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Abstract

Marching Onwards: The Social Practices of Literacy in Usulután, El Salvador

Julia Betts: Brasenose College Oxford

D. Phil: Michaelmas 2000

1990 was International Literacy Year. A decade later, both our essential understandings of what 'literacy' means and our approaches to learning about literacy have developed immensely. We now know that literacy is situated and multiple, complex and ideological; it is no singular, autonomous entity but an intricate mosaic of practices. It is part of the rich and varied social tapestry that is fashioned through the playing out of lives.

This text explores some of the social practices of literacy in rural communities of Usulután, El Salvador. It aims to form part of the New Literacies body of work, by taking an ethnographic / ideological approach to the study of literacy. Its main substantive foci are firstly, the uses of 'local' literacies as they relate to the socio-political and cultural environment of rural Usulután, and secondly, the ways in which existing and imported discourses are taken up and used by people in Usulután according to their own determined agendas, conceptualisations and visions.

The study seeks to reveal the diversity and dissonance within local ideologies and literacy practices that seem often to lie hidden in research. It takes as its theoretical framework Bakhtin's notion of discourse, to explore the meanings which are created when dominant and subordinated discursive streams meet and challenge one another. Experience in Usulután has revealed that 'literacy' here is a totemic creation of discourses, an invention of ideology, actualised through its continuing iteration by dominant voices. This discourse of power is critiqued by the voices of adults in the rural communities of Usulután, who engage with literacy as part of their creative strategies in negotiating struggles for resources and positioning within relationships. It forms a dynamic part of the imaginative and ingenious management of lives.

This study has found that labels such as 'literate' and 'illiterate' cannot capture the extensive range of practices which are ongoing as people act out their own cultural texts within the complex and ever-changing social world of Usulután. It contests autonomous notions of literacy as a site of deficit or deprivation, and challenges oversimplified views of literacy as 'empowerment'. Instead, it constructs a vision of local literacies in Usulután as performances, as part of an original and inventive process of reshaping the social fabric and challenging subordination. Literacies form in this arena a site for the recreation of history and the construction of identity; they are not only reflective of social process but a powerful force for 'marching onwards'.

The experiences in which this text is grounded have revealed that the struggle for voice in this corner of the world is no polarized conflict of 'oppression', no binary battle of wills, but rather a reflection of the fluid and shifting boundaries of language. Dominant and subordinated streams of discourse meet, reshape and co-construct each other on the vast, uncertain plain of dialogue; Bakhtin's 'living and unrepeatable' play of language and light. It is here, at the moment of discursive encounter, and in the surrounding intricacies of social practices, that the most powerful and meaningful of Geertz's webs of human significance are spun.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is owed primarily to those people in Usulután who invested in its creation. They are too numerous to list here individually, but deepest thanks is due to all the members of the communities featured, to the staff of COMUS, and to those of CIAZO. A debt of gratitude is also owed to Damian and Carolina of Oasis and to the many other individuals in El Salvador who gave with such liberality their time and kindness to a stranger.

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Introduction

El Salvador is the smallest and most densely populated country in Central America. It is a nation recovering from a brutal civil war, with heavy foreign debt, a teetering economy and a vast reliance on international aid. Its social and political histories are reflected in its cities, which demonstrate booming wealth in their shopping centres and privatised hospitals while shanty towns perch precariously next to polluted rivers. In the rural area of Usulután, meanwhile, a more consistent picture emerges; a woman and her partner sit at the only table in a small wooden and corrugated iron house with a dirt floor. They wave their hands to guard their meal of beans and tortillas from flies. They are engrossed in a discussion which ranges from this year's maize harvest to the current price of dried beans, from strategies for accessing aid grants to their community to the morning's events in a neighbour's household. Local and national concerns, history, politics and gossip are intertwined in a narrative of struggle, survival and hope.

This couple have no access in their home to electricity or potable water, minimal contact with newspapers, television and books, and in terms of social conditions their life remains largely materially unchanged since the civil war. Yet the lunchtime talk within their house, as in many other rooms that day, in fields, within coffee plantations, on the shady verandas and the quiet streets of Usulután, is of 'marching onwards'.

By way of contrast, 1990 was International Literacy Year. A decade later, at the turn of the millennium, governmental and non-governmental bodies continue to pour millions of pounds into literacy projects within locales such as Usulután each year. Talk of literacy as a development panacea continues even as literacy projects and programmes repeatedly fail to produce the kind of outcomes envisaged by their planners and designers. Meanwhile, the many targets of these projects, such as the couple described above, continue to manage their lives as they have done for generations – without the kinds of 'literacy skills' envisaged by planners and providers.

The apparent failure of the literacy solution has provoked much soul-searching among practitioners and theorists. Research has shifted towards a debating of the previously unquestioned literacy-as-development paradigm. But studies largely remain focused on, and written by, the providers of literacy; their difficulties and successes, triumphs and

tribulations. A relatively small proportion of research as yet trains its spotlight on the lives and acts of the actual people involved.[1]

Recent work has moved forwards from the 'why has literacy failed' debate to begin unpicking the notion of literacy itself – 'What kind of literacy?' 'Why literacy?' But review shows that the main body of literacy research continues to emphasise provision and the successes or setbacks of particular interventions. Studies which do focus on individuals tend to consider them in terms of what literacy has supposedly 'done' for or to them.[2] Little work yet has placed people's own views, actions and discourses at the centre.

This text will explore some communicative practices in Usulután, a rural area of El Salvador, from the perspective of an ideological / ethnographic model of literacy studies. It tells a story of some people's experiences in one corner of the world and, in doing so, seeks to discover what people's own practices and perceptions reveal in relation to the theoretical and conceptual constructs which surround the notion of literacy. It aims to unpick and respond to such questions as: How do discursive practices in this arena interplay with local social constructions of literacy and of power? What roles do these communicative processes play in the creation and negotiation of social relationships? How do people 'take hold' of and employ certain discourses in a situation of challenge and struggle?

In examining these issues within the context of Usulután, this study will consider some of the constructs developed in recent years within the New Literacies paradigm as they emerge in this specific landscape; the notion of 'vernacular literacies', for example, and that of their 'performance'. The narrative takes a view of literacies as dimensions of the wider cultural text, both embedded in social practice and also existing as sites of contestation and control.

This text does not intend to address issues of policy, nor does it claim any degree of generalisability. It stands very much bound within a local, private world. Its aim is to add to the 'library' of studies regarding the social practices of literacy in different contexts; to explore, through a dialogical encounter with another culture, what 'literacy' means to certain

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[1] As an example, a 1995 special edition of the International Journal of Educational Development on adult literacy contains eight papers; four have as their main focus questions of provision and policy at the macro level, albeit with varying degrees of the 'participant' view, one is a macro-level 'measurement' paper, one is solely theoretical, and only two both take a micro approach, and are empirical studies (IJED 1995). Much research which does argue its focus on 'the people' is in fact generally addressing issues relating only to literacy learners, while the voices of 'non–participants' or 'drop-outs' as will be discussed below, go unheard

[2] Prinsloo and Breier (1996) p16

people in another place, and thence to add to our broader understanding of social diversity and difference. The story is of course unfinished; Usulután and its inhabitants are changing by the day, just as literacy theory is developing apace. Thus it stands no more than as a provisional statement, the grasping of a moment, the catching of an image. It offers no all-consuming answers or overarching theories, but merely an account of lived experience in a context of rich variety.

Chapter 1: Adult literacy: Reviewing the issues

This beginning chapter of the text will examine the conceptual and theoretical frameworks within which research into literacy has taken place in recent years. It is based on the premise that models of literacy are ideologies and discourses in themselves; not neutral constructs but value-laden processes, embedded in wider political discourses of social development. The discussion will argue, after Rogers, that certain theoretical models of literacy practice and theory can be characterised as 'deficit' and 'deprived'.[3] These frameworks have become locked into an untenable 'productionist' discourse,[4] common to the 'project' or 'programme' approach. Moreover, this section will suggest that while the trend towards what Barton calls 'bottom up' approaches to study is gaining momentum,[5] such a discourse still remains dominant in literacy *research*. Much work which strives to reject the values and methods of the 'top down' in fact remains constrained by these very ideologies.

The first part of this chapter presents the rationale for the discussion and lays out the theoretical framework which underlies it. Next, the discourses around the deficit and deprived models of literacy will be addressed and their weaknesses identified. The penultimate section considers the recent 'ideological' model of literacy research, and discusses the accompanying question of how far studies that claim to adopt such a model, actually do so. Finally, the threads will be brought together in a discussion of the empirical gaps in the literature, within which the parameters of this research will be demarcated. Throughout, the chapter aims to make explicit some of the values and assumptions on which its logic rests and to provide a context for the very simple driving questions of this study; what, in Usulután, is 'literacy'? And how does it, as a construct, intertwine with the communicative practices and lived realities of this social world?

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[3] Rogers (1994a and 1994b). This framework also appears in several papers within the collection edited by Prinsloo and Breier *op. cit.*

[4] Carter (1996) p17. The term 'discourse' will be developed in further chapters, but is used here in line with Escobar's model of development discourses, conceived as social and ideological 'practices' which have come to 'regulate the everyday comings and goings of people in the Third World (*sic*).' (Escobar (1995) p104)

[5] Barton (1995) p462

1.1 'What is literacy', and 'Why literacy?' – a beginning

Literacy is a socially contested term. We can choose to use this word in any of several different ways. Each such choice incorporates a tacit or overt ideological theory about the distribution of social goods and has important social and moral consequences.[6]

The problem of defining the entity known as literacy has preoccupied scholars, policymakers and practitioners since the early 1940s. Attempts to pin down the term with relevance to the developing world have ranged from UNESCO's economically-focused 'functional literacy' propositions of the 1950s to the post-modern rejection of any kind of definition at all, and the increasingly accepted proposition by some theorists – notably anthropologists of education - that there is no single 'correct' definition of literacy; instead, there are merely competing accounts of what it means to be literate. On the policy ground, the struggle to define literacy has become more than an intellectual one, but a political battle too, 'with assertions of its definitions reflecting the search to dominate policy decisions and resource allocations, so ensuring compliance to a particular social order.'[7]

This 'literacy contest'[8] offers insights into how the theory and discourse around literacy are employed by those variously involved in its field. The confusion surrounding the term is in part due to its use for describing events of policy and learning, practice and theory, without distinction between these foci. Yet the particular slant of any given piece of research is determined by just such underlying steering: much of our body of knowledge, for example, has been commissioned by governments or NGOs. The usage of the term 'literacy' in these domains often takes on a policy-related gloss, focusing for instance on literacy provision. Because of this, such studies often remain within the kinds of discourses that governments and agencies like to hear – those of projects, outcomes and effects; how much has been learned, how well new knowledge has been assimilated. Other approaches to research, even conducted without this explicit or implicit agenda, often critique these kinds of studies for being slow to pick up on new theoretical models relating to the meanings and functions of literacy. Yet often within those same texts, the discourse reveals underlying ideologies that may, in fact, have not so little to do with the visions of the literacy providers as the writers might hope.

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[6] Gee (1990) p27

[7] Roberts (1995). His paper contains a full overview of historical attempts to define 'literacy' and 'illiteracy' which the author categorises into qualitative, quantitative and pluralist approaches. It is not proposed to reiterate these here. See also Venezky (1990) who takes a functional approach to defining the term.

[8] Gee *op. cit.* p27

Rockhill succinctly captures the trends of literacy research thus far when she tells us that 'The power of literacy has been framed primarily in terms of economic development, equality of opportunity and the possibilities of liberty and democracy'.[9] Echoing Rockhill's delineation, Rogers' framework of approaches to the 'why literacy' question will form the basis of discussion in this chapter. In this conceptualisation, first the traditional view of literacy is identified, which is founded on a *deficit* vision of illiteracy. This vision is based on the belief that 'autonomous learning and development activities can start only after the acquisition of literacy'.[10] Accordingly, it implies that the absence of literacy skills as recognised within this framework is the source of the difference between 'primitive' and 'civilised' societies. Secondly comes the Freirean type of approach, based on a *deprived* view[11] where so-called 'illiterate' people are perceived as oppressed and as being able to locate themselves in history through the discovery of 'the word and the world'.[12] Finally, the New Literacies or sociocultural approach of the 1980s onwards places its emphasis on *different* literacies and people, and is an approach where 'literacy comes second',[13] and is held as not necessarily a prerequisite for participation in further 'development' projects.

The discussion in this chapter will use the above framework to explore social constructions of literacy in discourse, and to show *how the ideologies and values of the 'deficit' and 'deprived' models have often carried over into sociocultural New Literacies research, even on occasions where such studies may strive to reject these ideologies.* Although Rogers' framework only distinguishes between three approaches, as opposed to the five or so taken by Lind and Johnson,[14] his model has been adopted for the following reasons. Firstly, Rogers' view is an analytical one, rather than taking the purely historical perspective of Lind and Johnson's discussion. Thus, it holds relevance at the level of theory as well as that of policy and practice. Secondly, Rogers' conceptualisation demonstrates a link between ideology and methodology,[15] or how choice of approach to literacy reflects a political stance. It can, therefore, help shed light on three dimensions of literacy, all of which are reflected in the body of research: those of policy, pedagogy and practice. Examining the literature from these

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[9] Rockhill (1993) p160
[10] Rogers (1994b) *op. cit.* p46
[11] Rogers (1994a) *op. cit.*
[12] Freire and Macedo (1987)
[13] Rogers (1994b) *op. cit.* p46
[14] Lind and Johnson (1990)
[15] It should be remembered, however, that the labelling of the various approaches to literacy ideology and method can be misleading, as Lind and Johnson's account demonstrates (*op. cit.*) and as will be shown with reference to Freirean literacy in particular below. This fact can itself become part of the playing out of power relations between the various players involved in implementing and participating in literacy programmes

angles is not to suggest that all studies of literacy can be placed into three neat categorical boxes, but rather to identify three distinct trends which underlie much current research.

These perspectives all have their own slant on 'what and why literacy'. The following sections will discuss the meanings manifested in each model and consider how the ideologies behind these meanings often reveal themselves in research, whether explicitly or implicitly.

1.2 The deficit model

A survey of the literature shows tendencies for writers working in the literacy / development paradigm to accept without debate the merits of universal literacy 'standards'[16] with many focusing their attention particularly on methods by which these could be 'endowed' on whole populations. Such motives stem in part from the widely held perception of literacy as an intrinsic good, something valuable or worthwhile, and from (arguably mistaken) assumptions about a causal connection between literacy and social and economic development. This macro-level approach rests comfortably with what Wickert calls the 'human capital rationales' of literacy planning,[17] or the efficiency and anti-poverty models of the science we call development. In terms of the meanings of literacy, this view corresponds to what Roberts might label a 'quantitative' vision, where measuring literacy is also a means of measuring people, with those found to be lacking requiring the appropriate 'treatment',[18] hence Rogers' deficit label. Its focus on the macro and the national means that the world of policy has, in the past, been closely bound to this approach.

A powerful ideological discourse operates within this deficit framework, where literacy, cognition and development are linked in theory which emphasises their transformative effects.[19] Literacy, a unitary entity, is seen as a sort of crucial social technology, facilitating the shift from primitive to modern mindset and enabling more complex abstract thought than is considered possible in orally-based societies. Literacy becomes a sort of cure for the ills of society and the individual, a neutral technology independent of social context, Street's now well-known 'autonomous variable' whose consequences for society 'can be derived from its

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[16] See as an exception Olson (1975)
[17] Wickert (1992) p30
[18] Roberts *op. cit.*
[19] Most notable here is the work of Havelock, (1963, 1982) Goody (1977, 1986) and Ong (1982). The work of Goody and Ong has been well discussed in recent years; see for example Street (1993)

intrinsic character.[20] Ahai and Faraclas call this the 'technicist' discourse of literacy;[21] this text however prefers the term 'productionist', employed by Carter to reflect the cause / effect model so fundamental to many studies of literacy,[22] which seems to better reflect the notion of creating somehow more 'complete' people through the injection of literacy skills.

The catalogue of consequences that this discourse claims as outcomes of literacy are lengthy, as Gee's summary shows, including impacts on thought processes, language use, political democracy and citizenship.[23] Whether or not these factors can in some way be proven to result from a learning process, they very much form part of the productionist dialogue; the catalogue of *effects* that literacy is supposed to have on the presumably powerless individual. We can see why the interest of policymakers is sparked here, and also glimpse some attendant issues of power, ideology and control; such a model allows for a blurring of whose interests are being served by literacy.

Yet empirical studies even within the same conceptual framework now largely discount the unshakeable barrier between the worlds of literate and oral communication,[24] as earlier proposed by such architects of the 'Great Divide' as Goody and Ong. And recent research contests the totemic meanings ascribed within this vision to terms such as 'literate' and 'illiterate', revealing them instead as 'socially constructed dichotomies and not technical or precise descriptions of fact.'[25] Literacy is no autonomous variable, but rather changes shape across different socio-historical contexts, although it may, and does, act as a powerful social signifier.[26] Two key ethical objections to the deficit ideology and discourse have also been raised; firstly, measurable people are manageable ones, leading to a suggestion of being assigned one's correct place on the social ladder. Furthermore, the stigma attached to illiteracy, applied by those in positions of power, can be devastating at the micro and individual level. The deficit model, and its attendant meanings of literacy, have therefore 'generally been employed to address specific policy and programme objectives....[they have]

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[20] Street (1993) *op. cit.* p5
[21] Ahai and Faraclas (1992)
[22] Carter *op. cit.* p17
[23] Gee *op. cit.* p32
[24] Kaestler (1990) p3; Goody (1968) and Ong *op. cit.* See Bernardo's study in the Philippines, which investigated the 'effects of literacy' on 'cognitive consequences' such as conceptual understanding and categorization and deductive reasoning from a cognitive psychologists's point of view, revealing an 'unequivocal absence of such direct effects of literacy' (1998) p123
[25] Mpoyiya and Prinsloo (1996) p181 see also Kaestler *op. cit.*
[26] Mpoyiya and Prinsloo *op. cit.*

been developed not to understand what literacy 'truly means' but primarily for instrumental, pragmatic and political reasons'.[27]

The deficit discourse around literacy generally accounts for low take up and completion rates of literacy programmes in terms of 'barriers'.[28] The terminology employed is often that of motivation, employed to explain the 'success' or otherwise of a project or programme, dubbed the 'you'll-never-be-cheated' approach by Rogers.[29] Malmquist, writing for UNESCO, lists a range of 'Enemies of Motivation,' varying from the educational (poor teachers) to the social (shame).[30] Under this umbrella, then, come a wide range of what are conceptualised by Malmquist – and by many others – as problems to or difficulties in 'becoming literate' to which, presumably, solutions can be rapidly identified and implemented. Yet these problems are highly generalised constructions, offering little space for or consideration to local views and ideologies, visions and aspirations. Instead, the assumption remains that, in all circumstances, the magic entity of literacy – undefined, imprecise, unquestioned - offers a totemic key to development.[31] In true productionist terms, those who start, but elect or simply have to cease attending literacy classes tend to be written up as a generic group of 'drop-outs' suffering from psychological difficulties or a lack of required skills;'[32] their specific difficulties, and the issue of the silent majority who never attend at all, remain barely addressed within the discourse.[33]

In this scenario, then, the powerful, monologic, universalising voice of the deficit vision drowns out small-scale utterances, to dictate the agenda for good and to point the finger of blame. Doronila, in the Philippines, stresses the role of the individual at the centre of development and criticises approaches which do not recognise the people's creative potential. Yet in her vision this creative potential is not to be employed for individual control, but for

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[27] Roberts *op. cit.* p417

[28] See for example Darkenwald and Valentine (1985); Ballara (1992); Bosch's Chilean study (1998); Hornberger's work in Peru (1997)

[29] Rogers (1999) *op. cit.* p220

[30] Malmquist (1991) p21

[31] A view promulgated primarily by UNESCO throughout the 1980s in particular (Rogers (1999) *op. cit.*)

[32] Abadzi (1992) in a paper written for the World Bank. She illustrates effectively the scale of the 'drop-out' and 'retention' problem but attributes the problem to participants' own psychology.

[33] Recent research contains some debate regarding the various constraints on participation, including the 'norms' around this, which tend to be imposed on participants and are often unsuited to their own circumstances (Robinson-Pant 1997 p186). However, this point has not been widely taken up in the literature. It should be pointed out here that the term 'learner' and 'non-learner' as they relate to adult literacy projects are contested categories anyway, since knowledge diffuses beyond a literacy circle. This study uses 'participant' and 'non-participant' only hesitatingly, and only in terms of attendance rather than learning or knowledge.

'participating in development' – that is, for engaging in a process defined and controlled by others.[34] Stromquist critiques the discourse of motivation as assuming an autonomy which women in particular may not possess,[35] and notes in her later work that such an approach fails to explore how these barriers to participation and 'retention' – in fact an equally contestable term - actually operate.[36] Van der Westen, in Honduras, makes the same point.[37] Gfeller meanwhile does set out to unravel literacy 'motivations' in Zambia, yet her discourse remains strongly within the terminology of 'motivational factors' affecting the take-up of literacy projects and programmes.[38] And none of these authors go on to provide such an analysis of barriers themselves, to dissent from the voice of dominance, ideology and power.

Yet social barriers and motivations are never static, permanent features of the landscape; they are ideological constructions which reflect constantly evolving power relations. Accordingly, their analysis can only properly take place in terms of a critique of the social frameworks of power which create them. Despite or perhaps because of their emphasis on 'empowerment', a term we will further explore below, such studies fail to emphasise local ideologies or constructions of power that shape and contain such forces, which remain constrained instead within the discourses of projects and programmes, the terminology of outcomes and effects.

Some theorists attribute the 'lack of motivation' discourse to the need for marginalised, especially women's, voices to be heard more at the planning level,[39] a point which certainly needs to be made in terms of creating spaces for silenced voices to be heard. Yet by clutching firmly to the importance of policy-making as the central issue, such studies implicitly both acknowledge and fortify the dominant discourse, despite often proclaiming their rejection of top-down models of research. The notion of the 'deficiencies' and 'lacking' – not to mention the supposed helplessness - of the people involved is reiterated and reinforced. The deficit discourse around literacy places the responsibility for motivation squarely on the learner - it is his or her fault for not attending / learning - rather than laying the responsibility at the door of providers for employing discourses so far out of touch with learners' own lived realities.

This is not to deny that space exists for macro-level approaches; certainly, the broader view is a necessary part of the picture. Yet, as we have seen, difficulties lie in the underlying

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[34] Doronila (1996)
[35] Stromquist (1990) p102
[36] Stromquist (1997a)
[37] Van der Westen (1994)
[38] Gfeller (1997)
[39] See for example Robinson-Pant *op. cit.* and Stromquist (1997a) *op. cit.*

ideological framework. Similarly dubious is the issue of the explicitness or otherwise of these ideologies. Wagner's work takes a distinctly and openly policy-oriented view,[40] and its ideological slant is therefore evident from the start. But other studies, as we will see, ostensibly reject the thinking of the deficit framework while in fact remaining constrained within it. And what studies that employ the deficit discourse, whether implicitly or explicitly, cannot fully do, and nor should they claim, is to address the question of 'whose ideology?' in determining literacy projects and programmes, or unravel 'whose practices' of literacy or, of course, whose research.

The deficit discourses around literacy theory and practice, then, do not fill the space between constraint and ideology; they do not reflect the power relations which lie at the heart of this dichotomy. They form a powerful universalising voice which treats learners as both helpless and as a unified homogenous group. In opposition to this discourse, proponents of the deprived camp argue for literacy as a political stance, perceiving it as playing a major ideological role in creating and maintaining a strong civil society. Their discourses will next be discussed.

1.3 The deprived, or disadvantaged, view and the problem of 'empowerment'

Revolutionary education implies the constant transformation of reality...empowering people to transcend the limitations of their past [41]

The voices of the deprived group of literacy theorists strive, through the theories of educational radicalists such as Paulo Freire, Ivan Illich and Antonio Gramsci, and the ideals of the 'popular education' movement,[42] to distance themselves from education projects with the characteristics of 'assistance' and with objectives imposed on the learners, as in the deficit model above. They claim the specific ideological motive of empowering the popular sectors, or here the masses of people in the lower economic strata. In this, they diverge from the vision in the deficit discourse of literacy as a neutral tool.[43] Their focus is on a particular ideologically-grounded approach to pedagogy.

