last one of my assumptions, I assumed customs and traditions have a bigger impact on daily life and moral behavior than the religions. It seems in my limited experience living in the South of Saudi Arabia is more than the other countries. Saudi sometimes do not follow the Quran. For example, tribes in the South of Saudi Arabia cannot accept orphans to marry their daughters. In Islam, prophet said if someone speeches and he has a good morality, fathers should accept him, but fathers in the south do not accept orphans even if they have good morality.

### **What does Islam teach about fatherhood?**

Thy Lord hath decreed, that ye worship none save Him, and (that ye show) kindness to parents. If one of them or both of them [is] to attain old age with thee, say not “Fie” unto them nor repulse them, but speak unto them a gracious word. And lower unto them the wing of submission through mercy, and say: ‘My Lord! Have mercy on them both as they did care for me when I was little. (Quran, Alesra, verse 23&24)

In Islam, Muslims must obey their parents and love them as their God, Allah. In the Quran, Allah related his obedience to parents. Because mothers take special care of their children, the Prophet Mohammed, (peace be upon him) recommended Muslims three times to take care of their mothers more than fathers. In other words, we owe our mothers three times the love and attention all our lives because they brought us into this world. That does not mean that the fathers' obedience in Islam is not important, but Islam found the mothers in need of care more than the fathers.

On the other hand, fathers should treat their children well. For instance, fathers should teach them to pray for Allah five times a day, fasting Ramadan month, spend money for their needs, stay with their families enough time, and be nice with all family members. The best ways for fathers to follow to parent their children are what Quran says:

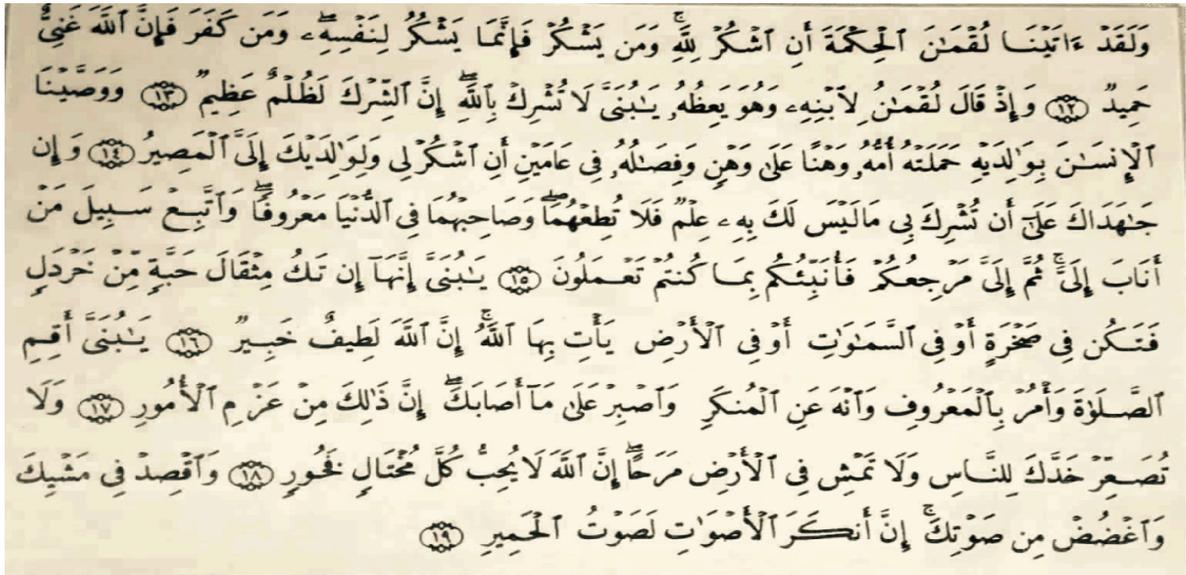


Figure 5: Quran, Luqman, verse 13-19

And [mention, O Muhammad], when Luqman said to his son while he was instructing him, "O my son, do not associate [anything] with Allah. Indeed, association [with him] is