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[40] Wagner (1995). See also Athreya and Chunkath (1996); Bown (1990)
[41] Archer and Costello (1990) p40
[42] Campos-Carr (1990) provides a full account of the political history of popular education
[43] Freire's work is far too well-known and understood to warrant a full discussion here. Mackie (1980), Mayo (1995) and Roberts (1998) provide very good overviews of Freirean theory, but the best account is that of Cobden (1998) who provides an admirable comparison of the work of Freire and Gramsci

Adults who lack literacy skills are inscribed in this discourse as 'beings for another'[44] – dominated people within oppressive social systems. Literacy acquisition represents a catalyst for social change not through enhanced economic status, but through the processes of self-development via enhanced self-awareness and critical thinking. Freire's delineation of conscientization can help us elucidate the deprived discourse around literacy;

> Men *[sic]* emerge from their *submersion* and *acquire the ability* to intervene in reality as it is unveiled. ....Conscientization is the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all *emergence*[45] (italics added)

Thus, prior to the conscientization process, men *[sic]* in these terms are submerged, or 'blind' and lacking the ability to shape their social reality. This discourse, then, interpenetrates literacy with knowledge and power. Rather than existing as a neutral, technical construction as in the deficit model above, literacy becomes an ideological tool or weapon, to be applied in the class war.[46] The rejection of what Freire called the 'banking' concept of education, where students act merely as recipients, depositors and filers of knowledge, reacts against the deficit discourse. Similarly, the Freirean vision of knowledge as developed through a dialogue between teacher and learner, in relation to a lived reality, offers room for a process-based model of learning.

Simply adopting the terminology in research and / or practice, though does not, of course, necessarily imply holding fast to the real ideologies of literacy for liberation. Kidd and Kumar remark on the increasing co-option of Freirean discourse, where dialogue becomes a search for the 'right' answers, predetermined by the programme planner often according to deficit thinking, and provided for the teacher. This leads to what they, in a borrowed phrase from Freire, call the continued domestication of the rural poor,[47] much as Patkar comments on the instrumental value of literacy in India as a tool for the socialisation of men and women into a codified norm of the 'literate Indian'.[48] Archer and Costello call this institutionalising process 'de-reading' or inoculation against Freirean language; the co-option of progressive language by people who are threatened by it.[49] Thus, the appropriation of literacy for liberation, while it claims to place the learner at the centre of the paradigm, becomes another

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[44] Freire (1972)
[45] Freire *op. cit.* p81
[46] *Ibid.* p106. Cobden *op. cit.* argues cogently and convincingly that Freire's concept of class is in fact problematic on several grounds
[47] Kidd and Kumar (1981) p27
[48] Patkar *op. cit.* p406
[49] Archer and Costello *op. cit.*

voice of dominance and universalisation. We will see below how this fits into the arena of empirical research.

One of the inherent difficulties in this discourse, though, lies its model of social power. The Freirean vision portrays society as an entirely top-down schema of domination, with ideology serving the purposes of a ruling group and the remainder of individuals existing as passive or unwilling victims. Yet Foucault has shown us how power is to be found not just in the State and in other institutions of power, but is a constantly-evolving process, rooted within the system of social networks.[50] And bell hooks has pointed out in her notion of the 'politics of location' that marginality has a double role, being both site of deprivation and space of resistance.[51] While Freire's voice captures the link between literacy and ideology, then, it also pushes a powerful notion of the 'oppressed' as a uniform, featureless group, with little attention paid to the dynamics and power relations within and between individuals, or what Luke calls the 'cliché of power'.[52] Gender and racial ideologies, for example, remain largely unaddressed.[53] Prinsloo, echoing Cobden's critique of the 'binary' nature of Freire's model of oppression, captures some of the difficulties with the Freirean discourse when he argues that its notions of oppressor and oppressed are 'empty and abstract categories and there is no sense of the dynamic of their conflict.'[54]

Freire has, with some justification, been accused of seeing literacy as having a 'hypodermic' effect[55] – as through an injection of literacy can automatically increase power - in the frame of the deficit model above. Certainly, his books appear to advocate a unitary vision of literacy without which people are unable to 'read the world'.[56] And Street points out that Freire's analyses often seem to be rooted in theories of cognitive development which take no

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[50] Foucault (1981) p52-3. See also the way in which Gender and Development specialists have begun to critique the tendency to fall into the feminist 'trap' by conflating women's realities into one oppressive experience (Mohanty (1991))

[51] hooks (1989)

[52] Luke (1994) p321

[53] hooks (1993) attacks Freire for his 'phallocentric paradigm of liberation – wherein freedom and the experience of patriarchal manhood are always linked as though they are one and the same' (p148). See also Moser (1993) p74; Stromquist (1997b). Freire, in dialogue with Macedo, does acknowledge that this criticism is justified ((1993) p70) and in fact revised sexist language in the revised edition of *Pedagogy Of The Oppressed* in 1995. Yet he still does not explicitly locate women's rights within his definition of citizenship. Cobden *op. cit.* provides a clear analysis of why Freire's treatment of gender and racial oppression is superficial (p93)

[54] Prinsloo (1987) p14. Moreover, neither the work of Freire nor of other theorists working in his mould offers indications of precisely *how* they see the processes of emancipation, or social reform, acting. A number of theorists have commented on the difficulties of implementing Freirean theory in practice; see the examples cited in Stromquist (1997) *op. cit.* and Cobden *op. cit.*

[55] Luke *op. cit.*

[56] Street (1991)

account of the social context in which literacy is embedded.[57] Yet the power and volume of this deprived discourse is reflected in its wholehearted assimilation by so many theorists and practitioners of literacy; a different yet equally dominating voice thus rings out.

Nowhere is this universalising discourse of literacy as power more apparent than in the theoretical concept of 'empowerment' which has grown out of Freirean ideology. This has become one of the most totemic terms in development and literacy discourse in recent years and continues to act as a major rationale for adult literacy work. While 'empowerment' remains a heavily debated term within the wider literature,[58] many theorists who employ it in relation to literacy work do not attempt to either define or explain their understandings of the word.[59]

Within the body of research, this lack of explicitness in conceptualisation has led to discussions of literacy and empowerment using clearly productionist discourse in line with the deficit views outlined above, while simultaneously purporting to reject 'evaluation' or 'measuring' approaches. This emerges most distinctly in research which adopts a project or programme framework. Consider for example the following quotation, from a female researcher working on a women's empowerment project in the Philippines, which intended to 'promote the working welfare [and]..extend social protection' to female home-based workers;

> Women's powerlessness arises from their illiteracy, lack of awareness, lack of information and knowledge…[Their] very lack of awareness and insight into their circumstances aggravate their powerlessness. They remain in a state of blissful ignorance.[60]

The description is reminiscent of a diagnosis of mental illness but is not untypical of discourse still found throughout the literacy and empowerment literature. Learners are perceived as somehow disabled, lacking in self-awareness and desire for change. Literacy, presumably, would enlighten them. There is little space here for consideration of the women's own ideologies and practices. Such assumptions are by no means isolated phenomena in the research; Bosch, in a recent review, takes a similarly dubious approach to a

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[57] Street (1984) *op. cit.*

[58] After a review of the literature, Shetty (1992) concludes that empowerment is an easy term to 'intuit', but difficult to define. The historical and theoretical development of the term has been well-documented elsewhere, in particular within feminist research; see, for example, Hunt (1989); Todaro (1994); Toye (1987) and Rowlands (1995). Youngman (1996) looks at empowerment in relation to adult literacy

[59] Rowlands *ibid.* who reviewed much of the research on empowerment for her study. See also for example Dyer and Choksi's work in India (1998); Athreya and Chunkath's study of the Total Literacy Campaign, also in India *op. cit.;* Breier and Sait (1996) in South Africa

[60] Lazo (1993) p27

women's popular education project in Chile: 'Isolated, silenced, women often suffer and perpetuate injustice without being able even to recognise it.'[61]

Even within the feminist literature, then, empowerment and literacy are inscribed in discourse as interdependent phenomena in universalist, productionist terms. In a further example Stromquist, in her study of an 'emancipatory' adult literacy project in Brazil, focuses on the difficulty of 'measuring outcomes from literacy'. While she rejects the notion of some sort of testing process, deciding instead to focus on women's accounts of their progress, her vocabulary reveals underlying ideologies that might be more at home in a deficit model of literacy – 'cognitive gains', 'aggregate', 'achievement', 'assessment'.[62] In an earlier instance, the same author presents 'greater levels of gender consciousness' as being dependent on written information - a perspective which implies a hierarchy of written and oral knowledge, echoing autonomous models of literacy.[63] The difficulty here is that women are presented as passive objects, requiring an injection of power – through the medium of literacy – to enable them to break free from (the researcher's conception of) their oppression. Women's problems are thus identified and addressed by this monologic voice, which provides little room for alternative echoes.

Lind and Johnson similarly argue sensibly that 'literacy is a potentially empowering tool for women. Literacy in itself does not, however, present a way out of the existing submission of women, due to hindrances of poverty, religious and cultural traditions and the political milieu.' However, they next discuss literacy in terms of income-generating activities, from the perspective that projects which have 'failed' to generate income undermine the literacy process.[64] Such a vision not only adopts the terms of productionism, it also implicitly accepts the hierarchical vision of power outlined above. Neither the deficit nor the deprived discourses as applied in such studies addresses the 'why literacy?' question in terms of ideologies.

In the light of critiques of empowerment as coming to serve as a voice of domination rather than acting as a force for liberation,[65] recent feminist models of empowerment, based on a rejection of the traditional conceptual models of 'power over', have concentrated on the notion of human potential, of 'power to' act on already inherent initiatives and desires and on

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[61] Bosch *op. cit.* p168
[62] Stromquist (1997b) *op. cit.*
[63] Stromquist (1990) *op. cit.* p107
[64] Lind and Johnson *op. cit.* p112
[65] Gore (1993)

'power from within'.[66] Such a dimension adds to the empowerment discourse an awareness of learners' *existing* powers, and recognises their sense of their own capabilities. The focus is less on outcomes than on social – and therefore ideological – processes and structures, such as Rowlands' model, constructed in a study of Honduras.[67]

However, much of the discourse around a literacy-for-empowerment model – even the sort of process-based model of Rowlands' work – remains imbued with productionist ideology, probably due to its 'project' or 'programme' imperative and the emphasis on evaluation and outcomes. Let us return, for example, to Anna Bosch's assessment of a Chilean popular education project.[68] She discusses how its literacy classes enhance self-esteem and self-reliance, using emotive quotes to describe the women's path from 'darkness' to 'enlightenment'. But while Bosch does identify features of the women's oppression, she does not go on to examine how these function in the concrete reality of women's lives. There is no examination of how such difficulties – like the universalised 'barriers to literacy' discussed above – are created, perceived or navigated around, and thus no room exists for the dissenting voices of learners. No space is allocated for learning how either existing knowledge or that gained in the literacy programme helped women negotiate, or what their perceived strengths were as well as their weaknesses, or how their bargaining position was employed for the benefit of the household.

Similarly, Doronila emphasises the role of 'empowerment' in development – yet she also refers to the people involved as 'those whom we seek to make literate', assigning them to the divided categories of 'literates' and 'non-literates'. Worryingly, she attributes as the primary 'outcome' of what she calls the 'rite of passage' of literacy, the ability to 'objectify', or to abstract knowledge from practice, as an indication of how far a community has moved towards 'development'. The underlying ideological thrust is reflected in the vocabulary: 'By plotting these indices (of objectification)...we can identify the 'deviance' of these communities from a hypothetical trajectory from the oral to a literate tradition...'[69] Questions of whose power? and whose control? need to be explored in depth if we are to understand how power operates or, perhaps more appropriately, how it *is wielded* – both by men and by women, by people at different stages in the power cycle – at the micro level, and what role

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[66] See for example Kabeer (1994); Crawley (1998); Rowlands *op. cit.*; Hartsock (1985)
[67] Rowlands *op. cit.*, Kabeer *op. cit.*, Batliwala (1993) and Harold (1991) have also produced interesting studies on the nature of empowerment
[68] Bosch *op. cit.* p180
[69] Doronila *op. cit.* p154

literacy plays in this. That is, to place the learner, their capabilities, tendencies, agendas and knowledges, at the centre of the paradigm.

Studies such as those discussed so far tend to adopt the discourse of 'post-literacy' to imply the period after completion of the literacy project, when it is hoped that participants will have achieved the pre-identified targets. 'Post-literacy' is conceptualised in different ways throughout the literature; Stromquist, for example, characterises it as the 'practice of literacy'[70] as her basis for arguing for a print environment in which reading can go on after project leaders have left. Yet even such an apparently open definition still implies that the individual possesses a learning capacity, which, once it has been filled, is then replete. It is worth noting that post-literacy, for Freire, was a misnomer in terms of the comprehension of meaning, since for him there is no clear distinction in between the mechanical deciphering stage of literacy – the moment in which letters, words and simple phrases are learned – and the later stage at which contact is made with meaning, or real text. Meaning, according to Freire, is involved at all stages.[71]

But also, such demarcated approaches ignore the literacy practices that may be going on outside the environment traditionally recognised as that of print, and how learners' own ideologies will shape their practices of social literacies. As Rogers *et al* point out in a recent report, such visions have become contests, about whether post-literacy is aimed at literacy learning or developmental tasks; whether it is intended to further group or individual competencies; whether it is hoped to help adults conform to prescribed notions of development, or to encourage participants to determine their own goals.[72]

What, then, of the interplay between such deterministic discourses and the voices and ideologies of learners? One of the major dangers of both the deprived and the deficit discourses is that the arrival of literacy projects or programmes into a given social arena accompanied by emotive language – often politically motivated – can construct people as 'illiterate' where previously no such conceptualisation has existed. One is struck in the literature by the almost automatic assumption by providers that people who have thus far in their lives experienced little formal schooling will automatically aspire to participate in a non-formal educational process. Yet, as Mpoyiya and Prinsloo argue convincingly, people may be actually unlikely to do so unless they have acquired constructions of themselves as

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[70] Stromquist (1997b) *op. cit.* p23
[71] Haddad and Ribeiro (1993)
[72] Rogers el at (1999) *op. cit.*

somehow in deficit[73] or, of course, deprived, depending on the political slant of the message. Such a vision, aside from harking back in its intent to the productionist discourses described above, presents a very autonomous model of literacy in assuming a universal 'standard' rather than discussing how people actually employ their existing skills in the playing out of their lives, that is, starting from the reverse end of the question. Thus, ongoing literacy practices which may not conform to the 'norm' promulgated by the discourse become marginalized.

This dominant discourse, which constructs vast numbers of people as illiterate and therefore powerless, flows strongly throughout much literacy research. Literacy, as Rockhill puts it so succinctly, has been constructed as power in discourses of power.[74] Aikman and Howard-Malverde, two of the few dissenting voices that can be heard against the tide, both raise concerns based on ethnographic study of 'indigenous' communities that the prestige attached to the text as the medium of information is likely to lead to devaluation, in terms of cultural significance and integrity, of local variation in the oral tradition.[75] A plurality of voices is being drowned out in favour of a standardised, written version as an authoritative reference. Thus the tension between the reinforcement of cultural identity and the authority of the written word muddies the waters of the literacy-for-power debate.

The above is not to argue that both women and other marginalized groups, such as those classed so often as illiterate, do not suffer under awful constraints, nor to diminish the extent of that suffering. Certainly, the identification of oppression and its sources has been a necessary stage in our thinking. But much research – even that which does take the 'power to' approach described above – moves directly from 'identifying the problem' to 'identifying the solution' in very productionist terms, and in a very monologic tone. The key interim steps of how the people being labelled as oppressed through gender[76] or 'illiteracy' cope? And how do they manage and control aspects of their own lives? - go largely unaddressed within the discourse. Perhaps it is time to move beyond a simple identification of injustices, to an emphasis on how these constraints are managed, or negotiated, or creatively employed. How do women and men in the developing world strive to make their lives bearable around such limitations and what role do their ideologies play in change? What is happening to power relations as social shifts take place?

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[73] Mpoyiya and Prinsloo *op. cit.* p190
[74] Rockhill (1993) *op. cit.* p157
[75] Howard-Malverde (1998); Aikman (1999)
[76] The term 'gender' is used here according to Carver's definition as 'the ways that sex and sexuality become power relations in society'- Carver (1996) p120

Therefore, while the deprived discourse of literacy moves closer towards a recognition of literacy as a social process, it still encounters difficulties in terms of its theoretical and conceptual basis, and in the way that research adopts its name while retaining the strains of productionism. The following section will consider how recent ideological models of literacy contribute to the discussion and examine the discourses which interplay around these.

1.4 'Different' - the New Literacies, or ideological models of literacy

An important bridge in the empowerment / power, agency / structure debate is the idea that literacy is socially constructed in the practices of everyday interaction, and thus that literacy is best investigated within the context of discourse systems as a whole.[77] The ideological model of literacy theory proposed by the New Literacies theorists criticises the divided approach of the deficit model for its mutually exclusive basis and argues that literacy does not necessarily lead to the kinds of social or cognitive outcomes claimed for it by both this and a deprived model.[78] Instead, it focuses on the different kinds of literacies – rather than literacy - that exist in daily communicative interactions, and on their relationships with power and ideology; that is, it conceptualises literacies as a set of ideological *practices*. The New Literacies has become an ideological movement in itself, embedded within 1990s emphases on diversity and the politics of difference, and has come increasingly to inform literacy planning and practice through such approaches as Rogers' Real Literacies.[79]

1.4.1. Literacy, ideology and agency

To begin with, let us explore the conceptual framework of 'ideology' in this context. We shall raise here two constructs as a basis from which to explore this terrain. Firstly, as defined by Brian Street, anthropologist and architect of the New Literacies framework, ideology according to its current interpretation in modern anthropology represents 'the site of tension between authority and power on the one hand and resistance and creativity on the other.'[80] Secondly, Eagleton, the literary theorist, offers us this: 'Ideology can be taken to indicate no more than this connection – the link, or nexus, between discourse and power'.[81]

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[77] Gee (1988) p37
[78] See for example Scribner and Cole's seminal account of literacy practices among the Vai (1976)
[79] Rogers (1999) *op. cit.*
[80] See Street (1993) *op. cit.* p8 for a full discussion of how he employs the term 'ideological'
[81] Eagleton (1983) p183

Thus, an ideological discourse of literacy posits a theoretical emphasis on power, authority and social differentiation; it is relevant to studies that seek to focus on the ways in which the apparent neutrality of literacy practices disguises their significance for the distribution of power in society and for authority relations. Literacies in this vision function as part of a set of *communicative practices,* a notion which includes both the social activities through which language or communication is produced, plus the ways in which these activities are embedded as part of cultural processes, plus the ideologies which guide processes of communicative production.[82] Within this vision come the analytical units of literacy *events* and literacy *practices*.[83] Such conceptualisations of communicative practices as sites of the production of ideology have been used by recent writers in a New Literacies framework to allow for a focus on the intertwining, interpolating, inter-constructing nature of written and spoken discourse.[84]

It is clear, then, that the ideological vision of literacies shares some conceptual ground with a deprived model, at least from the perspective of literacy practices as manifestations of power. Yet we may see differences in its elected model of social control. Unlike the Freirean vision of top-down domination, an ideological model of literacy, in theory at least, seeks to capture the Foucauldian notion of power being disseminated throughout social layers. Although the notion of 'silenced' peoples still appears,[85] these do so while revealing how, as Lukes' analysis of power has shown, 'muted' groups while seemingly marginalised and powerless, often develop their own strategies, sometimes spoken of as resistance, to increase their control over their own existence.[86] Thus, a recognition of individual agency and ideology enter into the arena. Unlike either a deprived or deficit approach to literacy, then, an ideological vision includes an understanding of the ways in which people in different positions may resist and negotiate the positions to which they are apparently ascribed. Kathleen Rockhill has shown us for example that structures which a deficit or deprived model might construe as 'barriers' to women's learning in fact result from different ideological constructions and agendas.[87] An ideological vision of literacy avoids inscribing people in discourse within the constructed categories of 'literate' or 'illiterate' but focuses instead on discussing the wide range of literacy practices with which people engage.

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[82] Grillo (1989)
[83] Heath (1983); Barton (1994a). See Barton and Hamilton (1998) for a full discussion of these terms
[84] Heath's seminal study, for example *ibid*; see also Lund (1997) for an empirical study in Peru, or the papers in Prinsloo and Breier *op. cit.* or those in Street (1993) *op. cit.*
[85] As in the collection of papers edited by Prinsloo and Breier *op. cit.*
[86] Lukes (1986). See also for example Scott (1985) on 'peasant societies' or studies of slavery in the Americas, such as Lewis (1983)
[87] Rockhill (1987)

Thus, the ideological voice is aiming not at dominating the arena, but at echoing and reflecting a variety of ideologies, experiences and practices. Through exploring the workings of 'dominant' and 'subordinated'[88] literacies, clearer pictures are emerging of the battlegrounds on which struggles for power and control take place, both in given social contexts and in wider theoretical terms.

It is this growing library of studies with their emphasis on diversity, ideology and agency which resonates with the experiences that created this text; the assumption of the individual as a thinking, acting, *literate* person. We have seen from some research now emerging that the very people branded by deficit and deprived discourses as illiterate in fact strategically and creatively 'take hold' of literacy to pursue their own aims and agendas.[89] One short visit to rural El Salvador for a month in 1998 revealed immediately the purposeful nature of social processes in rural communities; the central issue was not, it was clear, that of people being 'made literate', but rather the artful and deliberate employment of communicative strategies by community members, the resourceful engagement with discourse, textual creation and relationships. Within the ideological model, the focus of study is on the social practices in which people engage, rather than on placing 'literacy' as an abstract entity at the focus of interest, implying, by extension, a move away from project and programme discourses. This resonated with the powerful sense of purpose and inventiveness experienced in Usulután.

Yet in its insistence on the local, its spotlight on the micro, is it not possible to see within the culturalist argument on which the New Literacy Studies approach is based the danger of merely relativising literacy? That of celebrating small-scale practices while those with access to the dominant discourses of power continue to reproduce the sources of their own dominance?[90] These accusations of relativism and romanticism are addressed by Street in a foreword to a book about social literacy practices in South Africa. He contends that accusations of relativism mistakenly focus on access, rather than change. Debates about access to dominant genres of literacy – which are assumed to be fixed, universal and given – conceal questions about how such genres become and remain dominant. 'For, since the rules of dominant literacy genres are frequently quite arbitrary….they can easily be changed if too

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[88] These have been characterized variously as cultural resources (DiMaggio (1991)), workers' literacies (O'Connor (1994)) and vernacular literacies (Barton and Hamilton *op. cit.).* There is also the question of 'borderland' or 'primary and secondary discourses' (Gee (1990) *op. cit.*; O'Connor *op. cit.*), which return us again to the notion of agency or resistance and the recognition of individual ideologies

[89] Kulick and Stroud (1993)

[90] Street (1996a)

many people learn how to use them and thereby challenge the status quo'.[91] Certainly, the intention of the ideological model of literacy is not to relativise literacy at the level of social power. On the contrary, Street argues, the framework is termed an ideological rather than a cultural or pragmatic one because it aims specifically at drawing attention to the unequal and hierarchical nature of literacy in practice.[92] Thus, relativisation takes place only at the analytical level, not at the theoretical.

Yet it is certainly possible to see elements of celebrating the local in explorations of literacy practices from the nomads of northern India to Cape Town taxi drivers, from indigenous Peruvian women high in the Andes to islanders on Pacific atolls. But anthropological accounts of exotic social practices have served as the starting blocks for reflection and theorisation since exploration of other societies first began, as well as forming points of wonder in themselves. Powerful descriptions of the local may bring wider conceptual understanding to light and life; the difficulty, then lies perhaps less in romanticising *per se* than in whether romanticism implies a commitment to the status quo, to exoticising the local at the expense of examining repression or subordination. Many empirical studies in the New Literacies respond to this question by addressing issues of policy,[93] although we shall discuss below the attendant dangers of this. It is argued here that where the local is employed to address the theoretical, rigour is not necessarily at stake, and romanticism not necessarily a risk.

1.4.2 Ideology and discourse – the link

Let us now return to Eagleton's assertion above, that ideology is the nexus of discourse and power. We have touched on ideology and power in relation to the New Literacies: what then of these two dimensions as they relate to discourse?

Within the New Literacies model, as we have said, literacies are viewed as embedded in local discourses. Explorations of 'discourse' within this framework have drawn on anthropological discussions about its role in the production of ideology. Street cites Sherzer, who claims that discourse is the 'nexus, the actual and concrete expression of the language–culture-society relationship. It is discourse which creates, recreates, modifies and fine-tunes both culture and

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[91] *Ibid.* p5
[92] *Ibid.* Certainly, writers in the genre specifically address questions of social inequality, see for example the Prinsloo and Breier collection *op. cit.*.
[93] See for example *ibid.*

language and their intersection'.[94] Thus, discourses are sites of ideology in themselves. Gee's vision of discourses as 'social practices which integrate language, thinking, values and ways of acting and interacting' suggests an emphasis on the social aspects of discourse, as opposed to the natural.[95] Yet, to return to the literary, it is Eagleton's conceptualisation which, for this study, perhaps best captures discourse's role of both ideological production and reproduction and its reflection in both the societal and the personal. 'Discourses, sign-systems and signifying practices of all kinds...produce effects, shape forms of consciousness and unconsciousness which are closely related to the maintenance or transformation of our existing systems of power. They are closely related to what it means to be a person.'[96] Just then as ideology is the nexus of discourse and power, so is discourse the nexus of ideology and power; the locus of meaning generation and simultaneously the site of its contestation. Literacy and discourse, to return to Foucault's vision, are 'the things for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized.'[97]

We may see in this notion of discourse the vision of communication as the creator of identity and personhood taken up by writers in the New Literacies school. Prinsloo and Breier for example call on Foucault's understanding, where discourses generate ideological positions, through 'systems of rules which make it possible for certain statements but not others to occur at particular times, places, and institutional locations.'[98] They conceive of institutions such as the family, school, workplace, legal system, church and various systems of governance as the keys of social discourses which shape identity or 'personhood' in society and as the sites that construct, maintain and perpetuate the attachment of cultural capital to only some cultural resources.[99] This vision captures very effectively the way that terms such as 'literacy' and 'illiteracy' are constituted through discourse and thence exist as sites of contestation in themselves, and their relation as totemic terms to social practice.

We may see, then, how the notion of literacy as a set of ideological practices is firmly located within a post-structuralist view of discourse. Within the overarching framework of Eagleton's definition above, Bakhtin's conceptualisation of discourse is both powerful and influential. He views discourse as language formed as utterance, which can only be grasped in its inevitable orientation towards another. Thus, any discursive act necessarily involves speaking

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[94] in Street (1993) *op. cit.* p15
[95] Gee (1990) *op. cit.* p73; Prinsloo and Breier *op. cit.*
[96] Eagleton *op. cit.* p183
[97] Foucault *op. cit.* p52-3
[98] Prinsloo and Breier *op. cit.* p21
[99] See also Asad (1980)

/ writing subjects and also readers / listeners as part of the act of language being actualised in discourse, written or oral. 'Centripetal forces', in Bakhtin's model, aim at integrating and unifying meaning, or, in other words, constructing a monologue of meaning; they attempt to lead language back into the level of the system. By contrast, 'centrifugal forces' constantly strive to take language out of the system and into life, where it emerges as utterances. In this act, spaces can be opened up for the challenge to the monologic voice or, to put it another way, the dominant literacies. Such challenges create space for difference, or what Bakhtin calls 'dialogised heteroglossia,' or multiple voices.[100] These might include, for example, local conventions such as gossip.[101] We can clearly see the link with the ideological vision of 'multiple literacies' here.

Resonantly for this study, though, as will become clear, Bakhtin's notion of dialogue also includes the important corollary of silence. For Bakhtin, silence is always a form of being in dialogue and often forms a way of confronting the monologic voice of powerful institutions. It is a centrifugal force, which challenges the authority of the monologic voice. Silence, then – such as the silence of those who do not come to literacy classes – is an ideological act in itself; it is, to borrow Illich and Sanders' phrase, a creature of the alphabet.[102] This accords much more with the notion of agency than with the deprived view of the silenced majority, passive and unresisting. Silence can create space for heteroglossia which can, if the authorial voice gives way, create a plurality of independent and unmerged voices, Bakhtin's 'lively play' of street songs, folk sayings and anecdotes; a moment of carnival.[103]

Here stands revealed the link between an ideological model of literacy and Bakhtin's view of discourses; by treating literacy practices as essentially discursive, we are defining them as fundamentally ideological phenomena; given this, it becomes possible to identify their affiliated discourses, ideological assumptions and positions. By incorporating the notion of silence into this model we can consider what is muted through local power structures and how power is employed within ideology, placing greater emphasis therefore on agency. Discourses thus become within Bakhtin's model sites of contestation and combat; Foucault's familiar 'power to be seized.'

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[100] Bakhtin (1981)
[101] 'Gossip' will be later defined in the particular context of this study, but should be taken here to imply the informal exchange of information
[102] Illich and Sanders (1989) p119
[103] Bakhtin *op. cit.* p273

The discourse of the New Literacies stresses its aim of creating, and of course critiquing, a plurality of voices which may cause us to reflect upon wider theoretical propositions, much as Geertz argues that anthropology needs to search for systematic relationships among diverse phenomena, not for substantive identities among similar ones.[104] The question, then, is how far research that purports to adopt a New Literacies, or ideological, vision actually does so? How far do writers keep to the ideals of the approach, and how far do their texts resound with the echoes of deprived or deficit thinking? To what extent do they recognise heteroglossia? - or do they themselves inadvertently operate as Bakhtin's centripetal force, pushing multiplicity and spaces for carnival back into 'the system'? How far do they sustain their claim of placing the actor and his / her intentions at the centre? These questions will now be explored.

1.5 Empirical studies and how they fit into this framework

In the view of this study, the shift towards a more locally-focussed vision of literacies is extremely helpful in creating space for a plurality of voices, as the growing 'library' of literacy studies in the ideological model reveals. But both the discourses of Lukes described above and those of many researchers working within a so-called ideological mode still place their emphasis on the authorial voice, the monologic ethos of the universal. There is a tendency in much research to assume universality and harmony, and to discuss literacy practices as though these were somehow general throughout a given population, to assume the homogeneity of any given 'community'. That is, while a valuable scaling down of literacy studies to the micro level is going on, in some cases only limited changes in theoretical approach are taking place. Much research, while it may be more 'bottom up' than previously, retains an emphasis on identifying dominant trends within a group of people, of finding the majority voice – Bakhtin's 'orientation towards unity'[105] - and describing this as though it were applicable to any particular group. Within such studies there is little emphasis, indeed little expectation of, difference. Dyer and Choksi for example stress the 'extreme individualism' of the nomadic Northern Indian people with whom they conducted their research. They themselves, however, attribute common attitudes and values to the people; '[Rabaris] liked the idea of adult literacy…their view of empowerment and development…'.[106] This is not to disavow the existence of common cultural constructs, but to

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[104] Geertz (1973) p44.
[105] Bakhtin *op. cit.* p274
[106] Dyer and Choksi (1998) *op. cit.*

draw attention to the inclination to generalise attitudes and values which is symptomatic of a tendency, throughout the literature, to create a monologic voice, an assumption of universality and congruency reflected in the unproblematised use of terms like 'community', which renders the next step of identifying solutions simple.[107]

But human nature is not so harmonious, nor are communities isolated units of identical ideas and values. As Rockhill reminds us, 'Theories of resistance have romanticised the 'culture of the poor' without considering how it, too, is pervaded by dominant ideology, as well as differences and contradictions'.[108] While the temptation may be powerful within the social sciences to present neatly packaged conclusions, a chorus of voices in unison, there is little reflection in the body of research of the tension and variety of the human condition, of the diversity and dissonance that run throughout communities and families, such as Rockhill encountered in the stories of Latin American immigrant women to the United States[109] and Aikman met among the Arakmbut in Peru.[110] Discursive practices are used by people in many different ways at varying points in time; they are likely to be inconsistent, conflicting, changeable and diverse according to the imperative and agenda of the moment. Little research as yet recognises this. Yet contradiction and variety, when examined closely, often tell us something very important about the society with which we are engaged. Kell and Rockhill, for example, when they explored the reasons for apparently conflicting accounts, found revealing and deeply interesting ideological factors at work.[111]

Sometimes, the dissonance in practices and voices may appear to derive from a person's social functioning, their 'multifunctionality'[112] or usage of different facets for different circumstances and purposes.[113] This provides important insights into more general aspects of socialisation and ideology of the environment, and is often reflected in communicative practices. 'What it is to be a person, to be moral and to be human in specific cultural contexts is frequently signified by the kind of literacy practices in which a person is engaged.[114] So by focusing on dissonance we can understand more deeply the kinds of social rules and values that in fact form part of a coherent social and ideological framework in any given locale.

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[107] See also Athreya and Chunkath *op. cit.*; Hornberger *op. cit.;* Carrasco *op. cit.,* Bernardo *op. cit.* as similar examples. As exceptions, Howard-Malverde *op. cit.*; Marshall (1990); Aikman *op. cit.* Doronila *op. cit.*, whose study, while flawed, does search out the conflict in communities

[108] Rockhill (1993) *op. cit.* p163

[109] *Ibid.*

[110] Aikman *op. cit.*

[111] Kell (1996) and Rockhill (1993) *op. cit.*

[112] Kirkpatrick, cited in Street (1994) p97

[113] Similar to Barton and Hamilton's notion of literacy domains *op. cit.*

[114] Street (1994) *op. cit.* p97; see for example Besnier (1993)

The issue for research then is not merely to scale down the top-down model to smaller contexts while paying lip service to the considerations of local people. Nor is it to place harmony of findings at the top of the agenda. Yet the drive towards highlighting 'implications for policy' – as described, an aspect of the New Literacies model as part of the 'against romanticism' argument – means that some studies which explicitly reject an autonomous model of literacy reveal, within their discourse, elements of this productionist thinking. Ahai and Faraclas reject the 'technicist' discourses surrounding adult literacy and the notion of the literate 'participant' in development. But they go on to ask: 'Who needs literacy? Obviously, it is the majority rural (village) and semi-urban (settlement) sectors of the population of Papua New Guinea that have the greatest need to be mobilized for literacy….'.[115] No scope lies here for the recognition of local literacy practices. Similarly, Dyer and Choksi's 1998 research among the Rabari people stress the ideological nature of their research and emphasise that 'learners, of course, do not come as *tabulae rasae* to class'.[116] They go on to provide an interesting sociological / ethnographic account of how a Freirean-inspired approach to learning, REFLECT, while it ostensibly rejects as autonomous model of literacy, in fact tacitly endorses this. They then contend, however, that 'A REFLECT course, in theory, ought to be able to conscientise those who attend classes' – adopting the deprived model arguments outlined above – and proceed to examine the 'outcomes' of the process, from a project perspective. Their findings, while deeply interesting as to the perceptions of literacy among a particular set of individuals, and the workings of local ideologies, focus heavily on the project rather than the people; the emphasis is on how the 'group' react to – as if they were passive objects – the project, rather than considering what interactions went on between the 'new' (imported) and existing local communicative practices.

Doronila in the Philippines provides another striking example; her study emphasises the placing of 'the people' and their practices at the heart of her work – but her vocabulary reveals underlying constraints. She considers literacy as a social practice but employs the powerful language of productionism in her discussion of retention and acquisition, the sustainability or non-sustainability of literacy programmes, and questions of motivation.[117] In discussing community literacy practices, Doronila draws a distinction between two types of knowledge; 'literate knowledge', derived mainly from formal schooling, and 'traditional knowledge', informed by exclusively oral culture. But this dichotomy harks back almost to the historic Great Divide, with 'literate knowledge' being associated with constructs like

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[115] Ahai and Faraclas *op. cit.* p96
[116] Dyer and Choksi *op. cit.* p79
[117] Doronila *op. cit.* p17

'rationality'. In contrast, Aikman's more subtle distinction between the community as a context for 'out of school' learning, where teaching and learning, although they may differ in the different locales, are based on a common epistemology, and the community as a locus for 'without school' learning, where learning is based on different epistemological conceptions, reveals in greater depth the kinds of ideological assumptions surrounding learning in one given context.[118]

Occasionally, the pressure to reject the romanticism argument above drives writers inadvertently into the very discourses they are striving to reject. Malan, also in South Africa, draws an interesting and detailed portrait of the roles of literacy mediators but her conclusion reveals the discomfort between close ideological study and the need to validate research in terms of policy, discussing the limitations of the 'impact' that literacy interventions can have.[119] Similarly Breier and Sait, taking the same approach in the same collection of papers, simultaneously accuse workers of failing to engage with written text due to their 'apathy' to the content of those communications.[120] Hornberger provides an enlightening portrait of the way Quecha speakers have actively and independently developed their literacy practices to influence the decision-making regarding the future of Quecha literacy teaching, knowledge and identity, as well as religious teaching in the Quecha language. But she concludes by invoking the problematic 'deprived' discourse of empowerment, with all its attendant assumptions, and finally by categorising her three case studies according to UNESCO's definition, deducing that all three individuals must, therefore, conform to the status of 'functionally literate'.[121]

The tendency to view learners, even within a New Literacies framework, as passive objects, persists throughout much research. Magalhaes, who takes a Critical Language Awareness approach to considering beliefs about literacy in urban Brazil, also shows symptoms of perceiving learners as *tabulae rasae* – 'Literacy does not make people more developed than they were before acquiring it. However, it can contribute to constructing their identities...in certain ways.'[122] Rassool makes explicit her approach of literacy as a social practice and provides an interesting analysis of the discourses around literacy in pre-revolutionary Iran. However, she then goes on to place literacy firmly in the context of 'individual empowerment

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[118] Aikman (1999)
[119] Malan (1996b) p121
[120] Breier and Sait *op. cit.* although they do suggest that this act *might,* possibly, also contain 'a degree of resistance' (p70)
[121] Hornberger *op. cit.* p229
[122] Magalhaes (1995) p274

and social development' and to argue that 'literacies embedded in traditional cultural practices are often inherently subordinating',[123] surely a less productionist than patriarchal vision. Prinsloo and Breier discuss how research has been concentrated on 'literacy provision...rather than as an exploration of the social effects of its acquisition', employing the cause and effect vocabulary of much deficit-style research, despite their adoption of an explicitly ideological stance. Although they argue for a greater focus on the learners' needs and opinions within research, their adoption of the discourses of power - 'the recipients of literacy provision' 'the effects of literacy' 'what literacy had 'done' for people' - reveals an underlying pattern of more productionist thought.[124]

Fingeret, whose work on literacy networks and mediators has inspired much later work, identifies two characteristic types of relationship between 'illiterate' and other adults in their social networks, interdependent and dependent.[125] She shows how adults who lack 'traditional' literacy skills are intelligent people who function efficiently within their own social environment. Her work does, however, present a skills-oriented approach to literacy networks more fitting within a productionist, deficit discourse, while in fact, as later work in South Africa has shown us, the agency of literacy mediators is invested with different types and degrees of power, and is a social process which contributes to the creation of social identity and the contestation of power between agents of different discourses.[126]

Many writers, while explicitly focusing on a 'local literacies' approach, reveal their thinking through their discourse to be in fact more in line with the monologic voice of the autonomous emphasis on 'schooled' literacy. Gibson, writing in a South African context, draws an admirable portrait of the 'unschooled' and social literacies of a farmworker, but then legitimises these solely in the discourses of formal education – '[he] drew on an understanding of the distribution of weights, leverage, two- and three-dimensional constructions and spatial thinking.'[127] Such practices are attributed to a 'secondary discourse', involving 'a great many of the same skills behaviours and ways of thinking that we associate with literacy'. But the point, surely, is that such practices may be different; literacies should not be validated in terms of their similarity to a Western vision of schooled literacy but as techniques for negotiating the social world in themselves. Doronila's study of community literacies draws out very effectively some of the local practices involving skills

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[123] Rassool (1995) p434
[124] Prinsloo and Breier *op. cit.*
[125] Fingeret (1993)
[126] Malan (1996a) *op. cit.*; Robins (1996); China and Robins (1996)
[127] Gibson (1996) p55

that might well be considered literate practices – herbal lore, for example, or the calling of bets in a cockfight, conducted in sign language and by memory of the faces of bettors, supported by the traditional honour system. Yet these are classified as distinct and completely separate from literate practices, they belong to the older world of oral tradition, with the 'passage of a community from an oral to a literate tradition' – an indicator of development – measured by 'rating their capacity to objectify…their traditional and literate knowledge in order that it can be rendered in written form',[128] in the mode of the Great Divide.

As suggested, few studies encountered have examined how learners engage with their own literacy practices and those of others. We know from recent work that literacy practices are not goalless, undirected movements; but rather purposeful and pragmatic acts.[129] Robinson-Pant states the 'taking hold' of literacy as her approach and certainly she examines women's discourses around literacy very effectively, exploring the ideology of literacy in the Nepali context. But she does not go on to consider actual communicative practices outside the classroom. Yet assuming these as sites of ideology and contestation, this dimension is surely critical if we are to understand how people engage with new knowledge generated in relation to existing ideologies and cultures, and to understand their perceptions of this process. 'The analysis of discourse must always be concerned with the practice of discourse – *inter alia* the social activity through which discourse is produced and in which it is located'.[130] It is only by beginning here that we can start to understand how communicative practices are employed and how they function within local constructs of ideology and power.

It is then clear that there is, or should be in research, a distinction between communicative practices, including literacies, and more totemic, socially-constructed definitions of 'literacy'. Considering discursive practices within local domains – houses, yards, coffee fields and churches – together with the ways that the discourses surrounding literacy – the totemic constructs - operate is an integration not yet found in much literacy research. Generally, as has been discussed, the focus on conceptualisations of what constitutes literacy remains blurred, even in much of the ethnographic research in this area.[131] The common denominator of such studies is the finding that learners supposedly take a 'functionalist' or

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[128] Doronila *op. cit.* p109
[129] See Street (1987) and Hornberger (1994), for example
[130] Grillo (1989) quoted in Street (1993) *op. cit.* p15
[131] See Robinson-Pant *op. cit.*, as discussed. Dyer and Choksi *op. cit.;* Watters (1996); Breier and Sait *op. cit.* all look effectively at the interplay between literacy and discourses

'utilitarian' view of literacy,[132] unsurprising when the only arena for consideration is that of non-attendance or apparent rejection of providers' offerings. Because by far the bulk of the work is from the viewpoint of providers, the usual approach is that of a project or programme discourse, adopting a generally evaluationist stance, and using a productionist framework to assess success and failure, thereby re-engaging with and reiterating a modernisation discourse of development. The result is a monologic voice, the forcing of literacies and discourses into a universal shape and form.

Although ideological models of literacy may seek to capture variety and difference, then, the constraints encountered within much research mean that the imperatives of the productionist voice often overcome the dangers of diversity. This study aims to dissent from that tradition. The following section will therefore draw together some of the threads from the above discussion to delineate some gaps which exist in our body of knowledge, and, in doing so, to illuminate the specific parameters of this text.

1.6 A summary: where this research is located

This text is located, as stated, within the New Literacies / ideological framework. It employs Bakhtin's notion of discourse to explore communicative practices, conceptualised according to Gee's delineation above, in Usulután, El Salvador. It will focus on so-called 'real' literacies, or on the creation and interpretation of locally-encountered artefacts and discourses as well as on the imported or the 'found'. Its theoretical assumptions take reading, writing and orality to be integrally related and intertwined within the frame of discursive practice.

This study aims to problematise terms such as 'community', and to reveal some of the heteroglossia that echoes through the landscape of Usulután. Discursive practices are assumed to be rooted in the rhythms and discourses of people's lives, in the quiet patterns of daily movement and talk that so often remain uncaptured in the literature. Accounts of communicative practices have, in the past, tended to decontextualise literacy, to divide it from lived experience.[133] This text hopes to contribute to the filling of this space by drawing a picture of how literacy and power interact within the mosaic of some people's lives.

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[132] Dyer and Choksi *op. cit.*; Magalhaes *op.cit.;* O'Cadiz (1995); Van der Westen *op.cit.*
[133] Street (1993) *op. cit.;* Rockhill (1993) *op. cit.*

This text assumes women and men as sources of ideology who knowingly create their discursive strategies according to their own ideologies and practices. In placing its focus on the human agency behind communicative acts it seeks to bring Mayo's 'language of possibility' to the New Literacy Studies.[134] It treats literacy not just as the object of ideology, but as an ideology itself – of planners, policymakers and also of local people, as reflected in communicative processes. When these ideologies are revealed, and the ways they are enacted tracked, we may begin to understand how discursive practices can shape, and be shaped by, power relations. In the question raised at the start of this chapter, therefore – 'what literacy' – we may find the defining query of this study: what is literacy in Usulután? What does it mean to different people, and how does it operate within their social context? This text aims, by reflecting the voices of some adults in this corner of the world, to reveal in its picture some of the dissonance and diversity, the inconsistency and range that characterises the playing out of lives. In doing so, it hopes to echo Geertz's stance: 'Monologues are of little value…there is merely a discussion to be sustained'.[135]

The study contributes to our library of studies about literacy practices in several ways. Firstly, although there is a long tradition of theoretical work on literacy in Latin America,[136] this is generally located in the context of Freirean discourse and / or bilingalism.[137] A considerable gap exists in empirical studies on the social practices of literacy within Central and Latin America from a non-project point of view.[138] Secondly, very little in-depth research exists on the silent majority that either never attend, or cease to attend, literacy classes. Why did they leave, or not wish to arrive? What was their view that they did not choose the construction of 'literacy' as relevant to their lives? What does this tell us about social conceptions and practices of literacy and their relations to hierarchies of power and ultimately social change? Such voices are rarely heard within the literature.

This text does not seek to offer an analysis of literacy acquisition or learning, a question which has been well addressed by other theorists.[139] Rather, its focus is on practice. Nor does it in any way intend to constitute an evaluation of a literacy process, even an 'illuminative'

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[134] Mayo (1994)
[135] Geertz *op. cit.* p29
[136] See for example the work by Emilia Ferreiro, whose work centres on pre-school literacy (Ferreiro 1994; Ferreiro and Teberosky 1979); or the studies considered by Stromquist (1997b) *op. cit.*
[137] See for example Harvey (1992); Hornberger (1997); Aikman (1999) *op. cit.*
[138] See for example Archer and Costello *op. cit.*; Stromquist (1992); Bustillo (1993). Aikman's study *op. cit* is an exception, although this focuses on intercultural education
[139] For example Aikman *op. cit.* and Ferreiro *op. cit.*

one.[140] It aims instead at locating this particular investigation of discursive practices – where a literacy 'project' features only as it interplays with social processes - within the body of current research. It does not seek to explore 'schooled' literacy,[141] though it will touch briefly and again cursorily upon perceptions of education as they relate to people's perceptions of 'marching onwards'. Nor does it address issues of language or language policy, since Usulután is a monolingual setting. Finally it does not, as will by now be clear, aim to address issues of policy; the rationale for this will be further elucidated below.

The above review has considered some of the issues arising in the literature pertaining to studies of literacy and power. Furthermore, some gaps in our knowledge have been identified. The theoretical developments and concepts summarised here have both provided the grounding for this text, and, it is hoped, been somewhat elaborated by their discussion. The subsequent chapter will bring the issues raised within this section into the context of Usulután, to reveal the contextual features that render this location an interesting locus for the study of communicative practices. Throughout all the chapters which follow, the concepts of discourse, multiple literacies and social practice will be returned to, in order to both illuminate the findings of research in Usulután, and employ these findings and experiences to develop and expand upon the concepts themselves.

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[140] Parlett and Hamilton (1972) p57
[141] McEwan and Malan offer a helpful distinction between 'schooled' and 'local' literacies (1996) p198

Chapter 2: Usulután: Power and conflict

In Usulután, as everywhere, people manage as best they can in whatever circumstances they find themselves. They seek out humour and happiness, and are constantly looking out for the next rung of the ladder that will take them 'onwards'. But Usulután is a challenging environment today, one which even the most determined and resistant of people finds at times overpowering.

This chapter will introduce the setting for a study of discursive streams and communicative practices in the landscape of Usulután. It will describe some of the past experiences and present struggles that shape the ongoing dynamics, structures and conflicts of daily life in rural communities. By illuminating the key social, historical, political and economic forces around which people's lives are constructed and managed, while keeping as its reference point the vision raised in the introduction to this text of a couple sitting talking in their house in the late afternoon, it will locate the discursive practices explored here within their broader conceptual framework. How are the people who have travelled the path of recent history in Usulután living today? What factors shape their decisions about communicative practices and strategies? What role does the construct of 'literacy' play in their lives? In exploring these questions, the chapter will trace some of the links between macro forces and micro patterns and events, and explain why Usulután proved to be an interesting location for learning about the social and ideological practices of literacy.