great injustice." And We have enjoined upon man [care] for his parents. His mother carried him, [increasing her] in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Be grateful to Me and to your parents; to Me is the [final] destination. But if they endeavor to make you associate with Me that of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them but accompany them in [this] world with appropriate kindness and follow the way of those who turn back to Me [in repentance]. Then to Me will be your return, and I will inform you about what you used to do. [And Luqman said], "O my son, indeed if wrong should be the weight of a mustard seed and should be within a rock or [anywhere] in the heavens or in the earth, Allah will bring it forth. Indeed, Allah is Subtle and Acquainted. O my son, establish prayer, enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and be patient over what befalls you. Indeed, [all] that is of the matters [requiring] determination. And do not turn your cheek [in contempt] toward people and do not walk through the earth exultantly. Indeed, Allah does not like everyone self-deluded and boastful. And be moderate in your pace and lower your voice; indeed, the most disagreeable of sounds is the voice of donkeys." (Quran, Luqman, verse 13-19)

In these verse, there are some recommendations from Luqman to his son, and fathers should follow Quran to teach their children.

## 2. **What Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) said in the fatherhood:**

The prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) asked people to respect, to love, to take care of their parents. He said, "One, who follows the orders of Allah with regards to obeying parents, shall have two doors of Paradise opened up for him. And if there happens to be only one parent, one door of Paradise shall open up for him" (Kanzul `Ummal, Volume 16, P. 67).

In Islam, if your parents are satisfied by you, you can enter heaven. In addition, if your father asked, prayed Allah for you about anything, Allah will give you that. Abo-Horirah said, "Prophet Mohamad-Pease Be Upon Him-said, "Three people's prayers are always accepted, a father's prayer for his children, a traveler's prayer and the prayer of an oppressed person" (Sahih AlBokhari). Obedience to fathers is obligatory for the children if their fathers asked them any order they [must]

do it. When fathers ask their children to do anything, the children don't have a choice, they must do it, even if their fathers are not Muslims, unless their fathers ask them to disobey God. The prophet said, "There is no obedience to the creature in disobedience to the Creator" (Al-Emam Ahmad).



Figure 6: The prophet said, "There is no obedience to the creature in disobedience to the Creator" (Al-Emam Ahmad).

In short, fathers in Islam have great rights, and fathers have to parent their children based on Islamic faith.