2.1. Usulután's backdrop of violence: the Salvadoran civil war

The department of Usulután lies in the far east of El Salvador. It is one of the poorest and most rural areas of the country. Usulután was a bitterly and violently contested arena during El Salvador's recent civil war, with control fluctuating between the army and the guerrilla forces.

The war, which began in earnest in 1980, is perhaps best understood as one in a long series of protests by those socially, politically and economically excluded from the ruling junta of the country and in particular from landowning. The infamous 'fourteen families' remained the dominant minority of El Salvador until well into the twentieth century, largely due to their possession of 98% of the country's land. The war's chief protagonists were the Farabundi

Martí Liberation Front (FMLN), composed mainly of groups and individuals who, frustrated by the oligarchic system and the electoral frauds of 1972 and 1977 and the repression which followed them, formed from five opposition organisations with the stated aim of taking control of the government by military means and restructuring the economy for the benefit of the country's poor majority.[142]

After nearly ten years of violence, suffering and bloodshed, the attitudes of the key actors in the war - the FMLN, the Salvadoran government, the Bush administration in the United States and an important sector of the country's economic oligarchy - turned towards the favouring of a negotiated solution, leading eventually to the signing of the Peace Accords in Chapultepec, Mexico on January 16th 1992. Central to the signing of the Accords was agreement on the Land Transfer Process, where lands owned by wealthy members of the elite would be transferred to co-operatives of the poor majority.

Amid numerous hitches, national elections finally went ahead in 1993, with the FMLN participating as a political force for the first time. The process left the right-wing party ARENA,[143] originally the political vehicle of the military powers, firmly in control of the ruling executive for the rest of the century. National elections in 1999 confirmed this choice.[144] In March 2000, however, results in local elections sent a shockwave through Salvadoran politics as, for the first time, the FMLN won a majority of seats in Salvadoran equivalent of the US House of Representatives. In practice, though, little in terms of the location of power has changed, since ARENA and its allies remain firmly in control of decision-making through their combined force in parliament. ARENA thus remains today the voice of the State while the FMLN retains its political, cultural and historical status as the 'opposition' faction of political society.

2.2 The popular sector of Usulután

The analysis of communicative practices in Usulután requires an understanding of the social and political context, and in particular the still deeply divided nature of Salvadoran society.

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[142] See Murray (1997) and Montgomery (1982a) for an account of the conflicts and tensions which led to the civil war.
[143] National Republican Alliance
[144] The reasons for the success of ARENA at the ballot boxes in these elections are many and complex. (see Murray (1995) for an overview)

On the opposite side to the right-wing ARENA government of the State has traditionally stood the 'popular sector', a faction inextricably linked to the FMLN, and a political and ideological force with which 'popular education', often in the form of adult literacy projects, has become deeply entwined. The Spanish word *popular* has a specific social connotation in the Central American context, perhaps best captured by one respected Salvadoran activist and writer as 'characterised by an identification with transformation in economic, political, cultural and social terms that benefits the marginalised. Those who act for social justice identify with and make up the popular movement.'[145]

The roots of the *campesino*, or rural movement, a major dimension of the popular movement in El Salvador, lie in the historic problem of inequitable land distribution, and consequent social and economic injustices.[146] The pyramidical class structure of the country and the deterioration of material conditions, notably the intensification in landlessness and increasingly difficult economic conditions for the majority rural population in the 1960s and 1970s provided the objective conditions and the 'grievances' which many theorists have cited as a necessary condition for the political mobilisation of the masses in El Salvador.[147] These interacted with a rapidly changing structure of political opportunities to create increased radicalisation and mobilisation among interest groups.[148] Of particular influence on the growing militancy of the grass roots was the Catholic church, whose progressive 'theology of liberation', developing from the 1950s onwards, provided a philosophical, spiritual and political justification for protest and activism.[149]

The *campesino* movement was deeply entrenched in these struggles, and acted as the primary locus of mobilisation for people in rural areas. Its symbol of the suffering *campesino* – the poor and landless rural farmer – became the rallying point for the political and ideological struggle, and remains a powerful ideological motif today. Although some writers translate the word *campesino* into the English 'peasant', arguing that they employ this word without the assumption of any particular set of values,[150] such usage within the landscape of Usulután at

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[145] Lungo Uclés (1995) p153
[146] See Brockett (1991) for a detailed description of this; also Mason (1992) and Llewellyn (1985).
[147] See for example Montgomery (1982a) *op. cit.*; also Kincaid (1987)
[148] Montes (1980). See Brockett (1988) *op. cit.* whose review of Central American political movements of the 1970s discusses eloquently the shifts in social relations which were required for successful *campesino* mobilisation
[149] See Anna Peterson's excellent study of Catholicism in El Salvador (1997), Montgomery (1982b) and Pearce (1991). Also Linden (1997) which lists some of the major critiques of liberation theology, in particular feminist critiques
[150] See for example Brockett (1991) *op. cit.* p270 or Landsberger and Hewitt (1970) p560. The term here is employed to refer to both male and female gender

least does not reflect the way that the term embodies less an occupation than a highly politicised status and history. In the words of one local man, '*campesinos* are born in the land, they work on the land and live with the land, here [pointing at the ground] is our history and here is what we fought for'. The symbol of the *campesino*, formed out of history, ideology and battle, cannot be adequately captured by words which do not embrace the violence and bloodshed which lie behind it. It remains today highly charged in local and national discourses and acts as a multivocal symbol for different perspectives of the ideological landscape, reflecting on one dimension the poor unlettered masses, on another the symbol of repression and injustice, and on a third a pride in their status as workers of the land, while a reminder of historical standing in the eyes of the oligarchy – 'the rich ones' – and the continuing struggle in the face of surrounding powerful forces.

It would, however, be misleading to claim either the *campesino* movement or the popular sector as representative during wartime or currently of the ideologies and beliefs of *all* rural people in Usulután. The *campesino* movement was deeply influenced by Marxism, and during the war its armed forces fought under the slogan 'Either we all eat, or no-one does'. The resulting destruction of infrastructure and the economy by its guerrillas as part of the armed struggle had a deeply damaging effect on the lives of many rural families, particularly in such a highly combative area as Usulután. Many people echo this experience in their descriptions of the terrors of the times: 'If the government didn't get you, the guerrillas did'. Their ambivalency is reflected in the fact that after decades of intense organisational activity and twelve years of war, political and social fatigue is a powerful motif in Usulután, as this text will demonstrate.[151]

But despite its often only tentative support in Usulután, and notwithstanding its recent difficulties[152] the *campesino* movement still plays a powerful role in the lives of rural community inhabitants. This is largely because of its metamorphosis post-war into the popular sector umbrella for local NGOs, which will now be explored below.

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[151] This circumstance is not restricted to Usulután; for the 1999 presidential elections, 62.7% of the national electorate opted not to vote (Government figures cited by Pino (1999))
[152] See Murray (1995) *op. cit.* for a discussion of this

2.3 Usulután's rural NGOs

During the war, grassroots Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) sprang up in Usulután in response to the needs of the displaced and suffering people in rural areas. In doing so, they became central actors in the ideological battle for the hearts and minds of the local population. In the highly politicised climate of the times, such organisations became unsurprisingly as divided in outlook as Usulután and Salvadoran society itself. While one group became unmistakably associated with the counterinsurgency efforts orchestrated by the Salvadoran government and its supporter USAID, the other was deeply linked with the popular sector and the *campesino* movement. This second group of NGOs arose out of the *gremios*, the political structures created in communities by the FMLN as part of their efforts to organise and mobilise the local people. Although their missions were clearly defined as humanitarian, political origins, sympathies and in some cases actions in terms of a blending of interests and funds,[153] meant that popular sector NGOs in particular faced repression by State forces.

Post-war, such organisations found themselves at the heart of the struggle for the construction of a new civil society in El Salvador, with particular influence in rural areas such as Usulután.[154] Yet polarisation remained; while the FMLN and a portion of the beneficiary population saw these NGOs as the only legitimate vehicles of economic reactivation, the government perceived them as politicised vestiges of FMLN domination whose influence needed to be curbed.[155]

In 1999, NGOs in Usulután were continuing to encounter difficulties in adjusting from a political role to the demands of the different skills required by major donors. Donors seek project proposals different in both conception and philosophy from the communal economic survival projects that were developed in conflict zones during the war. NGOs and the popular sector are continuing to learn how to deal with government, and how to construct tactical and strategic alliances for their goals. Political allegiances, however, remain a powerful factor in the distribution and accessing of aid, as this text will reveal.

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[153] Foley (1996)
[154] See McIlwaine (1998) for a helpful deconstruction of the term 'civil society' in El Salvador.
[155] See Foley (1996) *op. cit.* for a through and realistic overview of the controversial development of NGOs in El Salvador and their role in the post-war reconstruction of civil society, highly critical of USAID. For a deeply personalised account of experience working for an INGO in El Salvador during the civil war years see Thompson (1996 and 1997)

2.4 A view of the arena

Deep within Usulután, an hour and a half by bus from the department's main urban centre and an hour up a steep road from the nearest town, lies the village of San Francisco Javier. This rural parish stands amid coffee plantations and maize fields. It has one main street with a telephone office, some small grocery shops and a police post, and thus acts as an administrative centre for surrounding rural communities. The majority of its population are employed in agriculture.[156] The total population stands at 142 families, although only around 60 of these live centrally, with the rest being scattered in outlying farmland. An electricity supply has been present since 1993 and pumped water since 1997.

It was during a one-month exploratory visit to El Salvador in May 1998 that the particular locale was selected for this study. Various factors influenced its choice. Firstly, the main local NGO, as will be explained below, made an explicit linking of literacy to power and ideology in its practice. This made for a potentially interesting backdrop in terms of how literacy was constructed as a totemic term on the landscape, and how communicative practices in communities interplayed with this. Secondly, the area's extremely difficult economic conditions and remote location appealed to Chambers' plea for greater focusing on poorer, less accessible areas where conditions are harsher.[157] Finally, while the physical environment is more testing than in other areas, the staff of the local NGO, as will become evident, were very supportive of a stay by the researcher.

San Francisco Javier is the home of COMUS, the United Communities of Usulután, a small grass-roots NGO. COMUS originated from an FMLN *gremio*, set up to politically mobilise the communities of the area in the late 1980s and therefore worked under clandestine conditions for much of the civil war. During this time, its main targets were the defence of the land for the rural inhabitants and the provision of emergency aid. After the peace accords in 1992 COMUS was legally inaugurated as an NGO. It became heavily involved in Usulután's Land Transfer Process, and by 1999 was receiving aid to the tune of $150,000 annually from a range of national and international donors. It currently employs 15 staff, and its work now covers agriculture, production, health, natural medicine and education, as well as infrastructural projects such as building schools and setting up water supplies.

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[156] 59% according to the most recent Census (1992)
[157] Chambers (1983)

One of COMUS' most significant projects remains the legalisation process of communities. To become eligible for local government aid in El Salvador, a community must possess a legally-enshrined Board of Directors,[158] who must be trained and sworn in according to the Salvadoran civil code. COMUS has initiated and carried through this legalisation process in many local communities, and it is partly because of this work and partly due to their strong historical roots within the popular sector of the area that the organisation enjoys such extremely close social links with many of the local communities.

Although COMUS' constitution stresses its non-partisanship politically, its origins as a *gremio* mean that political affiliations remain strong. All the staff are FMLN sympathisers and / or activists and the COMUS offices are frequently used for political meetings with FMLN representatives of local communities. Juancito and Margarita, two of the three members of the education section, are an ex-wartime political organiser and an ex-guerrilla respectively, and both remain very active politically.

Many rural Usulután communities are therefore, theoretically at least, due to COMUS influence highly structured. They have a local Board of Directors elected by the community members, either in accordance with the legalisation process described above or in preparation for this, and often health, production and agricultural committees. Nonetheless, political indifference is currently a major local issue, with just 34% of the electorate voting in the recent presidential elections.[159] Many local individuals attribute this to people's disillusionment with the promises of political parties, and their resentment at material living conditions remaining unchanged. The refrain of people being 'frightened' of party politics is a constant feature of conversations, and is usually ascribed by COMUS and local government staff to the experiences of the war, where open ideological sympathy with one side or the other could easily lead to torture or death or at the very least suffering for one's family.[160]

2.5 Local stakeholders

The above discussion has identified COMUS as one of the main sites of power within the daily reality of local inhabitants of rural communities in Usulután. Its rootedness in the discourses of the popular sector and its powerful social and historical links locally render the

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[158] *junta directiva*
[159] Figures from local co-ordinator of the FMLN
[160] See Best and Hussey (1996)for some accounts of wartime experiences

agency deeply entwined with the communities' unfolding history. The other key locus of authority and control in the lives of local people is that of the local mayor's office, or *alcaldía,* the regional representative of the State.

It is through this office, sited in San Francisco Javier, that almost all 'official' business, or that which is located within the conventions of the State, is conducted. It is in this dusty building that identity cards are issued, the documents necessary for the selling and purchasing of animals are registered, birth certificates, land ownership papers, community legalisation papers and so on are obtained. The *alcaldía* deals with requests for economic funding from communities, it organises aid projects and distributes the State's resources at a local level. It is, for example, with the mayor's office that communities must deal when they wish to clear stones from a path using machinery, or request funds for the building of a covered area outside a house, or lay title to land.

COMUS and the *alcaldía* of San Francisco Javier can be usefully conceptualised as local *stakeholders* in people's lives, in that their control of resources, micro and macro, and their legitimised social and historical role allow them to participate in and thence influence and control, people's social actions and conditions, their daily patterns of existence and their future. They are, as will become clear, both representatives and creators of discourses of power and ideology at the micro level. In their own struggles for local dominance, both wish to claim the ideological support of the rural people as their own, both vie for adherence and loyalty. Their political and ideological positions are embedded in the wider social and political divide of the Salvadoran history described above.

It is then to one or the other of these stakeholders that local people must turn for resources and support;[161] it is their discourses of power, to be explored below, which influence the playing out of lives. The battle for ideological dominance as it relates to literacy will be explored in later chapters, but the point of significance here is that it is with these two sites of power, conflict and contestation – small adobe houses, placed, appropriately, on opposite sides of the cobbled street of San Francisco Javier – that the inhabitant of a rural community of Usulután must engage in his or her struggle to 'march onwards'.

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[161] There are, of course, other stakeholders in people's lives such as the Church (whether evangelical or Catholic) and different NGOs, allied either to the State or to the popular sector. But the *alcaldía* and COMUS, for the communities studied here, are both the only stakeholders who are directly involved with adult literacy provision, and they are also the main sites of resources

2.6 Rural society; inside the communities

It is against this highly politicised backdrop, therefore, that lives are played out in Usulután. What, then, of the social conditions and patterns within communities? We will now draw together the strands of the above discussion to delineate the more specific social, economic, cultural and political conditions of the area of Usulután in which this study resides. This will help construct the framework for understanding the complex web of forces within which discursive practices and strategies are enacted.

Despite the changes brought about by the civil war, Salvadoran and Usulután society continue, in common with that of most other Central American countries, to take the form of a squat pyramid, with the dominant oligarchy as a tiny apex, then a slightly larger layer of middle class, and the main substance of the pyramid being formed by the poor. Currently, rural households in Usulután can be divided into perhaps two economic groups; those who own or rent houses and perhaps a few animals and some land, and those which constitute the largest tranche of Usulután society, who are dependent on daily labour and are therefore engaged in subsistence living. For this strata of society in particular, social exclusion remains the dominant theme of their lives; they are, for example, the least likely by far to vote in local elections.

National figures released by the outgoing government in 1999 – for example that 18.9% of houses nationally exist in 'extreme poverty' and only 26% in 'relative poverty[162] - bear little relation to actual conditions in rural Usulután. The 1999 picture of the respected FUSADES[163] is more coherent with local reality, whose surveys indicated that poverty had 'risen immensely' in recent years, with 61.5% of rural inhabitants now in its grip.[164] Increases in VAT in 1999 also badly hit the rural family budget, forcing up the prices of beans, rice and maize while work remained scarce and wages low.

The fundamental social, psychological and spiritual unit of many Usulutecos' lives, the family, has experienced major changes with the upheavals of the civil war and the post-war transformation of the rural political economy. During the conflict, rural families were often destabilised by the necessity of the male leaving the family for long periods in the face of

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[162] Source: government announcements in a special supplement to La Prensa Gráfica, Sabado 29 de Mayo de 1999
[163] Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development
[164] FUSADES (1999)

political repression or in order to search for work. Thousands of families were now headed by women, causing them look desperately to the informal sector of the economy as a means of survival for themselves and their families.[165] During the war years, women increasingly organised and participated in grass-roots popular organisations, as well as fighting as combatants. Many writers examining this phenomenon have applauded the apparent gains made by Salvadoran women during wartime.[166] But inside 1999 Usulután, economic necessity among other factors has meant there has been little opportunity to build on any wartime changes and gender patterns remain primarily patriarchal.

Male absence and the subsequent dislocation in family life continues to be a major factor in the shaping of Usulután society, due to the uncertain nature of seasonal employment and the culture of emigration to the United States, with temporary absence frequently ending up as permanent abandonment.[167] The pressures leading to male spouse abandonment and female participation in the labour market are greatest among the landless and the land poor, since these families live in the most precarious economic circumstances. For such households, much crucial additional household income comes from 'women's work' such as the selling of bread, tortillas or produce from family gardens, as well as unrecorded (in official statistics) efforts such as taking in laundry and engaging in petty commerce. What an economist might call the 'informal economy' is too neutral and innocuous a term to describe the range of activities to which people resort in Usulután's long and continuing crisis. The 'informal economy' is simply this: people do whatever they can to survive.

This study aims, as has been clearly stated, not at 'typicality' or some artificial imposition of representation, but at the seeking out of difference and variety. There are however certain common social patterns and conditions within rural Usulután which are helpful in drawing a picture of the world within which communicative practices and literacies take place in daily life. Let us therefore try to delineate some dimensions of the broader framework of living within which this diversity takes place.

A member of a rural family in Usulután, then, may live with his or her family, the size of which may consist of anything between about four and 12 members, in a stick and adobe

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[165] See Mason and Krane (1989) for a description of the effects of the war on family structure

[166] But these gains often relate only to the refugee camps outside the country, periods of suspension from the economic and other forces of daily life. See for example Maria Juliá's series of two studies in 1994 and 1995, the second of which concluded that the previously striking reconstruction of gender relations in the refugee camp had regressed to 'patriarchy and oppression' (p230)

[167] Mason (1992) *op. cit.* p72

house with a packed dirt floor. Their community may consist of anywhere from 10 to 100 families, and is likely to have little direct public transport, although access to pickups and buses may be only a short walk away. The head of the family, usually the man, generally works from 7 am until 1 pm clearing the land or sowing, for which he or she is paid a daily wage of 25 *colones*, or 3 dollars. Employment is seasonal, lasting from March to October; if work is scarce in the region, migration to other areas may be necessary. The mother may also engage in selling produce or in tortilla-making. If land is owned, work takes place in the afternoon on its cultivation; if not the man generally relaxes while the woman carries out the household chores. Children may go to school if the materials and in some cases uniform can be afforded, but during May and June they tend to be required to help with the sowing. Meals consist of beans, tortillas, cheese and perhaps rice, with income barely covering household expenditure and certainly leaving little leeway for doctor's consultations or other unanticipated expenses, for which loans from family networks are employed if possible. If there is no electricity, commonly the case, the day ends early, generally at nightfall (about 7 o'clock) since in many cases people rise at 5 a.m. or earlier to walk to work, which may be some distance away, or in, the case of the women, to fetch water if there is no community tank. Access to telephones is by travelling to the nearest town and using the telephone office there.

2.7 Education in Usulután

It will be apparent, then, that the kinds of social, political and economic structures which have prevailed in rural Usulután have not traditionally advocated the schooling of agricultural labourers. Stamina, endurance and experience have qualified rural people to plant and pick coffee and cotton, to work in the sugar cane fields. Indeed, education of the few was, before the civil war, the instrument and guarantee of ideological domination over the labourer and *campesino* who, denied access to literacy and schooling,[168] remained tied to the land filled, according to the ironically patriarchal view of one Latin American scholar, with a fatalistic view of life.[169]

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[168] The prestigious Salvadoran journal *Estudios Centroamericanos* undertook a comprehensive review of the Salvadoran educational system on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the ambitious educational reform of 1968. That study found a system that, despite infusion of unprecedented economic resources, remained grossly inequitable and highly inefficient

[169] Campos Carr *op. cit.* p51

Educational neglect was one of the conditions of life in rural Usulután before the civil war; in 1978, 62.1% of Salvadorans who earned their living in agriculture – to reiterate, the great majority of the population - were classified as 'illiterate.'[170] Many children did not attend school because the few educational institutions that did exist in the region were often physically inaccessible to inhabitants of isolated rural communities. Those that were both present and active charged a small fee for entry, in accordance with government policy of the time, which the majority of rural parents, existing in the kind of subsistence socio-economic conditions described above, could ill afford. Cultural conditioning played a major role too, with boys being expected to work with a scythe in the fields from the age of seven or eight, and girls being trained in tortilla-making and household tasks from about the same stage. During the war years, the already limited schooling opportunities in Usulután were in some areas of the department withdrawn altogether, leaving a generation of young adults with no access to basic educational facilities.[171] But even in the later peacetime of 1999, local schoolteachers estimate that around 20-30% of children are absent during the dry season, and anything up to 90% during the winter, the busiest time of the agricultural cycle. The reasons which prevent their attendance remain largely identical to those described above, which also constrained their parents' and grandparents' schooling.

2.8 Popular education

Aside from formal schooling, the other important strand of educational history and experience in Usulután is that of popular education. This term is employed within social discourse in El Salvador to describe two overlapping but different experiences. On the one hand, the alternative education *system* that grew up in the country's conflictive zones during the war and that was brought to El Salvador by church workers inspired by liberation theology in the 1970s, is called the popular education system.[172] On the other hand, popular education also refers to the alternative educational *method*, based on Freirean theory and used by educators in largely informal educational contexts all over El Salvador. Both are important factors in Salvadoran non-formal education and particularly adult literacy work, and both are deeply embedded within the ideologies and discourses of the popular sector.

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[170] Moncada-Davidson (1995) p283

[171] *Ibid.* estimates that as late as 1986 the dropout level of the student population reached 88% in certain – mainly rural – parts of the country

[172] For a thorough overview of the history and problems encountered by popular education in Latin America, see Campos Carr *op. cit.*

Popular education as both system and method stems from the Freirean premise, discussed above, that education is a force which will move the 'unlettered' and 'oppressed' masses to forge a new and more equitable society. In the years of conflict in El Salvador, liberation theology gained a strong hold in the churches and the extension of this into the popular education system was a natural next step. Freire's educational ideals were adopted wholeheartedly by the popular ideologies, and in particular by the *campesino* movement. Especially in the refugee camps outside the country, such popular education programmes and also techniques were adopted enthusiastically as vehicles sharing the ideological convictions and aspirations of those working for the oppressed majority.[173] Post-war, the still large numbers of non-formal adult education programmes operating within the popular sector, including literacy projects, reflect its continuing significance to Salvadorans.

CIAZO,[174] widely regarded as the best-established and most professional Salvadoran NGO working in adult literacy, grew out of several local NGO efforts in the north of El Salvador during the war who employed Freirean ideals of conscientizing and mobilising people in marginalized, rural communities to maximise the war effort. The deeply political nature of CIAZO's approach is reflected in its early choice of generative words such as 'revolver' and 'bomb'. Today, CIAZO are attempting to persuade the government to introduce Freirean principles into the school curriculum. CIAZO play a major role in the construction of literacy's meanings in Usulután, as we will now see.

2.9 Adult literacy in Usulután's rural communities

To explore the educational context of Usulután, and to illustrate the difficulties inherent in applying labels such as 'literate' or 'illiteracy' in an arena such as this, let us examine at this point how these terms are employed as classifications of groups and individuals by stakeholders in the literacy game. This will also reveal how these key players identify and approach what they proclaim as the 'problem of illiteracy'.

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[173] See for example Cagan and Cagan (1991) also Archer and Costello *op. cit.* Hammond gives an account of literacy in the guerrilla forces during the war, but this is descriptive rather than analytical in nature (Hammond 1996)

[174] Inter-organisational Committee for Literacy

'Adult illiteracy' nationally according to government figures stood in 1999 at 16%.[175] It is unclear how this figure was reached or how 'illiteracy' is defined. CIAZO also offers a numerical classification of 'illiteracy', this time limited to rural areas, of 43% in 1999. This figure derives from numbers who have completed what they call 'a recognised literacy course'. It accords, roughly, with the last government census of Usulután, carried out in 1992, whose estimated 'illiteracy' figures for those over 5 years old living then in rural Usulután were 45.6% for men, and 47.4% of women. The qualification for being considered literate in this census was the 'ability to write and read a paragraph, independently of whether or not [the person] has attended a centre of formal education.'[176]

Thus we see that the 'problem of illiteracy' as constructed by stakeholders in Usulután is founded on a set of labels whose meanings and encompassings remain unclear. What, for example, does it mean to 'have completed' a literacy course? What kind of paragraph identifies one as 'literate' and how does this relate to the kinds of demands an individual encounters in daily life?

In response to such forceful identifications of the 'illiteracy problem', in 1992 COMUS decided to begin a programme of adult literacy in its communities of responsibility. Lacking the requisite knowledge and experience, it called on the expert help of CIAZO, by now well established as a leader in popular education projects in El Salvador. Coincidentally, CIAZO had at this time been approached by ActionAid London regarding potential research sites for a new design of literacy learning methodology, REFLECT.[177] In 1993, therefore, ActionAid, CIAZO and COMUS worked together to develop and implement the REFLECT methodology in Usulután.

This study is not, as has been made clear, any sort of evaluation or assessment of REFLECT, nor does it constitute a study of literacy acquisition through its means. REFLECT's relevance for this text lies in its role as a vehicle for the discourses around and practices of literacy of the local stakeholders of the popular sector. Because of this, and for the additional reason that its theory and implementation are by now well known among literacy scholars,[178] the nature of REFLECT in Usulután will not be discussed in detail here. Appendix 1 provides an

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[175] Salvadoran Ministry of Education (1999); advertisement taken out by the outgoing government in the national press proclaiming that the lowest level of illiteracy in history had been reached
[176] From Usulután census (1992) pVIII
[177] Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques
[178] Cobden *op. cit.* provides a very good discussion of REFLECT in relation to Freirean theory; see also Dyer and Choksi *op. cit.* for an empirical experience with REFLECT in India

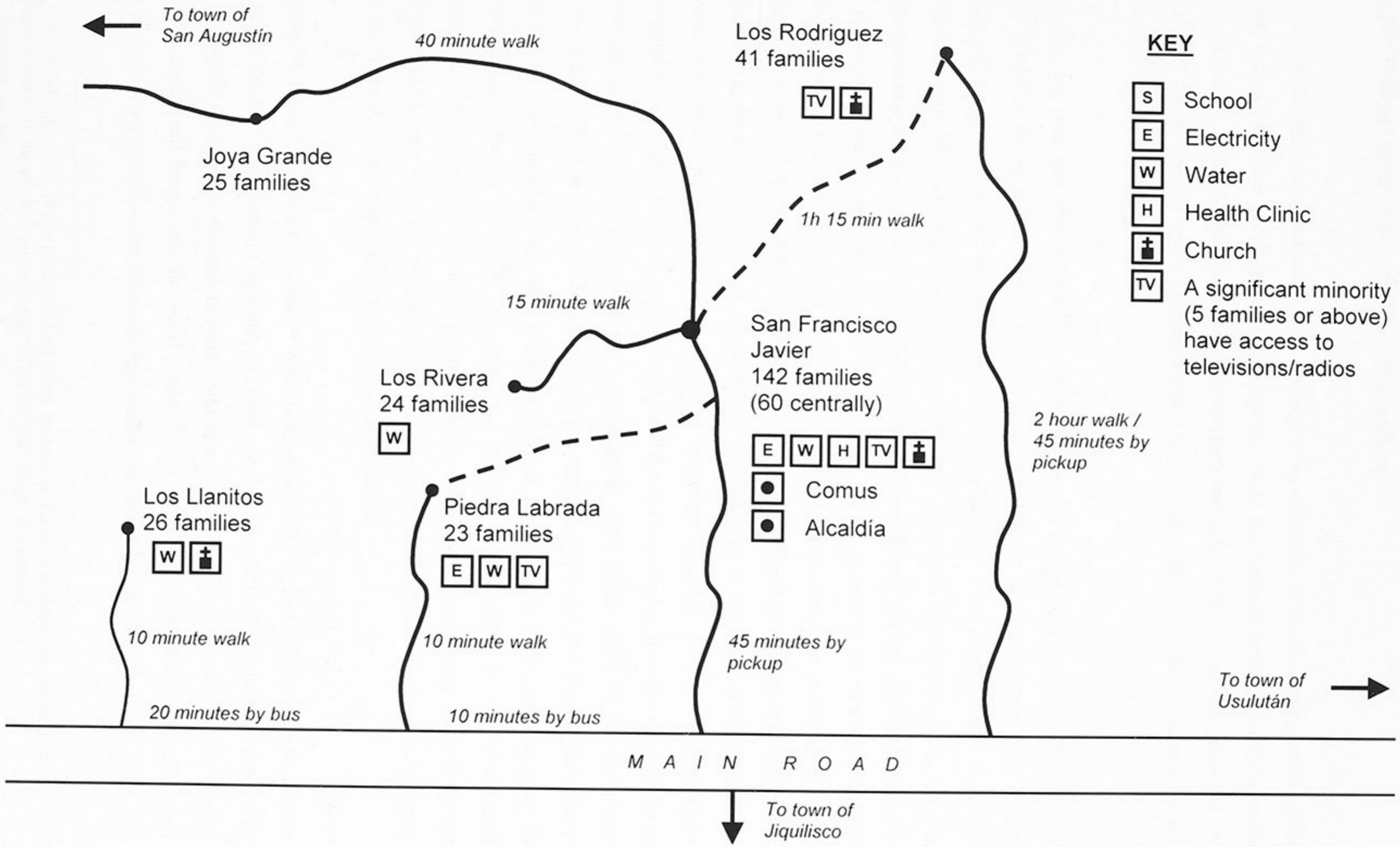
overview, but it will be sufficient to state at this point that its basis as a Freirean / participatory rural appraisal (PRA)-shaped programme found a natural harmony with the ideological and social aims of both CIAZO and COMUS in the immediate aftermath of the signing of the Peace Accords. In the heightened political climate post-war, with ideals of unity and mobilisation remaining a powerful dynamic on the political left and within its associated grassroots organisations, the impetus for a 'liberation' approach to literacy was a very strong dynamic. The REFLECT process was taken up within COMUS and CIAZO with considerable fervour.[179]

There were, however, several aspects of the REFLECT process in Usulután during 1999, initially and somewhat naively categorised by the researcher as 'implementational' issues, which shaped both fieldwork and this resulting text. It was apparent, for example, that people's reactions to the literacy classes within communities diverged considerably from both local accounts of events in the early 1990s and ActionAid's own 1996 evaluation.[180] It proved difficult to actually establish literacy circles, with people often expressing interest but then subsequently not turning up for classes. Where classes did run relatively constantly, membership was relatively low, with some groups comprising just 3 or 4 regular attendees, and with an average of only 6 to 8 members. For various reasons, follow-up visits by the COMUS literacy 'promoters', Margarita, Robin and Juancito, were realised considerably less frequently than once a month. The agricultural season also played a significant role; mid-May to early July is the busiest time of year for Salvadoran cultivators, with land needing to be sown and planted. By late August, only 11 literacy circles were still in operation, albeit intermittently, from the original 21, including those in the 5 communities selected for this study.

The significance of such events, conceptualised by COMUS and CIAZO as 'difficulties' and not immediately understood by the researcher for their entirely coherent place within the social fabric of Usulután, will be explored in subsequent chapters. Their relevance here lies in their role in shaping the processes from which this text has been created. The following section will discuss these processes, focusing first on the choice of communities in which this text is grounded. The map on the following page provides a pictorial representation of the geographical arena of this experience.

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[179] CIAZO have adopted REFLECT with such enthusiasm that one of its booklets thanks the key REFLECT architect in El Salvador 'for initiating utopia'!
[180] Archer and Cottingham (1996)


To town of
San Augustín
40 minute walk
Joya Grande
25 families
Los Rodriguez
41 families
TV
1h 15 min walk
15 minute walk
Los Rivera
24 families
W
San Francisco
Javier
142 families
(60 centrally)
E W H TV
Comus
Alcaldía
2 hour walk /
45 minutes by
pickup
Los Llanitos
26 families
W
Piedra Labrada
23 families
E W TV
10 minute walk
10 minute walk
45 minutes by
pickup
20 minutes by bus
10 minutes by bus
To town of
Usulután
M A I N R O A D
To town of
Jiquilisco
KEY
S School
E Electricity
W Water
H Health Clinic
Church
TV A significant minority
(5 families or above)
have access to
televisions/radios

2.10 'Telling' cases: selecting the communities

Fieldwork in 1999 was conducted from the beginning of March to late December of the same year, with a two-week break in August (according with the national holidays in El Salvador and COMUS' annual break) to consult supervisors and refresh thinking. This mirrored the period of the REFLECT cycle (March to late October) and the rainy, therefore agricultural, season (May to late November).

Initially, the plan had been to live in a single community, rather than in the small village of San Francisco Javier at their centre, and to travel from here to other communities on a daily basis. However, this proved non-viable for two main reasons. First was the issue of safety; COMUS were adamant that it would be excessively dangerous for the researcher to live within a community, even if space could be potentially be found. To have insisted upon this at the start of the research experience would have meant alienating its extremely helpful sponsors. Further was the question of logistics; as will be clear from the map above, all the communities are reachable from the central village but travelling between them is difficult in some cases, impossible in others, requiring backtracking to the village of San Francisco Javier. Walking alone to communities was not an option COMUS staff would themselves contemplate for safety reasons, even in daylight. This made returning from literacy circles in communities in late afternoon or evening problematic even when living in San Francisco Javier and would have been a near-insurmountable constraint if domiciled outside the village. Thirdly, in order to gain an ongoing global view of wider events and dynamics, such as relationships between COMUS, the *alcaldías* and the communities, it was considered important to be located at a central point. Finally, to be based permanently away from the village would have severely restricted involvement with COMUS which, as will be seen, eventually turned out to be central to the entire experience.

Opting to live in the village however – with its running water and (if infrequent) bus service – occasioned a considerable amount of guilt. Many researchers conducting nominally ethnographic or in-depth research in rural areas seem in fact to live in the nearest metropolis, making occasional forays into the rural zones.[181] The danger of what Chambers calls 'rural development tourism'[182] were however somewhat alleviated by the fact that San Francisco

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[181] Robinson-Pant *op. cit.* raises an interesting point, that the NGO staff involved in her study all preferred to stay in the capital, just as many COMUS staff do in El Salvador.
[182] Chambers *op. cit.*

Javier is by any definition rural, as will be clear from the map above; it is moreover a point of central focus for the communities, with many people passing through it at some point during each month. In compensation for not actually living in the communities several overnight stays took place there each week; Appendix 2 gives sample weekly timetables taken from fieldwork diaries.

To return to the discussion in Chapter 1 above, the question arises about the use of the term 'community' to describe a case site in this context. Within this text, it will be employed to describe a primarily geographical relationship. People adopt as one of their self-identifiers the name of their community; it is this sense that the word will convey here. It is important to distinguish between the different usages afforded the term locally in Usulután; many of those who actually live in such communities – fully cognisant of the tensions and differences within them – can sometimes adopt this primarily geographical sense, while the construction placed upon it by members of COMUS and CIAZO and those community members with alliances to these groups often reflects their own ideologies of political unity; *comunidad* holding a sense of 'the united people'. Similarly, it is important to reiterate here that communities in Usulután do not exist as bounded sites of social relations and ideology, but rather as fluid, constantly-changing locales which operate in a state of flux, through social networks of kinship, friendship and obligation flowing within and between them.

Owing to the 'difficulties' outlined above, it was decided to spend the first two months visiting as many communities as possible, staying for short periods in the communities where necessary, and to focus in on case study sites later in the cycle when a clearer idea was available of which literacy groups were likely to be continuing. Although this text is not a study, as has been made clear, of literacy acquisition, nor was conceptualised as such at its beginning, it was considered important to gain understanding of how the learning process functioned over time within communities, to try to learn about people's perceptions of literacy and the discourses they placed around it. This progressive focusing of field sites, viewed initially as a research 'problem', actually revealed as time went on its advantage of providing an overview of most of the communities with which COMUS worked, the sorts of relationships in which they were engaged, and thence offered a much broader basis for understanding. It also had the benefit of creating contacts who, in some cases, provided 'references' for other communities through the social networking system, with the result that relatively often the researcher found herself arriving effectively 'pre-approved'.

Factors influencing the choice of research sites, then, were necessarily initially convenience ones. The most significant of these was that their literacy circles appeared likely to continue through to October or November. Also, they had to be locations which, if the agency transport did not visit there at least weekly, were reachable by public transport or were within walking distance on a safe track. This did not necessarily mean geographically close, but certain paths in the area were known as physically very dangerous and these communities could not be reached, even by COMUS staff, without transport and armed protection.

Within this overall category there were a range of possible locations. Since the value of the analysis here lies in its 'explanatory power', there was no intention of searching out 'typical' communities or cases. Instead, attention was focussed more on the interesting, the different and what Mitchell calls the 'telling',[183] as ways into exploring theoretical issues in the field of literacy studies more generally. Therefore, a range of factors were identified as sources of interest during the site selection process, and communities were chosen for representing different aspects or extents of these features. These include: extent of links to COMUS and other NGOs; range of economic conditions; degree of out-migration; levels of relatives overseas (which impact considerably on economic conditions); Church presence; extent of co-operation with the local mayor; political involvement and sympathies. It is important to clarify, though, that this study should not be regarded as focussing only on these five case sites. In fact, through the first two months of visits to a wide range of communities, by regular presence in the COMUS offices and also via the many inter-community activities it was possible to attend, the opportunity came to meet and get to know many other people. The conversations generated added considerably to the study, creating ideas and insights and indications. The research should therefore be viewed as the study of a phenomenon – communicative practices - within a setting – rural Usulután – focusing particularly on five special cases,[184] with all the limitations and advantages that this implies.

The communities all share the common backdrop in social, political, historical and economic terms described above. Income derives largely from subsistence farming and from that turbulent 'informal economy,' both of which offer only sporadic opportunities. None of the communities, except where mentioned, consist of anything other than houses, one of which may operate as a small shop. All suffer from economic scarcity, especially in the dry season (November to March) when agricultural work is only infrequently available. From most,

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[183] Mitchell (1984) p203

[184] See Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) for a discussion of the distinctions between a 'case' and a 'setting'

there is considerable male migration to the cities and in some cases, to the US. All the communities 'co-operate' with COMUS, that is, receive aid from them and work with them in their social and economic development programme, and all have been badly hit in recent years by climactic effects, including annual flooding and 1998's Hurricane Mitch, which has severely affected agricultural production. There exist, of course, varying power structures and interest groups within each individual community; these will be explored in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 below, as they relate to communicative practices.

In focusing on the individual and the different, it would be inappropriate here to rank the communities from, for example, the most 'traditional' to the most 'developmental' as Doronila does in the Philippines.[185] Instead, the focus will rest on their individual characteristics, described in detail in Appendix 3. Since this study focuses on practices, and therefore includes dialogue with many people in the communities, no classificatory list will be presented here of 'literacy learners'; this would be a divisive labelling in itself, since learning takes place, as will be described, in many ways and for many people outside the 'learning episode'[186] of the literacy class. Instead, they will be identified by name in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. The following table sets out the key characteristics of interest of each community within its social milieu.

Name of community	*No. of families*	*Distinguishing features*
Los Rivera	24	Extremely close social and historical ties to COMUS. 22 beneficiaries of the land transfer process, a high proportion. Currently a high degree of cooperation with the agency; going through the legalisation process, with COMUS support. An active Board of Directors. Stakeholders = COMUS / mayor of San Fancisco Javier (ARENA)
Piedra Labrada	23	Heavy degree of male and female out-migration, particularly to the US, which adds to the wealth of some families, so the community is more sharply divided economically than most. Also, some families are part of a legalised land co-operative, which adds to their relative wealth. No clear Board of Directors, though, and fewer ties to COMUS historically than other communities. No-one from this community is involved in COMUS' political activities and many are ARENA sympathisers. Stakeholders = COMUS / mayor of Jiquilisco (ARENA)
Los Llanitos	26	The degree of poverty is extreme. The community largely comprises tied workers who rent land. The majority of families are headed by single mothers. The community is legalised, with COMUS help, but the Board of Directors only comprises two active members. Has only been involved with COMUS for 2 years; is closely linked to other NGOs too. Stakeholders = close to COMUS / other NGOs / mayor of Jiquilisco ARENA

[185] Doronila *op. cit.* In contrast, Aikman's study of Arakmbut communities in Peru offers a more subtle analysis, creating a typology in terms of degrees of cultural erosion resulting from the degree of 'destructive' contact they have experienced (Aikman *op. cit.*)
[186] Rogers (1997)

Los Rodriguez	41	Powerful evangelical church presence with most families attending regularly. The community is relatively poor, but divided, with some families receiving help from the US. It is characterised by its disorganisation – the Board of Directors is in dispute with each other, so there is little co-operation with COMUS. There are many ARENA sympathisers here too. Stakeholders = COMUS to some extent / the evangelical Church / mayor of Jiquilisco (ARENA)
Joya Grande	25	The community consists of a small co-operative, the members of which who moved there 3 years ago to work the land. Many of the people are very pro-FMLN, therefore the community has strong ties with COMUS. The co-operative are in a legal struggle to gain title to the land, with COMUS help. The degree of poverty is extreme, since the agriculture suffers from maize-buyers in the local town who give deliberately low prices. However, they have a good relationship with the local mayor, who is FMLN, and who gives assistance with such projects as adding stones to the path to the community. Stakeholders = COMUS / the mayor of San Augustín, (FMLN)

The above discussion has set the scene of the research and described some of the webs of ideology and structures of power that render it an interesting location for the study of communicative practices and discourses. The following chapter will consider how the research was conducted within the communities described above; that is, the experiences that have shaped this text.

Chapter 3: The dialogical plain: An approach to studying culture

A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning; they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures...Without one's own questions one cannot creatively understand anything other or foreign.....Such a dialogic encounter of two cultures does not result in merging or mixing. Each retains its own unity and open totality, but they are mutually enriched.[187]

It seems likely that whatever use ethnographic texts will have in the future....it will involve enabling conversations across societal lines...that have grown progressively more nuanced, more immediate and more irregular. The necessary thing....is to enlarge the possibility of intelligible discourse between people quite different from one another...and yet contained in a world where, tumbled as they are into endless connection, it is increasingly difficult to get out of each other's way.[188]

As both the above extracts illustrate, the medium of dialogue creates a plain on which two cultures[189] can meet and reveal meaning. The struggle to evoke understandings within another culture is, therefore, or should be, an essentially dialogical one.

These two quotes bring into focus some of the issues which lie at the heart of this study. There is the theme of the meanings and questions that the meeting of two cultures through dialogue reveals. There is the renegotiation and recreation of understandings and relationships. There is the ethical nature of the dialogue that takes place and by extension the question of ownership – whose discourse and whose research? This chapter will address some of these issues, in order to make explicit the conceptions, ideologies and values that underlie this text. In doing so, it does not purport to offer any 'answers' to the kinds of common problems that arise in this sort of work. Instead, it acknowledges that in searching to discover and evoke meanings that lie within another world, we both begin and end with questions. It hopes only to make some of those questions explicit.

The chapter begins by considering conceptual and methodological approaches to exploring literacy practices, and then moves on to discuss some of the philosophical and ideological issues confronted specifically by cross-cultural researchers. It then discusses 'how' data was generated in Usulután – approaches to the process – and, crucially, how this was mediated by

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[187] Bakhtin (1986) p7
[188] Geertz (1988) p147
[189] This study does not purport to study 'culture', which is of course an enormously contested term, but rather to examine only some aspects of signification within another context. The word is taken here in the sense of Geertz's often-quoted phrase: as the different 'webs of significance' that people spin ((1973) *op. cit.* p5)

the role and presence of the researcher. Finally, it appraises the strategic decisions taken in the field, and reflects on how these affected different aspects of the research.

3.1 Selecting a strategy: conceptual and methodological beginnings.

As is clear from the discussion in Chapter 2 above, the New Literacies model argues that, as social / ideological practices, and thereby embedded in webs of social, political, economic and historical forces, the study of literacies requires 'detailed, in-depth accounts of cultural practice in different cultural settings.'[190] Studies in the New Literacies model, including most of those discussed above, therefore aim to take an ethnographic approach, following from the long tradition of studies of communicative practices within anthropology. [191]

Yet this argument by itself does not automatically imply that the ethnographic tradition must, or should, be followed. It might seem, for example, that a case study approach would be equally suited to investigating an ideological model of literacy in a given setting. However, case studies do not, in themselves, necessarily indicate a more process-based model of study; they have very often been used according to the productionist discourse of education, or, more quantitatively, to 'provide *evidence* of the *effect* of literacy programmes on *social, economic and personal change*' [italics added].[192] An ethnographic approach which emphasises a commitment to dialogue may, on the other hand, help lead to a fuller understanding and evocation of social process through its recognition of talk as both a reflector and a generator of social practice and as the site and mediator of meaning.

Let us return then to Bakhtin's quote at the start of this chapter: meaning, to reiterate, is created and uttered through dialogue; it is through the meeting of two cultures on the plain of dialogue that the 'other or foreign' is revealed. In searching to understand the something foreign of Usulután, then, let us consider what 'dialogue' means as it relates to Eagleton's

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[190] Street (1993) *op. cit.* p1

[191] Including folklorists, ethnographers of communication and so on (for example Hymes (1981); Sweeney (1987); Howard-Malverde (1990), (1997)). However, studies of literacy – even those nominally taking a social practice approach to literacy – which claim an ethnographic methodology sometimes undermine the principles of ethnography as defined here. See for example Doronila's study, mentioned above, which emphasizes the value of its ethnographic approach, but which in fact uses a range of semi-structured interviews and psychological attitude measurement tests. The notion that such an approach might generate the kind of 'thick description' which is the hallmark of ethnographic data is completely untenable (Doronila *op. cit.*)

[192] Bown *op. cit.* p28

and Bakhtin's notions of discourse, explored above, and consider how this can create a powerful conceptual basis from which to engage in the experience we call ethnography.

Within the concept of discourse for Bakhtin comes that of dialogising. Discourse is essentially dia-logic; that is, it is made up of words already spoken, in other socio-ideological settings. Polyphony, for Bakhtin, is the process by which the speaker or narrator involves him- or herself in reporting others' words, with varying degrees of directness. It is the representation of others' discourse by the speaker or author. Verbalised meaning emerges in the practice of speaking or writing; these are enunciative processes in which symbols are invested with value for their authors. Thus, there is no such thing as a neutral word; in speaking, we are embarking on a process of dialogue with others from our own social standpoint. Any conceptualisation of dialogue also, of course, includes the role of the listener / interlocutor. Bakhtin points out that this is not a neutral position since any understanding is necessarily imbued with response; 'the listener becomes the speaker'.[193] Thus, the process of dialogue, including silence, is one of interacting ideologies.

Through engaging in dialogue or 'speech events'[194] then, as in a process of 'reading' another culture in the Geertzian sense, we can come to 'creatively understand' the meaning of the something foreign. In the process, the listener / reader / interlocutor – the ethnographer – becomes the speaker, or the voice of events. The ethnographic text itself becomes the site of challenge and struggle, where meanings meet and ideologies engage in contest.

Yet Trinh dismisses ethnographic method as 'gossip about other people's gossip,'[195] that is, telling stories about other people's stories, and certainly we are reminded that Aristotle's *anthroplogien* can be translated as little more than 'idle talk' or 'tattle tales'.[196] Trinh's rejection draws the distinction between legitimate gossip, or that which lies within a 'real' speech community, and illegitimate gossip, which is transported by the ethnographer across the boundaries of culture, community, ethnicity, society. This distinction assumes the innocuousness of gossip on the one hand and its perniciousness on the other. But neither such

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[193] Bakhtin (1986) *op. cit.* p68
[194] Conceived as 'a happening composed of participants, setting, intentions, and other social and linguistic elements' (Agar (1980) pp91-92)
[195] Trinh (1989) pp67-70. 'Gossip' here is taken as the placing of information, conveyed through dialogue, into the public domain
[196] Illich and Sanders *op. cit.* p3

assumption may in fact hold true within each separate world of researcher and participant; furthermore, assuming a proprietary stance towards gossip – that it some way belongs only within the community of its generation – is directly opposed to the spirit of talk itself; the gossiping voice asserts through its very act that information stands not as individual property, but belongs in the public domain. In this sense, gossip and conversation provide the model for a reflexive, dialogical, critical ethnology; the ethnographer's gossip commits itself to the public world and accepts the risk inherent in this act.