### 3. What does Islam teach about how to treat one's mother?

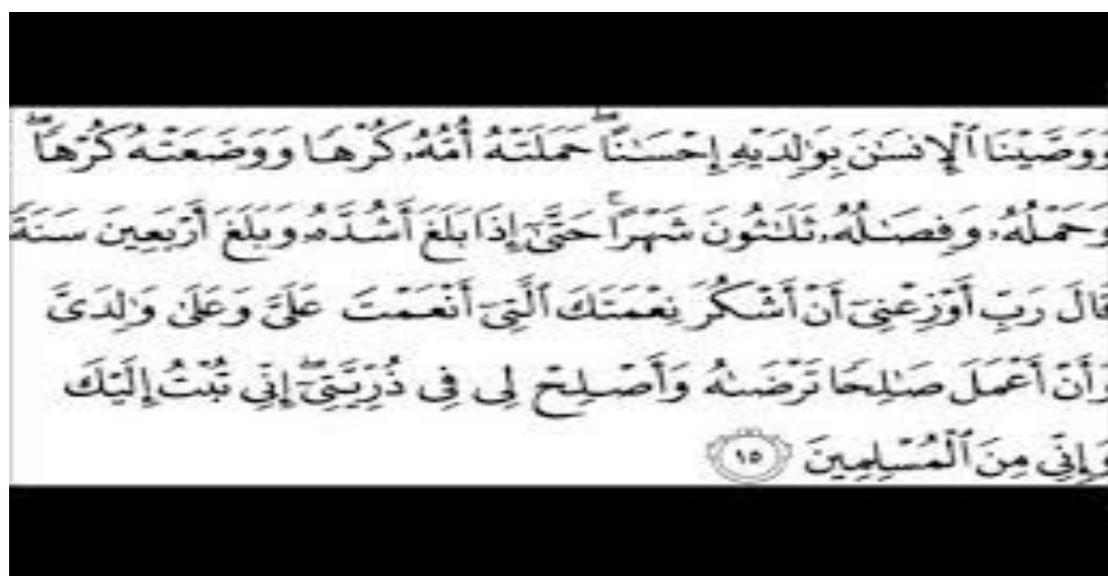


Figure 7: Quran, Surah Al-Ahqaf, verse 15

And we have enjoined upon man, to his parents, good treatment. His mother carried him with hardship and gave birth to him with hardship, and his gestation and weaning [period] is thirty months. [He grows] until, when he reaches maturity and reaches [the age of] forty years, he says, "My Lord, enable me to be grateful for Your favor which You have bestowed upon me and upon my parents and to work righteousness of which You will approve and make righteous for me my offspring. Indeed, I have repented to You, and indeed, I am of the Muslims. (Quran, Surah Al-Ahqaf, verse 15)

We are taught to treat her with great respect and kindness. When she is old, we must care for her and never complain about helping her since she never complained about carrying us for 9 months—even though we kicked her in her womb and caused her much trouble growing up. Do this not because it will lead us to heaven, but because it is the right thing and it is Allah’s will for us to live happily.

In Islam, Allah and Prophet Mohamad ask us to take care of our mothers more than our fathers. There are many verses in the Holy Quran, and many Hadiths (Sunnah) about taking care and respecting mothers. One of these verses and Hadiths is: “It is narrated by Asma bint Abu Bakr that during the treaty of Hudaibiyah, her mother, who was then pagan, came to see her from Makkah. Asma informed the Messenger of Allah of her arrival and also that she needed help. He said: ‘Be good to your mother’” (Bukhari and Muslim). Muslims believe that mothers have high status in this world and in hereafter, and they are causes of entering the heaven. Prophet Mohamad said, “Paradise is under the feet of mothers”. That means that the Muslim must behave modestly, respect , and obey his/ her mother to be successful in the worldly life and in the other life—After death.

#### **4. How did being raised without a father make me different from other men?**

This is difficult to know, but at first observation, I think I am a bit different in these ways:

1. I go to school to talk with the teachers in Cheney. I do that because my first day in school is still in my mind. I went alone, and I saw all children with their fathers except me. In Saudi Arabia, women cannot enter public place. I do not like my children to feel that they are alone, I want them to know I am always with them. I also would like to share my children their lives.

2. I help the children—4 are in school now—with homework—my wife cannot as she does not know English well enough yet. I encourage my children to study, and I have discovered that children won't do their homework without their parents. My mother also said to me that parents are first teachers for their children because children spend more time in the house, not in school.

3. I take all seven children to area cultural events and make sure that they understand what is going on. For example, during the Spokane Fall Folk Festival we watched dancers, admired crafts made by different people, and a true highlight, watch Dr. Reeves perform.

4. I learned from my mother to spend the money wisely. I came to America to complete my education, and I brought all my family members. In America, the living cost is high, and I did not have enough money when I came. I was pay my own tuition, and I applied to get a scholarship from my government, Saudi Arabia.

5. I treat with my wife well because I learned from my mother that wives will be loyally to their husbands if their husbands are loyally. My mother does not remarry after my father died. All of her family members tried to convince her to leave my brothers and me to my father's family and remarry, but my mother does not do that for many reasons, and one of the reasons was that my father was loyally to her.

6. I spend most of my time with my family. When I was a child, I was looking at the fathers who play with their children. I wished I have a father, but I was not.

My role as a father is to provide spiritual capital, care, & direction:

- I encourage the children to honor and obey their mother who cares for them around the clock.
- I model respect for my own mother and took care of her in KSA—she lived with us there, but she could not make the trip here.
- I try to make family come first—despite my many assignments and other responsibilities.
- I try to teach them about Islam and be a model of prayer and good behavior.
- I try to model hard work and good deeds

## Spiritual and Religious Capital

Verder (2006) interprets Bourdieu's concept of spiritual capital which will help us pass through hard times in life. Lisa Miller, professor at Columbia University, also wrote on the topic, expressing a concern about children's spiritual role models such as the grandmother who modeled kindness to a homeless man on the subway:

"Miller defines spirituality as 'an inner sense of relationship to a higher power that is loving and guiding.' Different people can conceive of this higher power as God, nature, spirit, the universe or just a general oneness of being. She distinguishes spirituality, which has a provable genetic component, from religious affiliation, which is entirely influenced by environment." (Reviewed by [David Brooks](#) MAY 22, 2015 2015 *New York Times Book Review*).