It becomes clear then that the choice of methodology for researching discursive strategies is not simply a technical decision, but rather an ideological choice in itself. This choice is a deliberate rejection of a positivist paradigm that emphasizes neutrality, objectivity and people as the 'subjects' of research, and which disregards power relations. In contrast to positivistic ideals, this study aims to work 'by the light of local knowledge'[197] and is rooted in reflexive theoretical principles.[198] It attempts to engage in depth with the life worlds of the people involved, seeking to understand and develop accounts of the 'complex webs of significance'[199] and thick descriptions which are the hallmarks of ethnographic research. In its specific focus on communicative practices, it is perhaps more accurately described as 'using ethnographic methods' or 'taking an ethnographic approach' than as claiming a misleading status as a full ethnography of people's lives.[200]

It is also, in its commitment to dialogue, part of what some writers have termed a 'dialogical anthropology',[201] where the cultural evocations embodied in ethnographic texts are perceived as the negotiated outcomes of the interactions between researcher and participants.[202] It aims to create a 'world, or an understanding of the differences of two worlds, that exist between persons who were indeterminately far apart, in all sorts of different ways, when they started out their conversation'[203] rather than to claim the untenable status of some studies' 'negotiated and consensual analysis of community life and literacy practice'.[204] As such, it is part of an ethnographic vision where 'paradigms of experience and interpretation are yielding to discursive paradigms of dialogue and polyphony'.[205]

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[197] Geertz (1983) p167
[198] Spradley (1979); Agar (1986)
[199] Geertz (1973) *op. cit.* p5
[200] See Green and Bloome (1996)
[201] Harvey (1992) *op. cit.*
[202] See for example Agar (1980) *op. cit.;* Clifford (1988); Clifford and Marcus (1986); Rabinow and Sullivan (1979); Geertz (1973) *op. cit.*
[203] Tedlock (1987) p388
[204] Doronila *op. cit.* p185
[205] Clifford (1988) *op. cit.* p49

Yet, as we have discussed, dialogue is not a neutral process of information transfer. Its role in the production of ideology renders it imperative to discuss the power relations involved in conversation, something that this chapter aims to make explicit. Cross-cultural ethnography is a branch of research which raises a number of concerns relating to aims and status, both ideological and philosophical. The following discussion therefore addresses some of these issues.

3.2 Philosophical and ideological approaches to cross-cultural research

Engaging in a dialogue which is conducted across barriers of culture, class and sometimes gender too, might lead many to question its validity as research.[206] Certainly, it is true that there are difficulties of power and meaning / representation / interpretation. However, this study will assert, along with Radcliffe that, if questions of power, meaning and so on are properly and rigorously addressed, then they need not prevent a valid, or, it is hoped, interesting, account being offered.[207]

The primary philosophical issue concerning cross-cultural study is that of the realist versus relativist divide.[208] In selecting their standpoint vis-à-vis these philosophical positions, researchers need to find a way through the cross-cultural maze of differing realities and beliefs while producing a reasonably coherent vision of a social process. Hammersley helpfully conceptualises a middle ground between the two perspectives which he calls 'subtle realism', intended specifically for ethnographic research. His vision retains from the realist school the notion that research examines independent, knowable phenomena. But it also denies the realist tenet that researchers have direct access to these phenomena, and that they can be reproduced in some way which is uniquely appropriate. Instead, 'subtle realism' admits the relativist position that all knowledge is constructed through human and cultural assumptions, which must be relied upon in research. Hammersley's conceptual framework thus rejects the notion that knowledge must be defined as beliefs whose validity we know with certainty, replacing it with the concept of knowledge as beliefs about which we can be reasonably confident.[209] Such an approach appears particularly relevant to cross-cultural research, as it allows the ethnographer to locate their work as a created view of a certain

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[206] See for example Mohanty (1991) and Ong *op. cit.*
[207] Radcliffe (1994).
[208] Hammersley (1992) offers for a useful analytical account of this divide which is beyond the remit of this study to repeat here
[209] *Ibid.*

social reality, but to hold this subject to the cultural and ideological web which shapes that different world.

We have argued that ethnography – like all social research - is itself a product of dialogue, a social construction, formed out of the realities and ideologies of the interlocutor. This factor has at times been its greatest weakness, due to the previous reluctance of some of its creators to admit the biases from which their texts have been constructed, instead presenting accounts as somehow 'objective' or 'true'. Yet ethnography, like its raw stuff of conversation, can never be free from power relations, partly because the examination of social phenomena necessarily means the confronting of issues of ideology and control, and also because creating ethnography out of talk is in itself an exercise of power.

> Research, like talk, always carries with it a political and moral dimension because no-one can hold at bay the real power relations that are always its context (and generally its intention as well). Good, critical, reflexive ethnography at least carries with it certain correctives: an awareness of the dimensions of local and global power; a willingness to treat those power relations critically, antagonistically; an understanding of the role of ideology in producing knowledge of any sort; a recognition that one-way observation is always a power relationship.[210]

In its explicit emphases on power and ideology, the ethnographic model of research into literacy described above may well acknowledge its assumptions by default through the author's own interpretation of power, authority and social differentiation. As such the text becomes, as the quote at the start of this chapter suggests, a dialogue between perspectives on and of power. Nonetheless, acknowledging assumptions and values intrinsic to research renders it less likely that accounts will become ideological tools in which any one version shaped by particular values is presented as if this were the single, true version of social reality. Moreover, it will make clear whether any given piece of research is to be assumed 'action' research – a particularly relevant question to an ethnographic approach, where psychological involvement in people and place means that the creative and dialogical processes which build the research can blur easily into advocacy and efforts to find solutions to problems.[211] The following account of the processes which have created this research intends to do precisely this, thereby clarifying the status and aims of the text.

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[210] Lancaster (1992) p73
[211] Forester (1993); Thomas (1993)

3.3 'How' – techniques and methods

Speech, dialogue, conversation and listening all lie at the heart of this ethnographic experience and its resulting text. Yet the traditional tool of the ethnographer when exploring social process is, ironically, participant *observation*. There are various models of this, some reflecting a greater degree of personal involvement than others, but all share the common basis of reflexivity. This can work both to the advantage and the disadvantage of the researcher; Eriksen calls participant observation 'a vaguely defined research technique, [which] may serve as a convenient blanket term to conceal both ethical and methodological shortcomings'.[212] Consequently, this section will attempt to lay down with openness all the ethical and methodological issues which arose during fieldwork.

While watching and listening are important aspects of this study, as will become clear, the notion of engagement in dialogue implies a more political process than a purely 'observational' stance. There have been a number of typologies drawn up for various styles of participant observation,[213] ranging from the 'complete participant' model, impossible for a foreigner and which in any case has inherent dangers of over-involvement, to the 'complete observer', which requires no engagement at all. Yet none of these seem to capture the ideological commitment implied by a dialogical approach.

The obvious road down which to turn here is that of critical research.[214] Cameron *et al* construct three political positions for the researcher; they characterise 'ethical research' as research *on* and 'advocacy research' as research both *on* and *for*. 'Empowering research' in their model is that *on, for* and also *with* (the researched).[215] This framework at least offers a clear delineation of stances, allowing for transparency and explicitness of approach. Yet where ethnography is perceived as the discovery of some aspects of a social world, the researcher cannot, nor perhaps should be, committed to any one of these static positions, since commitments and values can and do change as the discovery process is underway.[216] Just as talk is fluid, so are its underlying constructs. Moreover, within a cross-cultural study such as this, to assume one or other such methodological stance would be to ironically uncritically accept patriarchal / ruling elite patterns of oppression from the start. Such

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[212] Eriksen (1995) p26; he cites the publication of Malinowski's diaries as a case in point
[213] See Vulliamy et al (1990)
[214] in the mould of Habermas (1993) or feminist researchers
[215] Cameron et al (1992 p22). For 'empowering' research see also the model described by Van Maanen (1995) or Crawley *op. cit.*
[216] see Van Maanen (1995) *op. cit.* for a discussion

assumptions by a total outsider to the context raise immediate difficulties; there are many sources of oppression within any given society, which operate in a range of complex and subtly interweaving ways.

Yet the imperative towards critical research is powerful. Lancaster in his study of Nicaraguan families during the civil war, writes from an unashamedly partisan perspective; 'In a world where the strong overwhelm the weak, it would be irresponsible of me to write about the subjects I am pursuing without a political...imperative. Partisan analysis is the only resistance to power that a writer, as a writer, can offer.'[217] These echoes of Auden's dictum that 'All the poet can do is to warn' serve as a cogent reminder of the powers and the dangers of authorship. Certainly, this account is partisan and critical in its ideological commitments, as has been discussed. But it does not claim to stand as action or 'empowering' research in the framework described above, in that it does not seek to create directly an agenda for change. Instead, it is critical within Barton and Hamilton's framework, in its striving to reveal and question the dominant discourses around literacy, and in uncovering and documenting communicative practices which often go unrecognised in these narratives.[218]

In this respect, this text has affinities with feminist and other research on marginalized groups. But the aim, laudable in itself, of emphasising the voices of those oppressed by patriarchy or racism or other dimensions of discrimination, has in practice often resulted in rendering people simply as objects of scrutiny. Commitment to a dialogic methodology, such as that elected here, implies the evocation and critiquing of actors' own narrated lives; not the assumption of oppression but the exploration of how constraints and limitations are managed and traversed in daily life.

Where, then, does the locus of interaction lie between this text and those lives from which it is created? We return, perhaps inevitably, to Geertz's famous analogy; 'The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong.'[219] Thus, this text is two things; it is in a metaphorical sense the reading of an assemblage of cultural texts - those of the people of Usulután – and, simultaneously, it is a text created from a more literal kind of assemblage, texts spoken and written within the locale of study. Both of these sorts of texts can be considered as literacy and discursive artefacts, a term which reflects their status as

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[217] Lancaster *op. cit.* p xviii.
[218] Barton and Hamilton (1998) *op. cit.* p6
[219] Geertz (1973) *op. cit.* p452

'cultural artefacts'[220] embedded in social practices. They are the written, the read and the uttered; the rumoured and the whispered. They are jokes, arguments, appeals, admonishments, stories, diatribes and life histories. They are political acts in a landscape of struggle. All these kinds of texts reflect and illuminate the many different voices which fill the landscape of Usulután and which vie to be heard in the growing confusion. They do not, in their 'fixing' within this secondary text, aim to create an 'insider account', tumbling as this would into what Geertz calls ethnographic ventriloquism.[221] Instead, they simply reflect various dimensions of the image in which this text consists.[222]

As discussed above, dialogue is, of course, never really fixed or somehow immutable; it reflects changing social reality and views. As such, it changes in content, tone and meaning over periods of time. During fieldwork, the moment and context of talk also proved highly significant, with individuals reflecting certain views or positions depending on who was present, in which social process their talk was embedded, and so on. It was important, therefore, to build into the conceptual approaches to the methodology a recognition of the significance of diversity and dissonance and the role talk played in this; as its reflector or as its instigator. Dialogue could, and did, as will be discussed below, act as a means of discovery for both cultures involved.

Ongoing conversation naturally implies the construction of relationships, which require a degree of commitment and participation on the part of the researcher. This raises the issue of 'immersion' – another traditional ethnographic tool – and how far such relationships can be constructed across cultural and social borders, as well as the ethical questions implicit in such gestures. As Judith Stacey questions in a widely cited and influential paper, 'I find myself wondering whether the appearance of greater respect for and equality with research subjects in the ethnographic approach masks a deeper, more dangerous form of exploitation?'[223] Anthropologists in particular are often tempted to 'go native', as some researchers put it,[224] to claim the foreign culture as their own and the friendships built within this as somehow free of cultural and power constraints. But such an approach implies for this writer a peculiar sort of self-deception and artifice, as well as a considerable imposition on the people involved; no individual can truly cede their self to become another, and no relationship between two people of different cultures where a power dichotomy is involved can ever be truly equal.

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[220] Spradley *op. cit.*
[221] Geertz (1988) *op. cit.* p145
[222] The full list of dimensions on which data was generated can be found in Appendix 4
[223] Stacey (1988) p22
[224] Hammersley and Atkinson *op. cit.*

This text, then, rejects the traditional imperative to 'see through the eyes of the people studied' as both unrealistic, and conceptually and ethically flawed. Instead, its chosen view – and it is not claimed as any sort of answer – emerges from its understanding of dialogue; of two voices alternately speaking and listening, exchanging views, reinterpreting meanings, seeking insights, growing in understanding while, to return to Bakhtin's words at the start of this chapter, 'retaining its own totality'. This necessarily implies a distance between the two worlds; however, this is not the space of conventional social science which often ignores the research relationship while tipping its hat to standard ethical issues. Acknowledging difference in interests, it is asserted here, makes room for, rather than precluding, conversation.

This raises what Geertz calls the question of 'dispersed authorship';[225] the hope that ethnographic discourse can in some way be made heteroglossial, where the researched speak alongside and with equal volume to the researcher, a dilemma often captured within educational literature as 'whose research?' This is, of course, fundamentally a question of power relations, and one to which there is no simple answer, as Van Maanen's 'tales from the field' show.[226] Inescapably, the writer's chosen conceptual discourse shapes the text; moreover, since the researcher is engaged in debate and discussion with competing academic discourses, taking account of such intertextuality very likely implies a subordinate role for the voices of participants. In response to the dilemma, Krieger suggests that since the resulting manuscript will inevitably, no matter how oriented to participants' point of view, reflect mostly the choices, interests and concerns of the writer, researchers should openly acknowledge their interests and how they differ from those of participants rather than (futilely) attempting to subordinate their concerns.[227] This perhaps more realistic view also encourages the writer to take responsibility for the creation of the ethnography and the views and conclusions expressed within it. This text should therefore be assumed as part of the prerogatives of the researcher, who possessed the luxury of detaching herself from her everyday life, reflecting on experiences and processing these conceptually. As such, she alone is accountable for its shape and form, its insights and imperfections, its conjectures and its limitations.

The above section has been, in essence, a description of approaches taken to the 'data generation' process. As will be clear, this should not be viewed as the recording of static or

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[225] Geertz (1988) p145 *op. cit.*
[226] Van Maanen (1988)
[227] Krieger (1991)

'dead' pieces of information, but as a social process in itself. The data were not lying 'out there' in the field, waiting to be collected by the researcher, but were fashioned out of social transactions with men and women, through the dialogical process.

Admitting a status for ethnography as a social construction, built largely from the perceptions of the researcher and shaped by his or her ideologies, means that the fieldworker becomes the most significant aspect of the process. It is her presence and personality which not only defines which data should be generated but what is available to be explored at all. The following section outlines how this research was influenced at the data generation stage by this writer's presence, to render more explicit the events and constraints that have shaped this resulting text.

3.4 The role of the researcher: co-operant versus cultural stranger

While early ethnographic research aimed at an almost positivist notion of objectivity, recent work has emphasised the issue of reflexivity, on the basis that researchers form, for a moment in time, part of the social world they study.[228] As suggested, the ethnographer her- or himself is the most important 'scientific instrument' present, investing a good deal of his or her own personality in the process.[229] A dialogical model of research takes this point further by suggesting that the ethnography emerges from the meeting, as the first quote at the start of this chapter shows, of two different cultural worlds and that, as such, both worlds need to be made explicit. Thus, rather than engaging in futile attempts to eliminate the effects of the researcher completely, we should set about understanding them.

Miller asserts that dialogue itself is a form of ethics. 'The locus of ethical perspective and decision is in the interplay of self and other – in the dialogue'.[230] The dilemma of ethnography, then, in its search for understandings, is how to take simultaneously ethical positions towards both participants and science? No easy set of rules exists to answer this question. Merely waving flags about confidentiality and anonymity seems a superficial, unthoughtful response. Moreover, the concept of 'informed consent' encountered in the educational literature is in this kind of context oxymoronic; participants had, as will be discussed, differing ideas from the researcher as to what exactly they were consenting to.

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[228] Hammersley and Atkinson *op. cit.* p16
[229] Eriksen *op. cit.*
[230] Miller (1996) p131

Vulliamy's opinion that many ethical problems which arise in the course of developing country research 'cannot be resolved by recourse to general statements of ethical principles or professional codes of conduct...Rather, they are matters for individual conscience'[231] will resonate with anyone who has done fieldwork in a world such as this one. Engaging in this particular study, then, rather than 'solving' ethical problems, involved finding a way to encompass contradictions and to make peace with them.

Many of these contradictions emerged in this experience from the complexity of the ethnographer's role, which has been delineated by Ball as consisting in three aspects; the persona within the community, the data gatherer and the reflexive analyst.[232] In Usulután, however, this model underplays the intricacy of events; several other roles and dimensions were revealed too. This section therefore aims at making explicit some of these facets as they shaped the experience of ethnography, and, in doing so, highlight some of the ethical issues encountered in conducting such research into power, ironically from a position of power in the eyes of the participants.

During the initial two-month stage of getting to know people and building rapport, it became apparent that the question of the researcher's role was going to be of crucial importance for the research process. In the sensitive context of Usulután, any suggestion that her presence was somehow authority-related would serve as a powerful block to communication; the reserve with which its people view foreigners or other outsiders, stemming from a cultural emphasis on respect for authority and the experiences of the civil war, promised initially to make the generation of free dialogue difficult. The methodological literature proposes straightforward solutions to the dilemma, offering variations on the theme of researchers simply adopting a role which participants can 'relate to'.[233] But such resolutions are far more easily written about in a textbook that actually accomplished in the field; in Usulután at least, the gulf between a foreign university researcher and the people with whom the research was being conducted seemed initially so incomprehensibly vast that identifying a role the participants could 'relate to' appeared a matter for fantasy. Yet since defined social roles are so important in Usulután it was clearly an imperative to locate a status which participants would at least find comprehensible.

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[231] Vulliamy (1990a) *op. cit.* p112
[232] Ball (1993) p43
[233] Herschfield *et al* (1993) although they conceptualise this in terms of avoiding 'distortions' in data

In the initial phase of the research, the researcher was presented by members of the COMUS team to contacts in the community as a 'visitor'. However, this notion carries powerful assumptions – that of a foreign aid worker, who might bring funds and resources - and it was immediately obvious that this created a very specific and rather damaging relationship. Within a very short space of time, therefore, this was changed to an actually more accurate introduction as 'a student who was here to learn about adult literacy'. However, unlike the situation of Stephens in Nigeria, who found that the research 'ice' had been broken before him,[234] the waters of Usulután are effectively uncharted territory as far as fieldwork from foreigners goes, and it was soon painfully obvious that it was unclear to participants why anyone should wish to travel across an ocean to study their literacy classes at all, and indeed they found the notion disconcerting. It also raised an ethical question, since people were clearly likely to have differing understandings from the fieldworker as to what their participation in the research entailed.[235]

Initial field experiences were therefore centred very much around learning about others' expectations of the persona of the fieldworker. Despite serious concerns at the start, however, these difficulties of rapport soon lessened, albeit in rather accidental manner. As the researcher's involvement in the work of the agency deepened, mainly in an attempt to repay them for the enormous help and consideration they were offering, the mantle of the COMUS 'co-operant' was slipped upon her, a role familiar to agency staff and community members from one previous foreign volunteer and one visit from an ActionAid staff member during the REFLECT pilot project. Working with COMUS offered a powerful and effective form of sponsorship which, due to COMUS' closeness to the communities, guaranteed an entry on the basis of assumed shared concerns. The agency staff themselves readily accepted a volunteer fourth member of the education team, and within the second month of the research it was possible to operate as a full-time member of the education team, responsible for the maintaining the REFLECT programme in the communities selected as research sites. Thus, the ethnographic experience shifted more into the territory claimed by Shirley Brice-Heath, of conducting research in a locale in which one is personally involved.[236]

In terms of rapport with COMUS, the researcher's evident sympathy with some dimensions of their ideals and the taking on of duties as an equal team member meant that it was possible

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[234] Stephens (1990a)
[235] Dyer and Choksi draw attention to the this ethically grey area when they point out the difficulties of trying to conduct 'overt' participant observation when among people who are unfamiliar with the concept of research; the process therefore inevitably becomes somewhat covert (1997)
[236] Heath *op. cit.*

to develop a relationship of some degree of confidence and closeness, particularly with the three members of the education team. As with fieldwork in the communities, status as a foreigner eventually offered a certain licence once the initial icebreaking had taken place, although as a member of staff, the 'acceptable incompetent'[237] approach was certainly not a possibility in this arena. The 'well-meaning co-operant, who sometimes makes mistakes' was considerably more appropriate - and fitting. This persona allowed the researcher to attend all COMUS meetings as a team member, all CIAZO meetings and training sessions, including facilitator training, and also all maintenance and evaluation meetings of the literacy process at a 'zone-wide' level. It was also possible to attend CIAZO working weekends as a COMUS representative, to make visits to other grass roots organisations running the REFLECT process in nearby regions, and to act on several occasions as a trainer with CIAZO staff in other departments. This offered the opportunity to compare experiences with other literacy promoters of the region, as well as to explore any tensions between COMUS and CIAZO's perceptions of literacy and the acting out of communicative practices within communities. It also allowed for insights into how localised the findings of this study are, which will be discussed below.

Within the communities, becoming involved in local activities, whether formal or informal, also facilitated the dialogical / listening process. Hammock-making, cooking and bread-making, tomato-growing and coffee-picking were all opportunities for conversation but also means of building and reinforcing friendships, as was attendance at church and in schools.[238] In one community (Los Llanitos) the opportunity also arose to stand in for the literacy facilitator for a month, while he went away to work. Here again the association with COMUS proved invaluable, offering an entry into a wider range of groups and individuals that would otherwise probably have not been accessible. By being able to use the agency facilities to perform small services for people, such as typing up appeals for football shirts or loans (services which the COMUS staff were happy to perform as long as they were not busy, which was usually the case) the researcher's social circle was considerably widened. Consequently, it was possible to generate dialogue that added to and reinforced knowledge from the fieldwork's own 'special' communities. This highlights how the research process can become part of the social fabric for a period of time; the ethnographic experience itself mediates, as well as being mediated by, social interactions.

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[237] Lofland (1971)

[238] The point at which it was realized that these activities had 'paid off' in research terms - apart from their value in their own interest - was when people began to include the researcher in their joking and teasing, of which there is a great culture in El Salvador. This experience is reminiscent of Geertz, who found in Bali that 'to be teased is to be accepted' (Geertz (1973) *op. cit.* p416)

This raises, however, the question of the researcher being seen as a 'resource', and whether her wish to contribute was taken on by research participants as a means of accessing new knowledge and practical help.[239] As Harvey points out, the 'interactive nature of participant observation implies considerable autonomy for the researched at the moment of data collection and their agendas necessarily become part of the overall research process'.[240] This view suggests a certain equalising of power relations during the process, albeit a rather cynical one, with researcher and participant gaining what they can from the other. Experience in Usulután certainly showed instances of testing the researcher to see what gains could be accessed through her, and COMUS staff monitored and advised on this as regards community members. Within COMUS itself the new skills and knowledge brought in by a researcher were certainly capitalised on; however, this seems to the writer to be very fair trade for the support and help which was forthcoming from them as sponsors / gatekeepers.

As will be clear, then, the role of researcher in this experience was neither static nor predictable but negotiated and reconstructed in the field, operating constantly in a state of flux. Methodological reflexivity allows for a changing of roles and positions according to the exigencies of the moment, alternating between the insider and outsider experience, and experiencing both simultaneously. This marginal position of simultaneous insider-outsider can be a source of creative insight in itself; as the quote at the beginning of this chapter suggests, outside-ness can operate in itself as a powerful perspective for the understanding of a different world. To reiterate: 'In the realm of culture, outsideness is a most powerful factor in understanding. It is only in the eyes of *another* culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly'.

Sharing an identity with COMUS however was a potential source of over-rapport, with personal ideological persuasions being the major source of conflict. The researcher arrived in the field deeply sympathetic to COMUS' social cause at least, and initially was prone to accept without question their claims of full representation of and ideological support within the local rural population. It was only after the second month of fieldwork, when visits began to be made to the communities unaccompanied by COMUS staff, and by which time the 'foreign co-operant' identity had begun to reap rewards, that she began to question this view and become more orientated and sensitive towards the voices which surrounded her in the communities. After this point, recovering the 'outsider' aspect was assisted considerably by

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[239] Such as Robinson-Pant found in Nepal, where the NGOs she worked with wanted her to conduct formal appraisals of classes *op. cit.*
[240] Harvey *op. cit.* p75

the arrival of some key texts to the field, which served as reminders of the status of data as data, and not merely as daily events while undergoing the process of cultural absorption. A brief visit home in August to attend a conference and confer with supervisors also acted as a reminder of the status of fieldwork as fieldwork

Although the sponsorship of COMUS offered an entry and closer links to people in the communities, it also however brought difficulties of its own. The agency's decidedly ideological role in local communities, as discussed above, meant that accompanying assumptions of being a member of a particular political canon had to be actively negated. Status as a foreigner was helpful here; it was found that by adopting the less explicitly political stance of some other COMUS staff, and by expressing an interest in the sociopolitical context as a point of learning, rather than as an ideological commitment, it was gradually possible to carve out a role as someone who was committed to a general vision of social development but who did not 'know' about local politics. This aspect of the research persona inadvertently proved a goldmine; people appeared concerned to explain their understandings of the situation, and this text has benefited accordingly from multiple stories, histories and polemics, all from different points of view. The 'outsider' dimension also offered space for listening where a more 'inside' role could not; people seemed to feel relatively free to discuss with the researcher what they saw as the strengths and failings of both COMUS and its projects, including the literacy process. Thus, within the communities, data generation thus seemed to profit from both the COMUS and the 'foreigner' roles, with each informing and strengthening the other.

How then was this process shaped by the researcher's own personality, that key factor in a dialogic approach? Coffey and Atkinson record their surprise at how many anthropology academics, in their study, 'produced accounts expressing the personal qualities that are required of an anthropologist. There was little emphasis in their accounts on the importance of research methods techniques.'[241] Quite the reverse is the case in methodological textbooks of education, purportedly dealing with qualitative 'real world research' but where, generally, the idea seems to be to delete the personality of the researcher from the process as much as possible. The experience of this study has been that dialogical ethnographic fieldwork is shaped almost completely by personality; it is only through the closeness developed in conversation that the contours of the landscape become apparent in terms of what lies revealed, and what remains still hidden. Although the concealed may never become explicit,

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[241] Coffey and Atkinson (1996) p148

awareness and acknowledgement of its existence at least sheds light on the limitations of the understandings and meanings uncovered.

Within this particular experience it is considered that the researcher's own persona and characteristics provided a useful entry to dialogue. As a relatively young cultural stranger to the country, it was possible to adopt with considerable genuineness the 'ignorant outsider' role.[242] Had the researcher been much older or more 'formal' in her approach to fieldwork, it would probably have been much more difficult to build such relationships. Certainly, being female offered access into the lives of women which could definitely not have been achieved as a man, although to say that the researcher was identified merely 'as a woman' would be to present a very reductive version of others' perceptions of her, and no account at all of the differences in experiences and concepts of womanhood between fieldworker and participants.[243] The presence in the field of a male partner however at least made the issue of marital status readily comprehensible and 'fitting' within the cultural framework.[244] One barrier which could not be overcome, though, was the fact of being of childbearing age and yet childless – this was not easily accepted either by rural women or men and was never satisfactorily resolved despite varied attempts at its explanation, remaining a question of some curiosity until the day of departure.

The possibilities for rapport offered by the researcher's own characteristics raised, however, the ethical dilemma of how to keep in the minds of participants that they were engaged in the research process without an automatic distancing taking place. By trial and error it was eventually found that reminding people that their words were important for the 'study' was an effective way of maintaining the research hat. People were initially cautious, but many grew eventually to ask with seeming interest how the 'study' was coming along, and was there anything else the researcher needed to know. All appeared reassured by the notion that the study was focusing on everybody, without specific names, that it was a general discussion of social life in the area, and that anonymity was guaranteed – indeed, the choice of alias names and locations was a source of rapport-building in itself. As discussed, a matter of initial concern was whether the different concepts of research from its perception in Western universities meant that people differently perceived the process in which they were

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[242] Davies (1997) p143

[243] As Harvey *op. cit.* notes, gender identity draws on multiple masculinities, femininities and sexualities, with social meaning lying in the ways in which they cross-cut axes of class, ethnicity etc

[244] See Warren (1988) for accounts of female anthropologists who have found being present in the field while of marriageable age but without a partner to be a difficult barrier. This was also noted in Usulután during the exploratory visit

participating. However, in fact people's interpretations of the research process became sources of interest in themselves; many seemed to visualise the study as being primarily a work of solidarity for the communities and, as such, a piece of the social fabric of which they too could claim authorship and which they themselves could shape.

People's willingness to take on roles as research participants did not extend, however, to the breaking of social conventions, as the issue of note-taking in the field made clear. Participants appeared happy for notes to be taken during literacy classes 'for your study', but often became uncomfortable if the researcher began to write while we were engaged in dialogue, even though, as discussed, they were aware of their status as research participants. This has two aspects; Salvadoran culture, as will be explored below, attaches great importance to the exchange of oral information, and firstly not only would taking notes create the suspicion of official monitoring, something which has historically been a cause for great fear, but secondly it also was considered a social gaffe in that attention was being directed away from the conversation. Notes therefore had to be scribbled afterwards, during breaks away from the conversation and at any other convenient opportunity. This led to some initial concern that fieldnotes were rather piecemeal, with some data being neglected through physical inability to get it on paper. In order to circumvent this problem, it was therefore decided, with the naivety of the novice ethnographer, to tape record some interviews, with representatives of local stakeholders well as with a few key contacts in the communities. This presented no difficulty with the former groups, but while some individuals in the latter agreed with no apparent reluctance, they was a clear change in what they felt free to say on tape and in how comfortable they felt doing so. Had our relationships not developed over several months this difference would probably not have been immediately detectable to the researcher; as it was, however, the idea of taping within the communities was abandoned after a very few attempts. Such an experience highlights the dubiousness of some writers' declarations that 'everyone consented to be taped' without questioning the status of / considering the constraints on the dialogue that subsequently takes place.

3.5 Appraisal of the research process

In the light of experience, the main criticisms of the fieldwork on which this text is based are linked to the common difficulties of conducting cross-cultural research. Although it is considered that relatively close relationships were developed with many of the participants and the researcher is confident that the picture drawn reflects some dimensions at least of a

certain picture at a particular point in time, ultimately it is limited by what people elected to tell a foreigner. It is also, as indicated above, filtered through the lens of an individual's – the researcher's - own ideologies and values.

There also remains some dissatisfaction that the research participants fully understood the nature of the process in which they were involved. They were clear that they were taking part in 'a study' but it was generally assumed that this was linked to the work of COMUS and CIAZO, despite attempts to explain it to the contrary. Therefore, people had different ideas of the uses to which their words and voices would be put. Perhaps it would have been ethically more satisfactory to go in as a pure fieldworker, without becoming involved in COMUS or CIAZO, but an inability to explain the nature of Western academic fieldwork to participants who have no experience of this left little option than that chosen, and in any case this eased concerns about how to be able to 'trade back' with people and agencies. It does however raise a more general ethical question of the researcher's role in the ethnographic experience; it is often only by trial and error that an effective status for the researcher can be worked out, as in this case of a fortuitous metamorphosis from student (that is, foreign unknown) into agency co-operant. In contexts which do not contain such possibilities for entry, both research and its participants may suffer from a lack of clear understanding of roles; it is therefore an imperative that ethnographic reports contain a full analysis of the researcher's status, by what means this was achieved, and any changes their presence made within local social processes.

The question of ownership remains resolved only in the way it has been described above; ultimately, this text has been created by the writer from other people's words. Yet people did, once friendships had developed, seem to welcome the idea of having their story told; many individuals expressed this in an identical fashion, saying that 'the government' did not want to listen to the *campesinos*, and so it was good to have people 'in other countries' hear about their situation. Perhaps a principal value of this study, then, lies in making people *feel* that they were engaging in dialogue with someone from another, perceived as more powerful, world. Miller records people's sentiments that his research process had aided them in their reflections on life and their selves; a sort of therapeutic impact.[245] Such a claim cannot be made for this experience, yet it is certainly possible that an element of enhanced reflection may have formed part of the engagement in the dialogical process for some individuals. From the ethnographer's point of view, this particular research has also proven quintessentially

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[245] Miller *op. cit.* p140

ethical in that it has served as Habermas' 'aid to self reflection'[246] and offered the sense of, as Eriksen puts it, if not actually asking the right questions, then at least being close to the questions which matter.[247]

The emphasis of the New Literacies on ethnographic method is considered to be vindicated by this experience in Usulután, in that its ideology of small-scale observation over time allowed for close investigation of phenomena as complex and variable as power relations and social practices. While a more realist or positivist approach might regard its reflexivity as a danger, in that the ethnographic tool can lend itself to any biases or distortions of the researcher, the experience of this study has shown that this same fluidity, taken in conjunction with the limitations described, in fact added considerable depth to discoveries in Usulután, allowing for adjustments in focus and direction in accordance with emerging theoretical findings.

Research into social phenomena is, by its nature, merely a reflection of a given moment of reality. In Usulután, literacy, REFLECT and social contexts are constantly and rapidly evolving. Indeed, in 2000 the notion of literacy classes was to be dropped altogether in favour of 'development' groups. Of equal import is the fact, mentioned in the preceding chapter, that the national elections of March 12th 2000 resulted in the election to Congress of a majority of representatives from the FMLN. Although this means little material change in decision-making patterns, as described, it was a cause for greater mood of optimism in Usulután in mid to late 2000, and may well be the start of a long-term process of political change, and the shifts in power relations that accompany this. Thus while it is hoped that some of the implications for theory may be longer-lasting, this text, like all ethnographic research, should be read as an unfinished story, whose plot cannot be resolved here and whose protagonists' lives stretch far beyond the limits of these pages.

This chapter, then, has considered the theoretical and methodological implications of data generation for this thesis. The following chapter will discuss the next step in the process; the writing and the reading of the ethnographic text.

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[246] Habermas *op. cit.* p23
[247] Eriksen *op. cit.*

Chapter 4: Constructing the text: The writing and the reading of ethnography

The writing versus the doing of ethnography creates a tension sometimes difficult to bear[248]

Just as the argument above holds the most important 'scientific instrument' within the generation of ethnographic data to be the researcher's self, so processes of theoretical deduction and textual construction depend largely on the creative insights and abilities of the analyst. The construction of an ethnographic text, as has been discussed, is in itself a dialogical, iterative process, discoursing between data and its 'fixing' in writing, between the processes of analysis and those of textual creation. The tensions of these processes are also to be found within the multiple, simultaneous roles of the ethnographer - as conversational partner, analyst, theorist, reader and writer, as 'bricoleur'.[249]

Critiques of ethnographic texts have focused on the way that theory is said to 'emerge' from 'thick description'.[250] Thus the substantive validity of an ethnography rests, as Mitchell describes it, in the 'cogency of the theoretical reasoning'.[251] To allow for greater scrutiny of this cogency, recent thinking has called for writers to render explicit the choices, theoretical assumptions and ideologies which underscore their work,[252] or the tracing of what Sanjek calls the 'ethnographer's path'.[253] Taking the leap into theoretical and methodological candour requires a degree of courage on the part of the ethnographer, but is the only really honest way to lay open the text to critical evaluation.

Accordingly, the previous chapter has considered the ideological assumptions which underlay the processes of data generation in the ethnographic experience. This subsequent chapter intends to render explicit the analytical procedures which are the other sources of this text's creation, in response to Berreman's call for an 'ethnography of the ethnography.'[254] The first part of this chapter examines the translating of ethnographic experience into text,

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[248] Jackson (1990) p25
[249] Levi-Strauss' famous use of the term, which literally means something who makes things out of odds and ends, was employed by him in the sense of mythical thought, which he considered to be a sort of 'intellectual bricolage' (1962 p17)
[250] Geertz (1973) *op. cit.*; see also Hammersley *op. cit.*
[251] Mitchell (1982) p207
[252] Hammersley and Atkinson *op. cit.*
[253] Sanjek (1990) p399
[254] Berreman (1968) p368

and considers how the resulting text should be read – what kind of text. Next, the different layers of text are explored from which this final manuscript has been constructed. This is followed by a description of the procedures taken to analysis – a tracing of the 'ethnographer's path' of theorising. Finally, the limitations of this text in terms of its purpose and its envisaged applicability are discussed. Throughout the chapter runs a more general thread, considering what this experience has revealed about the processes of building ethnographic texts in terms of theoretical and conceptual validity.

4.1 From experience to text

All too often, ethnographic writing removes the ethnographer from the scene of his or her investigations and reduces the real men and women who are its subjects to so many abstract structures or principles. Thus, the authoritative voice of Science establishes an orderly, authorless narrative that either marginalizes or suppresses all that is disorderly, trivial or personal. In the process, it finds the world exactly as it had imagined the world to be, and when it is finished, it necessarily leaves everything the way it was. Every account becomes a 'just-so' story [255]

The now-familiar tensions in ethnographic writing between what Geertz calls 'the archetypal moments in ethnographical experience, soaking it up and writing it down'[256] have been used by several writers to distinguish the fluid and reflexive ethnographic experience – Geertz's Being There - from the processes of its concretising in text, the Being Here.

How then, has this tension been resolved within this text, and what does this mean for its status? The 'signature' debate in ethnography and the implications of this for the standing and role of ethnographic texts[257] has led to assertions such as Lancaster makes above. 'Ethnographers do not so much describe culture but inscribe it in discourse.'[258] The ironic danger, in a text that takes a dialogical approach to studying discourse, is, of course, that of privileging the written. Meanwhile, postmodernism has led to a questioning of the nature of texts and their status and representations of social reality and to a problematising of this status and a move towards textual experimentation. Certainly, the temptation within an academic thesis of producing what Lancaster in the quotation above calls a 'just so' account, with neat findings and conclusions is powerful, given the imperative of this text to meet

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[255] Lancaster *op. cit.* p xvii
[256] Geertz (1988) *op. cit.* p83
[257] see for example Clifford (1990), Gitlin et al (1993) *op. cit.;* also Sanjek *op. cit.* who takes the reader through the writing process from the 'context of discovery' to the 'context of presentation' (p390)
[258] Gitlin et al *op. cit.* p193

binding terms of reference, and the expectations of its specific audience. Moreover, as a text born out of a specific set of rules – those of academia – a thesis cannot, on completion, lend itself to the kind of experimentation and challenging of boundaries that the post-modern or feminist movements, for example, may celebrate.[259] Therefore, certain aspects of Bruner's 'meaning and drama'[260] of the ethnographic experience may be lost in textual construction – the dimension of personal experience, for example, or the beauty of the physical surroundings, or discussion of the Salvadoran political or literary tradition.

But ultimately, this text is about, and by, people, and human interaction is by its nature 'disorderly, trivial [and] personal'. How, then, to resolve the tension within the text between the dictates of written convention while simultaneously doing justice to the 'aliveness' of the context, including the untidy, the inconclusive and the ragged? How can the depth and breadth of theorising be sustained, while encompassing the diverging voices of individuals whose words and worlds form its basis? This study cannot offer any all-consuming 'answer' to the dilemma, but offers to the challenge a lens trained determinedly on the quixotic and the individualistic, on the clutter and the gossip that is the stuff of everyday life, aiming to embrace diversity and chaos rather than impose false order upon it. It is hoped that through the communication of this text some of the apparently trivial events of life in Usulután which revealed greater depths for the researcher will do the same for its audience, and that through this account the reader may glimpse the struggle and the adaptation, the humour and the tragedy of life in rural Usulután during 1999.

4.2 The principles of the text: how it should be read

The author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning[261]

Engaging in the processes which create the content of an ethnographic text is, as Geertz[262] and Ricoeur[263] argue, essentially a matter of reading. The ensuing *writing* of the text raises the issue of 'representation', a problematic arena where real lives are engaged. Representation, argues recent theory, leads to the objectification of the reality described; that is, it entails a 'fixing' procedure of the phenomena observed, which tends to obscure the

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[259] such as Mulkay's work (1985), or the genre of ethnographic drama / theatre (Mienczakowski (1995); Bluebond-Langer (1980))
[260] Bruner *op. cit.* p8
[261] Foucault (1994) p118
[262] Geertz (1973) *op. cit.*
[263] Ricoeur (1971)

dynamic nature of the cultural process.[264] Yet for Geertz the cultural 'text' is a process in which individuals constantly develop meaning and where these meanings are continually being interpreted,[265] an ongoing process of creation, and recreation - a performance that evokes signification in the moment. This fact has led some anthropologists to describe their analytical appraisal of the phenomena they describe in terms of an 'evocation' rather than as a 'representation' of meaning.[266] Such a view is harmonious with the approach to data *generation* – rather than collection – that this study adopts. The purpose and the findings of the text signify not the definitive description of a bounded system of meanings, but the evocation of a moment, the confining and limitation of some dimensions of the 'inexhaustible world of signification.'[267]

Integral to the discussion of *how* the text is created is the question of *when* it is created – at what point in the process. Traditionally, and particularly in methodologies of educational research, social science, including ethnography, has been divided into three separate phases – data collection / data analysis / writing up. Recent critics have acknowledged the over-simplification of this model[268] yet it remains the dominant approach in accounts of research methodology. Dey's principle of data analysis, as 'an ongoing dialogue between data and ideas'[269] is helpful, but applies not only to analysis but also to data generation and textual construction. In the experience of this study, meanwhile, moments of 'soaking' and 'writing' were not so arbitrarily divided; the Here and the There became melded within one dialogical and intertwining creative process both within and outside the field. Throughout the progressive experience – in libraries and in Usulután - all dimensions of the ethnography blended to create one recursive and dialogical movement, a dialectic between ideas and data which ran from an initial reading of the literature through to the final creation of the written text. The resulting manuscript has been shaped by all the processes which went into its creation as an ongoing journey, it is therefore both the product and an integral part of the analytical process; its performance is bound up in these facets of its whole.

Two aspects in particular informed this holistic process and reinforced the role of the ethnographer as 'bricoleur'. Firstly was the presence in the field of certain key texts, which the researcher considered important theoretical works. Undoubtedly, these books influenced

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[264] Howard-Malverde (1998) *op. cit.*
[265] Thompson (1990)
[266] Howard-Malverde (1998) *op. cit.*
[267] Foucault (1994) *op. cit.* p118
[268] Walford (1991); De Vries *op. cit.,* who calls the notion 'simplistic and ideologically tainted' (p48)
[269] Dey (1993) p7

conceptual thinking and data generation in the field, just as they have affected the structure and process of the final text. For the sake of explicitness, they are listed in Appendix 5. Secondly, just as the fieldworker was the most important scientific tool in data generation, so data analysis relied to a considerable extent on the researcher's insight – her intuition, sense and instincts for what was important. This point is often considered a source of weakness in social science, and as with data 'collection', the tendency is to try to remove the analyst's presence as far as possible from these processes. As discussed, however, rendering explicit the ideological requires clarifying the personal, an aspect which it is suggested here may in fact contribute more rather than less to analytical procedures. After months in the field and a thorough immersion in the literature, instinct is hopefully guided by enhanced cultural sensitivity, or what Mills called the 'sociological imagination',[270] and an ear for the false notes of mistaken analytical alleys. As long as rigour is maintained, such cultural sensitivity may, it is argued, contribute considerably to the creative process.

This text's status as the final product of experience is therefore as an individual account. It is only one of the multiple, competing stories of Usulután in 1999; it is only one performance, entered in the middle, surrounded by both prior and future texts which shift and flow in a constant state of flux. As such it claims no degree of typicality, nor of objective 'truth', but stands merely as an instant of illumination. It does not, to reiterate, claim a stance as an 'insider account', or wish to act as a piece of ethnographic ventriloquism. It should be read as a Geertzian view, as more the grasping of a proverb, the catching of an allusion, the understanding of a joke[271] than as the holy grail of a view from within.

4.3 Analysis of fieldnotes and texts

The raw form of fieldnotes makes their analysis an initially daunting process. Those for this study appeared, when confronted out of the field, to be fragmented, incoherent, disparate and disorienting, according, in fact, to Lederman's description:

> [Fieldnotes] are in fact ambiguous in form, content and intention, neither here nor there (or, perhaps both Here and There). Smudged by gritty fingers and squashed bugs….Produced and still smelling of There – musty, smoky, spicy, evocations of people and places…[272]

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[270] Mills (1959) He argued that there is an 'unexpected quality' about the sociological imagination
[271] Geertz (1977)
[272] Lederman (1990) p73

The notes are multi-dimensional; observational, theoretical and methodological. They are, as has been noted, influenced by certain works which the researcher had brought with her into the field situation.[273] They incorporate what was witnessed, read, listened to and overheard, aspects which proved helpful in keeping alive a vibrant vision of the social arena during analysis. This study chooses to use the fieldnotes and texts from which it is created not as evidence for the argument of the thesis, but rather as means to text building and data analysis in themselves - an 'illuminating case', a way of understanding and shaping theoretical connections.

As stated, the reading and analysis processes were dialectical and iterative. Therefore, they cannot accurately be described, as is the case in so many social science theses, as a series of consecutive steps. Instead, they will be considered as a group of dimensions of the analytic whole, all of which took place fluidly, better to capture the nature of its processes.

Dimension 1: Complicating the data: content analysis

...the anxiety at feeling beneath [discourse] (despite its greyness and ordinariness) powers and dangers that are hard to imagine: anxiety at suspecting the struggles, victories, injuries, dominations and enslavements through so many words even though long usage has worn away their roughness. What, then, is so perilous in the fact that people speak? Where is the danger in that?[274]

The multiple texts generated through dialogue in Usulután are marked throughout by a series of leitmotifs and recurring themes which emerged repeatedly in people's dialogue and actions. These formed striking features of the social landscape, seeming to serve as reference points for people's views of their lives – as explanations and rationales for their situation, actions, hopes and aspirations; the reflections of some of Foucault's 'powers and dangers' above. In theoretical / conceptual terms, such 'cultural symbols' can be seen as indicative of what is important in the social patterning. As regards the creative and analytical processes, these symbols are their structure and their guide; the echo of people's voices, views and humour are the force and shape of this text. They form the 'bones' of the story, and bring the holistic picture into focus. As symbols they are grounded in socially shared knowledge and express specific ideas, collective identities, common and diverse assumptions and values.

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[273] Much more so than by supervision, which was difficult to effect in the field because of the logistics of communication

[274] Foucault (1981) *op. cit.* p52

A focus on communicative practices implies a commitment to more than linguistic elements, but to the location of the discourse within the shifts and fluctuations of social life. Yet in most accounts of ethnography within educational studies, data is described as being 'sorted' or 'selected' according to certain categories. This approach was appropriate for some aspects of the findings arising out of Usulután, for example the taxonomic analysis of written artefacts, family groups, stakeholders and so on, in order to discover the cultural meaning that arises from patterns of organisation, the ways in which things relate to one another. As discussed, however, dialogical practices – including literacy practices – cannot be separated from values, emotions and ideas; as such, they could not be appropriately divided into 'bits', or simplistically categorised as themes. Reading them requires reading the whole; as with the discussion of literacy practices above, the roles, uses and content of gossip, whispers and rumour were interlocking and interdependent; their greatest significance lay in their relationships. Moreover, coding and categorising could only take account of the *positive* pieces of data; they could not account for silence, which, as explained above, acts as a crucial part of the dialogical landscape.

It was decided, therefore, to view discourses holistically; not to cut and paste people's voices into categories however rooted in the data, but to try to keep the voices flowing as they did in the field. Instead of viewing leitmotifs as categories for division, these were considered as multiple lenses, as devices for *complicating* the theoretical picture that emerged, in the model of Strauss and Corbin[275] or as a means of re-reading it. Conversation and observation were treated therefore according to Hammersley's model of 'generating concepts'[276] – not the fitting of things into boxes, or the testing of data against categories, but rather their expansion and mystification. The conceptualisations which emerged from this process proved interlocking and theoretically intricate;[277] contradictions between them revealed further questions and links which both complicated and simultaneously illuminated the thematic picture. Thus, the focus was placed on examining key themes firstly as to their merit as theoretical sounding-boards for people's texts and voices, but also *in relation to each other* so that the picture which emerged was, while considerably more complex than that to which a categorising approach might have led, perhaps more reflective of the disorder and the dissonance of human life.