### 5. How does my experience influence my parenting?

Because I was big brother to my siblings and helped them, I do the same as I did to my children. I also learned from my mother that my family must be number one of my live. Having my family with me is one of many reasons which gives me power to follow and achieve my dreams—to teach English in KSA. I decided to come to Cheney because my teacher at the WSU English Language Institute, Margaret Mount, said it was a good university with a good community. After speaking with my family, we decided to move to Cheney because we believed that it is the best place to give me a chance to achieve my dreams at EWU. We are thankful to be here.

### 6. What does Islam teach about the care for widows and orphans?

In the Islam, orphans and widows have great rights. People, who take care of orphans will be in the same place of the heaven which prophet Mohamad will be in. There are many verses in the Quran and many Hadiths—second source of the Islam, which prove that taking care of widows and orphans have great position for Muslims.

هكذا الجنة فى اليتيم كافل و أنا

والوسعى السبابة باصبعيه وأشار

"I, and the person who brings up an orphan will be like this in heavens; and he pointed out his index and middle finger together." Prophet Muhammed (AlBukhari)

ولا بالطيب الخبيث تتبدلوا ولا أموالهم نامى الى اتو و

كبيراً حوباً كان إنه أموالهم الى تأكلوا الأموالهم

“And to the orphans do restore their property (when they reach their age), and don’t substitute your bad things for their good ones; and devour not their funds (by mixing it up) with your own; for of a certainty this is indeed a great sin” (AL-Quran IV-2)

فَحَدِّثْ رَبِّكَ بِنِعْمَةِٰ وَاٰمَآ (11) تَنْهَرْ فَلَآ السَّآئِلِ وَاٰمَآ (10) الْيَتِيْمِ فَاٰمَآ

“Therefore, treat not the orphan with oppression, nor be harsh to the seeker of information, but speak publically of the bounty of your lord” (Quran, 9-11).

**7. What was life like for me as a fatherless boy? How was I marginalized by my society?**

In KSA, we are called orphans if we have lost one or both parents—whether the father or the mother. My maternal grandfather would call me “widow’s son” and that would hurt me because it made me feel less than a whole son. The term “widow’s son” is used for any bad boy in our country. The society has the view that single mothers cannot raise children alone, especially boys (Gibbs, 1981).

**8. What were the challenges my mother faced as a widow who refused to remarry after my father’s death? How was she marginalized by the society?**

There is no separation of church and state in KSA. Every woman—regardless of age—has to have a male guardian who signs for her to have:

- A bank account
- A job
- Admission to school, college, university
- A passport
- A visa to travel
- An official ID
- A marriage license

When my father died, my mother’s father became her guardian until I reached the age of 14. Then, as her guardian, I could sign documents, drive, or accompany her in public places. This placed a kind of strain on our relationship as parent and child because I was actually too young to take on this role, and I was still in school. I married my wife while I was still in high school, and she came to live with my mother and brothers. At that time, my mother went to school for the first time and she learned to read and write for the first time. It is still not clear to me why she was never sent to school as a child and why

she was married at age 11. It seems to be something tribal, but it is no longer favored, even in the South. I know of another case in which the child was required to marry at age 12, and so she had to dropped out of school since married women are not allowed to be students. In the United States public schools, I am told that most schools have daycare centers where the students can bring their children. In Saudi Arabia, now it seems that the average age for women to marry is 21.67.

(<http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/WorldStats/Gender-age-first-marriage-female.html>). However, this age may vary some since Bedouins married quite young, but there is no minimum age for marriage by law. With more Saudi women entering university, there is a delay in marriage until they finish their degree/s.

### **9. What is strategic contemplation?**

This way of thinking and reflecting on life reclaims meditation, which requires “taking the time, space, and resources to think about, through, and around our work as an important meditative dimension of scholarly productivity” (21). It also splits the research process into two parts (or journeys). One is the journey in real-time, real-space, which involves going into a field site to see where the research subject lived (85). The second journey is more internal and reflexive, providing space for the researcher to engage with her own embodied experiences in order to reimagine rhetorical situations and events (89). “By focusing on lived or embodied experiences, strategic contemplation moves toward a *politics of location* that accounts for socio-historical contexts, cultural traditions, and the lived experiences of both research subject and researcher”. (Hitt, 2012, p. 2)

### **10. How did strategic contemplation and writing help me to understand my childhood and my mother's life as a widow?**

My mother used the site of marginality as a space of resistance to raise her children alone. This meant that she could not go out in public to work, attend school meetings for her children, or become educated until I became an adult. We both went to college together—different colleges, to conduct any legal transactions. As I matured, I became more aware of her challenges to support us with just a small widow’s pension and with a small income from making baskets and things to sell at market— which my mother’s

brother took to market to sell. Since women cannot go to market to sell things without a male relative, she stayed at home to take care of the children.

I see my mother differently now that I am a father myself. I understand her problems as a parent, and I have even more love and respect for her now. I accept that she sacrificed much for us, but I regret that I cannot go back and make life easier for her and for us. I want to help her now as much as I can to make up for all of the hard times she faced raising us alone. In addition, I will raise my five daughters differently by sending them to college and not making them marry young or marry someone they do not know or love. My daughters will have more freedom than my mother and my wife. For example, we will respect their opinions about their own lives—who to marry, what to study, where to live, and how to make lives for themselves.

In conclusion, the laws in Saudi Arabia have changed, but the culture has not changed, even though our religion remains strong. It will take time. Saudi Arabia has also worked to improve women's access to government services, including enabling women to secure their own ID cards; issuing to divorced and widowed women family cards, which specify familial relationships and are required to conduct a number of bureaucratic tasks; and removing requirements that a woman bring a male relative to identify them in court. The culture is still limiting in its ways of accepting women who are single parents.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

Chapter 5 is a brief discussion of (1) the findings and what I learned from writing this autoethnography; (2) the limitations of the present study; (3) recommendations for future research, and (4) final reflections.

#### **What I Learned**

Before doing this project, even though I already had six children with one on the way, I thought that the father's role was primarily working and providing for the family, but now I have changed my thinking based on research and reflection about the changing roles across generations and over time. As a son whose father died when I was three, I have also taken on responsibilities for my siblings and my mother from the early age of five or so because my older brother was a quadriplegic with epilepsy and needed help with everything. At the same time, by reflecting on my mother's life and imagining all of the hardships she experienced—married at age 11, widowed by age 18, and keeping her four children—I discovered the father's role is based on showing love and respect for the wife, spending time with the children, reading to them, guiding them, teaching about Islam, and being a good role model. I also discovered how marginalized widows are in the KSA with pressures from society, the family, and the dead husband's brothers who took her to court. Even her father wanted her to give up her children to the in-laws and to remarry because her life would be too difficult without a man since she had no education and no way to earn money. Remarkably, she and I were both able to enter the university and graduate—my mother from a women's two-year college and myself from King Abdul Azeez University in Jeddah.

Other reforms have included granting Saudi women the right to obtain national identity cards without male permission. But in order to be granted an ID card, women must present a family card, which is issued to men. Recently, the government issued a directive allowing divorced and widowed women to obtain

family cards, which grants them the ability to enroll their children in school, for example.

A law was passed in 2013 that criminalizes domestic abuse, and women can seek protection in shelters without the approval of a male guardian.

But women still cannot travel abroad with their children without the permission of the father, who remains the children's legal guardian, and women cannot provide consent for their daughters to marry, or pass their nationality to their children, the report said. (WEB)

In writing this thesis, I learned the difference between two genres—the autobiography and the autoethnography—the latter being written as first-person narrative but incorporating theory—in this case, rhetorical and feminist theory. From rhetorical theory, I borrowed and applied bell hooks' "marginality as a site of resistance" (hooks as cited in Foss, Foss, and Trapp, 2014, p. 277). I truly understand that my mother and all of her children were marginalized socially and legally, but that she found her marginality as a site of resistance of the expectation that young widows have to remarry and give up their children. The authors note that "hooks proposes two primary ways in which marginalized rhetors can use rhetoric to challenge and transform the ideology of domination—critique and invention" (p. 278). My mother worked within the courts for more than a year to explain that she would not give up her children as she appeared before the judge and made the case that she would find a way to support us. But it seems that the judge ruled in her favor when she convinced him that my eldest brother, who is disabled, needed her to take care of him, and that no one else could take such good care of him as she could. Still, my father's brothers insisted she should give the children to them and not try to raise us alone without little income. In the end, the judge ruled in favor of my mother, and then my mother's invention began: she would be inventive in her ways of earning a living—make and sell baskets and other items she sent to market to sell while accepting a small monthly widow's pension from the government. She invented herself, knowing that she was going to be a different kind of woman and mother, knowing that she would be ostracized by family and community. Even her

father, until the day he died, called us “widow’s boys” and insisted that she was making a mistake by trying to raise these children alone, and he was denigrating all of her children while praising his six sons’ children. Despite his misgivings, as required by Islam, my mother and I treated him well until the moment he died of cancer last year. What I want to emphasize here, however, is that local customs sometimes have more influence than religious teachings. Our faith teaches us that we must love and respect our parents, but the parents also have to treat the children well.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The only major limitation for this project was that I could not interview my mother in person, and she was not able to talk much about her life with me because it may cause too much sadness for her. At present, I am her guardian because all women have to have a guardian for all business and government matters, so when she wanted a passport, I had to sign for her, making her feel that I control her life. However, this is the law, even though the government and United Nations are looking into the laws forbidding Saudi women to have a bank account, travel abroad, enter the university, be employed, get insurance, and make other transactions women would normally be able to make alone in the United States.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

It is recommended that future researchers interview widows—both those who gave up their children to relatives and those who kept their children, asking some or all of the following questions:

1. How have you changed since you lost your husband?
2. How old were you when you married?
3. How many children do you have and what are their ages?
4. What is your source of income?
5. How old were you when you became a widow?
6. How did you make your decision to keep or give up your children?
7. What challenges have you had with this decision?
8. How do you feel about your decision?

9. What kinds of responses have you gotten from your family, your community, and your religion?
10. Who supported you when you made the decision?
11. Who disagreed with the decision and why?
12. What laws helped or hindered you in this decision?
13. Who is your current guardian?
14. How do you feel having to have a guardian as an adult woman?
15. What would you change in the Kingdom's laws if you could?

### **Final Reflections**

By writing this essay about my mother's life, raising four boys, and the hardships she faced with courage, I have gained an even deeper appreciation for her and employed encomium—the rhetoric of praise—as well as invective to bring attention to a problem in the society and the law. Our Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, asks us to take care of the widows and orphans, and he became an orphan by the age of six, so he never had the opportunity to take care of his parents, as I have taken care of my mother. He asks us to love our mothers three times more than our fathers because our mothers carried us for nine months and brought us safely into this world, as stated here:

A man came to the Prophet and said, 'O Messenger of God! Who among the people is the most worthy of my good companionship? The Prophet said: Your mother. The man said, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: Then your mother. The man further asked, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: Then your mother. The man asked again, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: Then your father. (Bukhari & Muslim).

In closing, I want to thank my mother for all she has done for us and hope that she will live a good life for many more years.

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**Vita****Education**

Bachelor of Arts: English Literature. King Abdul- Aziz University, Saudi Arabia, Jeddah.

Master of Arts: English/ TESL. EWU, Cheney, WA.

**Professional Presentation**

I presented at EWU Symposium of Undergraduate & Graduate Research & Creative Works, in 2016 and in 2017, and I participated in WAESOL 2016.

**Internship in ESL Instruction**

English 112: Composition for Multilingual Writers. Fall 2015, Fall 2016, and Winter 2017.

- Created, taught, and assessed weekly journals
- Held weekly conferences with students to help them revise essays
- Prepared my groups to present a chapter in class