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[275] Strauss and Corbin (1990)
[276] Hammersley and Atkinson *op. cit.*
[277] Glaser and Strauss's constant comparative method was helpful here (1967), although the approach of this study is at odds with their insistence on categorisation

Dimension 2: Shaping the text – the literature

The shaping of the theoretical and analytical picture and thence of this text itself – that is, the reading of culture - was, as has been indicated, greatly influenced by the reading of theory. 'As writing is a positive act of sense-making so too is reading'.[278] 'The literature' was used as a source of idea and theory generation from the start of the process throughout fieldwork, analysis and writing; its reading and understanding – themselves organic and developing processes – guiding the creation of the text. Reading, as an active process of selection, served as a means of creating Blumer's 'sensitizing concepts',[279] which gave shape to analysis and to data generation. Yet published and unpublished sources did not provide 'answers' or ready-made models for data generation or analysis; rather, ideas in the literature helped with the development of perspectives on the study's data, drawing out comparisons, analogies and metaphors. Texts, therefore, enhanced the understanding of the cultural texts; reading shaping reading.

The reading process also trained the lens of universality on the work, indicating points in common with other writers' experiences, adding to this text, despite its status as an independent phenomenon, the dimension of its location within theory. This aspect reflects Northrop Frye's dictum that 'Our impressions of human life are picked up one by one, and remain for most of us loose and disorganized. But we constantly find things in literature that suddenly co-ordinate and bring into focus a great many such impressions and this is part of what Aristotle means by the typical or universal human event'.[280] While the findings of this study remain largely localised, therefore, it reflects an experience, both in its relation to other work and in the processes of its creation, of Aristotle's human commonality.

Dimension 3: The ethnopoetics of everyday life: discursive performances

We have established above that a key unit of research in literacy studies is that of communicative practices, reflecting the general cultural ways in which literacy and discourse are used, the 'folk models' of these.[281] Communicative practices and events are both part of the wider notion of textual artefacts, discussed above. Such cultural texts, created through discourse, are shaped by the processes of language, ideology, myth, history, convention and

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[278] Coffey and Anderson *op. cit.* p110
[279] Blumer (1954)
[280] Frye, cited in Geertz (1973) *op. cit.* p450
[281] Street (1993) *op. cit.*

style.[282] They are not 'literal' representations or reflections of social situations, but rather sites of the construction and reproduction of ideology. As such, textual creation and interpretation form mediums through which social power is expressed.[283] The emphasis on agency within the notion of communicative practices is a dimension which allows for a focus on what has been called dominant literacies.[284] Such a vision enables us to see how discursive practices become sites of contestation and negotiation.

The concept of practices in this ideological sense was useful for capturing the nature of social processes in Usulután. Indeed, the most striking aspect of discursive events, and of the dialogical encounters in which local people engaged with stakeholders in particular, was the degree of agency behind them, the role of the actor in their often self-conscious performance. At moments such as these, the emphasis of interest seemed to lie less on the text itself than on its creation or enacting as a moment of theatre. Such instances of discursive practice and textual creation seemed imbued with the explicit aim of changing and reinventing social life within the dialogical encounter, less an event formed by ideology than one carefully directed at shaping it. The texts created both within and behind encounters were purposeful, conscious actions and gestures, carried out with an eye to the audience and the intention to create specific effects. Thus, the notions of communicative practices and events as they are perceived within the literature were helpful ideas on which to approach analysis, but the significance and degree of agency, creativity and control at the moment of discursive activity in Usulután led to a search for additional constructs on which to base understanding.

This resulted in an encounter with the conceptual frameworks of anthropologists and folklorists, who view culture as social discourse, comprised of meanings and expressions of experience that are negotiated in instances of social interaction, or performances.[285] Communicative processes are in this vision treated as literary texts, representing at least one view of experience to society. For Bruner, for instance, culture is negotiated through the public performance – the textual enactment - of the individual apprehension of experience. The text stands in a dialogical relationship to the individual and society; its public performance both constructs the text and accomplishes culture, or society, while each of

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[282] Denzin (1989)
[283] Habermas (1984)
[284] Street (1994) *op. cit.* p100, after Grillo's 'dominant languages' (1989)
[285] See Hymes (1964, 1981 *op. cit.);* Bauman (1986); Basso (1985); Bruner *op. cit.*; see Howard-Malverde (1997) *op. cit.* for an excellent explanation of the concept of the performance of culture

these processes shapes the other.[286] 'It is in the performance of an expression that we re-experience, re-live, re-create, re-tell, re-construct and re-fashion our culture.'[287]

Thus, the performance of texts combines history, experience and ideology with discourse, and this intertextuality of discourses recreates history and meaning anew, just as Bakhtin's 'narrative event' is shaped by his 'event of narration', or utterance.[288] The performative act is a moment of meeting, the nexus of ideologies, values and experience. It is, to return to Bakhtin's quote at the start of the previous chapter, an instant of 'dialogic encounter of two cultures', both collision and collusion between social worlds, in which meaning is both created and revealed. Only by seeking to comprehend this crucial nexus of the text, its history and enactment, its recursive and interpretive nature, can we understand it 'in the totality of all its events.'[289]

This vision of performance resonated with the sense of agency experienced in Usulután, the very powerful apparentness of people as active agents in the historical process, as constructors and negotiators of their own social world. The framework has been taken into the realm of the New Literacies model by Camitta's study of vernacular writing processes among adolescents, which reveals the interplay of collaboration, performance and recursiveness in the processes of writing, where collaboration is a kind of performance in which the audience for the text is actualised as opposed to fictionalised.[290] Her study also reflects the 'artfulness' of the texts and performers; Bauman's 'poetic function'.[291] Applying performance to communicative processes offers the restoration of the work of oral or written literature to the individual artist who produced it and a recognition of the creative individuality of the performer's accomplishment, as Camitta's study so effectively does. We may also see here the potentiality for capturing diversity and difference, the ethnopoetics of everyday life.

The texts of this study are, as has been suggested, characterised by their diversity and dissonance; they reflect more ambivalence and contradiction than theme or position. Yet it is precisely these tensions which locate participants in their own narrated lives. People act on, and react to, their conditions of life in various ways at various times. Texts and performances

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[286] Bruner *op. cit.*
[287] *Ibid.* p11
[288] Bakhtin (1986) *op. cit.*
[289] Bakhtin (1981) *op. cit.*
[290] Camitta (1993)
[291] Bauman *op. cit.*

from Usulután are a mixture of politics and faith, conviction and compromise, idealism and self-interest, hope and despair. Traces of each of these define the other and through them, people define themselves at any given moment.

This text, then, searches to illuminate both the totality and the fullness, and also the diversity and range that characterise the 'other' texts and performances from which it is re-created. Yet it is, of course, important to acknowledge that this artefact too, the ethnography, has its own structure, designed to persuade the reader that, confronted with any given textual fragment, a favoured reading applies. This text is, as has been made explicit, no neutral construct, no objective glimpse into reality or truth, but itself a performance, a moment of theatre.

4.4 The status of this text: validity issues

Ethnographic research has traditionally been critiqued both as a method in itself and within studies which employ its approach on three grounds: the reliability of the data – particularly a concern in cross-cultural, cross-class research such as this - the generalisability of the findings to other contexts and the potential applications of the findings.

The first of these issues – the reliability of the data – was perhaps the central issue of validity that this study encountered; that is, the question of confidence in the phenomenology of the data or, in other words, in the understanding of texts and voices of participants. Aside from difficulties such as 'courtesy bias'[292] or the 'echo effect'[293] cross-language research presents particular difficulties; the researcher has to work out the new vocabulary and what Schutz calls the taken-for-granted understandings[294] in order to achieve conceptual equivalence. As an outsider to the community, albeit a Spanish speaker, the researcher cannot claim phenomenological validity or conceptual equivalence in terms of either communicating or understanding. This text remains, therefore, subject to these constraints.

A serious initial concern for the inexperienced fieldworker was the way that information generated through conversation could not be taken as, in her conceptual framework at least, a 'fact'. It was often apparent that the interlocutor was perfectly aware of other versions of the same story; the role of silence was also significant here. To begin with, this caused worry and

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[292] Mitchell (1983)
[293] Rogers (2000)
[294] Schutz (1967) p74

confusion, but as time moved by and the researcher's own cultural sensitivity and field experience grew, it became clear that this was not a question of simple misinformation, but rather of the use of certain specific codes and rituals in given situations and, as such, an interesting dimension of the thematic picture in itself. Thus, the concept of dialogue within the ethnographic experience acted not merely as a tool for reflecting true or false reports on reality, but as a reflection of displays of perspective.[295] Thus, issues of diverging accounts and the roles and rituals of silence and avoidance are not simply matters of questionable validity, which need to be reduced and resolved through justification, but stand rather as interesting features of the theoretical landscape, which demand to be explored and understood.

The second question on which qualitative research has traditionally been judged has been its applicability to other populations or ecologies.[296] This study makes no claims to population validity; indeed, it is argued strongly that the findings of this study are only relevant to the micro context from which they have been drawn. Brief periods of the 'ethnographic experience spent working in two other NGOs in El Salvador, who implement the REFLECT programme in tandem with COMUS, supported by the same CIAZO staff, made it clear that social and cultural conditions vary widely even from rural area to rural area and NGO to NGO.

However, perhaps one implicit aim of this process has been to echo Hammersley's goal; 'to identify stable features....that transcend local contexts.'[297] If this work needs to claim 'ecological validity',[298] then this can perhaps be sought in its contribution to the creation of a typology of literacies in many different settings. There is no single theory of literacy which can be claimed as universally relevant to all cultures and contexts; it is only through generating and applying theory at the micro level that we can arrive at a deeper understanding of the possible range of meanings and roles which form what we call literacies.

The final aspect of validity on which ethnography as a method is challenged is the question of purpose; that is, the link between research and practice (here, 'practice' includes the policy and implementation of adult literacy projects). This argument rests on the force of Vulliamy's contention that 'Educational research has to be applied research with a likely pay-

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[295] This interactionist approach is discussed by Silverman (1993) p107
[296] See for example Lincoln and Guba (1985), Bracht and Glass (1968)
[297] Hammersley and Atkinson *op. cit.* p211
[298] Bracht and Glass *op. cit.*

off in terms of the improvement of education in the country [studied]'.[299] Such a definition of 'quality' research, in the opinion of this study, excludes the aspect of theory-building – and it is, after all, or should be, theory which directs policymaking and planning. Its explicit rejection of the project approach means that this study's primary concern is not to inform policymaking, but simply to add to our body of knowledge about social literacy practices in different places. In this it will be different from the majority of research within the field. But perhaps its very value lies in its particularity and intimacy, in its basis of the researcher acting as a guest within the private spaces of other people's lives. This text should be read as a story, as an account which illuminates, like a picture, someone else's world; as a place where other people may find something in common, but which does not attempt to draw generalizations or to build overarching theories. Its intentions are to construct a conversation and thence reflection; between the people of Usulután and the reader, between participants and researcher, between experience and text. It makes no other claims.

[299] Vulliamy (1990b) p34

Chapter 5: The story of literacy in Usulután: An outline

The communities here are orphans, the analfabetos ['illiterates'] go around like blind people..we have to take them by the hand to bring them to self-realisation...[Angelica, CIAZO]

Any analysis of literacy as a social practice needs to examine the emphasis placed by dominant interest groups within the State, as well as oppositional fractions [sic] within society, on particular forms of knowledge during specific historical moments – what Williams (1980) terms the 'selective tradition' through which dominant meanings are produced and reproduced within society.[300]

Fieldwork in Usulután, as described above, revealed a story of literacy. It also highlighted the complications of applying the term 'literacy' as an all-embracing blanket to describe events, statuses and practices in any given world. The following short section of this text will describe the plot of the social history revealed in this experience of discovering something foreign, to construct a framework for the ensuing analytical discussion.

5.1 A story: A moment in Los Rivera

A group of men, some elderly, are sitting around in the late afternoon under the shade of a palm tree, eating mangos and discussing the procedures for applying for legalisation of their community. This act will bring them and their fellow inhabitants enhanced rights of economic aid from local government. Lacking the technical know-how to engage in the process by themselves, they are composing a letter to COMUS to request the agency's support. The discussion is animated and diverse; considerable differences of opinion are expressed, negotiated and settled.

A fourteen-year old youth, Jaime, the son of one of those present, is writing the letter. He does not enter into the substance of the conversation but only asks questions to clarify his instructions. Meanwhile his seniors, amongst the wider debate, formulate through talk the written text of the letter, with three of the men in particular taking the lead on corrections, additions, appropriate formulas. The lively discussion around the teenager, sitting quietly in the centre, forms a polyphony of diverging narratives, of experiences and knowledges,

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[300] Rassool *op. cit.* p 434

optimism and disillusionment, humour and hope. Yet the letter itself – five lines of formula, entrenched within the discursive mode and code of COMUS – emerges as an artefact of universality and restraint.

We may see several dimensions of literacy practice and theory in this story. Firstly, there is the deliberate adoption of written discourse in encounter with a local stakeholder. Although the men could have chosen to make a personal, oral representation to COMUS, they elected to adopt the dominant mode of communication, that of a formal letter. In doing so they are engaging in co-option, the employing of a dominant discourse of a local stakeholder to achieve an identified aim. Secondly, the processes of creating the written artefact described in this episode are both embedded in and simultaneously reshaping social relationships. This letter was written by Jaime's hand, yet its text was not fashioned by him at all, since his youth and accompanying social status meant that he could play little substantive role in its production. Its authors were his seniors, the older men present. Thus, within the dialogical process of textual construction, hierarchies of local social structures are being enacted, and relationships reiterated. Finally, the written artefact emerged from a polyphony of variety, difference and dissent; it was formed through negotiation and discussion, a unified voice emerging from a multitude of sub-texts. Its performance is recursive and collaborative, yet stands also as a moment of contestation – of heteroglossia confronting the monologic voice, the meeting of orality and text. In the performative instant, history and ideology are confronted and embraced, and meanings constructed anew.

From this glimpse into a moment of textual creation, we see how intertwined and interdependent are the spoken and the written; indeed, distilling the communicative acts of this story into artificial categories of 'oral' and 'literate' seems both disingenuous and flawed. It would certainly be possible to label the elder men's verbal construction of the letter as 'work knowledges' or 'working intelligences' as some writers in the New Literacies frame have chosen to do.[301] Yet the men's confident and authoritative dictation of the letter's content, their familiarity and comfort with the formulae of dominant discourse, rendered them its true creators. To consider Jaime as the letter's only composer, as the owner of the only 'literate' act present, would be a crass misassignation of authorship.

The cultural text here then is multidimensional, comprising the three aspects of the letter, as

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[301] These terms are from Scribner (1984) (working intelligence) and O'Connor *op. cit.* (work knowledge) respectively. They are used by Gibson *op. cit.* to describe the practices of farm workers in South Africa.

artefact, and also the performative act of its construction, and also the cultural sub-texts which are the source of its creation. These facets are interlinked, each shaping the others. In emerging through collaborative, recursive, performative event, the letter from Los Rivera is both integrated within, and a process of, the negotiation of position; between those present, between individuals and COMUS, between the community and its stakeholders. As such, this instant of textual creation is bound up in greater struggles over relationships and resources, it constitutes a moment of meeting of discursive streams.

This episode thus reveals the ambiguity and complexity in the dynamic relationship between power structures, between written and spoken voices, between the text and its subtexts, between history and hope. This takes us back to the questions raised at the very start of this thesis; what, then, is 'literacy' in Usulután? And how does it, as a construct, interleave with the communicative practices and lived realities of this social world? The following three chapters will explore these questions.

5.2 The structure of the story

The storyline of literacy in Usulután in 1999 runs in brief as follows: ideologies of literacy are disseminated through the landscape embedded in two primary hegemonic discourses which stand in opposition to one another; these are voice of the State and that of the popular sector, acting through their local agents of the *alcaldía* and COMUS, whose roles as stakeholders in people's lives have been described above. The communicative strategies which support these powerful discourses reveal a good deal about local power relations and structures, and show the sorts of forces with which people in rural communities must contend. The effect is a subordination, at decision-making level, of local heteroglossia.

Meanwhile, however, the people come into their own; the communicative processes and acts in which they engage reflect the multiplicity of ways in which they confront and challenge these discourses, both in dialogical encounters with stakeholders and privately, within their own communities. Discursive processes away from the eyes of stakeholders reveal the construction of a fabric of resistance, whose layers of iteration and positioning lie behind and shape dialogical encounters. Communicative practices are exposed as sites of contestation and creation of meaning, embedded in struggles for resources and the negotiation of

relationships. Powerful and sub-rosa[302] streams of discourse interplay and co-construct each other; hybrid and intertextual narratives are locally constructed within discourses of survival and hope, as part of the challenge to hegemonies.

These discourses and processes form part of the most powerful metaphor arising in the landscape of Usulután during this experience, that of *seguir adelante* or 'marching onwards'. There are various possible interpretations for this phrase, which literally means 'to continue forwards'. It forms a striking leitmotif in the discourses of development which have become embedded in the historical consciousness of Usulután, and is used accordingly within different ideological frameworks by politicians, mayors, representatives of NGOS and rural men, women and children alike. It represents for the State an ideology of economic and social development; it contains for the popular sector, and for many people in rural communities – hence the translation selected here - the echoes of wartime resistance and challenges to oppression, a battle cry of unity; let us march onwards and fight….

It is then in the context of these discourses of power and control, of marching onwards on the one hand and propaganda and subordination on the other, that the practices and performances of literacy and communicative strategies in Usulután should be viewed. This story mirrors the wider history of this social world, the patterns of struggle, adaptation and resistance which have shaped the lives of community inhabitants in recent years.

The following three chapters of the thesis will draw out this picture, illustrating it with examples of acts by the many players in rural Usulután's story of literacy in 1999. The text takes the form of a bricolage of narratives of the main actors, events and concepts which mesh together create the fabric of the tale. Chapter 6 explores the dominant voices on the horizon, the stakeholders' ideologies of literacy and the communicative strategies which legitimate these in order to describe the sorts of forces with which rural community inhabitants must engage. Chapter 7 examines how people in communities engage with, challenge and resist these dominant ideologies through their discursive strategies in dialogical encounters with stakeholders. Chapter 8 focuses the lens on the fabric of resistance which is constructed privately through communicative practices within the five rural communities of this study and which forms the creative locus of heteroglossia. Since the conceptual approach of this text, as described above, is that of a dialogical encounter, the

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[302] Gilmore (1983); Sola and Bennett *op. cit.*

subsequent discussion should be viewed as dimensions of dialogue, as aspects of an image rather than as the capturing of the whole.

The textual lens throughout is trained firmly on the local; it aims to sweep the landscape recursively, reflecting the voices which echo through it, from those of local stakeholders to private strategies of contestation and resistance within communities. It tries to capture the quiet practices of discourse, within houses and under trees, in fields and shops, schools and streets. On a broader theoretical level, the following chapters explore how discursive and textual practices relate to local social constructions of power. In doing so, they reveal how, in Usulután, literacy functions not merely as an ideology in itself, but also operates as a tool of ideology, with the discourses around it shaped and being shaped by these wider patterns of power and control.

The subsequent chapter, therefore, will consider firstly the different discourses placed around literacy by local Usulután stakeholders, namely, those who elect to try to 'make literate' the adult population of the area, and secondly how these discourses are, through the particular political context of the arena, placed in opposition to one another. This will delineate the kinds of ideological constructs and spheres of control with which people in rural communities have to contend. Finally, it will explore the kinds of communicative strategies employed by these actors to support and legitimate their discourses.

Chapter 6: Dominant voices: Literacy as ideology in the landscape of Usulután.

..because of the integral links that exist between language, culture and power, literacy provides an important variable during periods of social transition or crisis. During periods of conflict and / or transition, literacy becomes both signifier and signified in the discourse about what society is not as well as what it should be or aspires to become morally, socially and economically. [303]

To reiterate from Chapter 2 above, two major stakeholders operate in the daily lives of rural inhabitants and thence in the story of literacy played out in the theatre of Usulután; firstly COMUS, who are heavily influenced in literacy ideology at least by CIAZO and secondly the *alcaldía,* the local representative of the State. These agencies, as will by now be clear, act as gateways to resources at both a local and a national level, and as such they have a particularly authoritative and all-pervading voice in the lives of local people.

The stakeholders' constructions of literacy, as well as the actual communicative practices in which their ideologies are embedded, reflect wider discourses about power, subjugation and control. We have discussed in Chapter 2 above how totemic categories of 'literate' and 'illiterate' are constructed in Usulután through classificatory mechanisms of doubtful conceptual validity. Both State and the popular sector, through their local representatives, evoke in their discourse the social category of the *analfabeto* – the 'illiterate person'. The *analfabeto* has become a powerfully symbolic figure on the Salvadoran landscape, a universal metaphor for 'lack of progress'. Like all symbols, it is one of Turner's multivocal images;[304] it means different things to each voice and is thus strategically employed in various ways. But for both stakeholders, the challenging of the socially-constructed totem of the *analfabeto* through their own conceptions of literacy has become an ideological metaphor for different views of social change, for their particular vision of 'marching onwards'. It is these ideological constructions, and their dissemination and legitimisation in the landscape of Usulután, that will be explored here, in order to reveal the sorts of centripetal forces which people find themselves confronting in their daily lived realities

It is important to stress at this point that neither the *alcaldía* nor COMUS, nor CIAZO, are assumed within this text as unidimensional, harmonious sites of ideology. A considerable

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[303] Rassool *op. cit.* p433
[304] Turner (1969)

amount of conflict and dissonance takes place within all of these organisations, and within COMUS in particular.[305] The voices relayed here are those of individuals. But their diversity takes place within a firm ideological framework; the stances of Juan, Robin and Margarita, from COMUS, and Benjamin and Anjelica, from CIAZO, are deeply rooted, for example, in the tenets and traditions of the popular sector, just as the words of San Francisco Javier's mayor, Don Alfonso, range little from the orthodoxies of the political Right. In dialogical encounters with rural people, though, these stakeholders all emphasise their harmony and unity of vision; individuals' words form part of the monologia presented to the external world of the communities. Thus the acts and strategies of the *alcaldía* and COMUS / CIAZO reflected here are put forward as evocations of this monologia; where dissonance exists, it is explored.

6.1 Opposing voices

6.1.1The voice of the State

We have seen above how historically, as in many oligarchic societies, education and literacy were traditionally the preserve of the Salvadoran few. Education was actively restricted by the ruling elite in order to limit challenges to its power.

These days, still following the path of its historical pattern, the State seeks to retain its status of exclusivity. It does not generally make efforts to physically transport its discourses into the reaches of the rural zone; local people must approach its offices in villages and towns if they wish to engage with it in transactions, as we will see. Through such practices, its discourses retain the mystique of elitism, and its relationships are conducted within the literal and metaphorical offices of power; the discourse of exclusion is sustained and maintained by its ongoing reproduction.

Yet despite these efforts at seclusion, the State vision of literacy remains a powerful ideology in Usulután. It penetrates rural communities in various ways; via for instance media such as newspapers and televisions, with their frequent advertisements exhorting the 'way ahead' of adult literacy. Although the majority of individuals who participated in this study have little access to these channels of communication, such discourses nonetheless absorb themselves through networks of dissemination into the fabric of social life. Local mayors act, for

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[305] It is beyond the scope of this study to explore these conflicts further here, although they would be relevant to a further paper focusing on the changing roles and dynamics of NGOs

example, if of the same discursive community as the State, as mouthpieces for ideology, implanting State discourses and values surrounding literacy into the local environment via transmitters such as teachers in rural schools, whose own reading and co-option of these discourses often acts in the processes of propagation. Within some State schools, 'parents school' is run in the evenings, offering adult literacy classes, and the State also ran until recently its own Spanish-government sponsored adult literacy programme in rural areas including Usulután.[306] Thus, these discourses and ideologies soak through the outer corners of the rural world, making inroads into areas traditionally hostile to the voice of power.

In what, then, do these discourses consist? Recent history, in accordance with the thinking of the World Bank, has found the State discourse around education and literacy heavily focused on notions of human capital. Moncada-Davidson cites the respected Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUSADES) in 1989 – 'Education is the motor for the development of a society...sustained economic growth is conditioned by the profile and quality of its human resources. It is important to remember that education is the best form to redistribute the wealth of a country'.[307] We may hear in such dictates the echo of O'Connor's 'rhetoric of panic' about the 'skills and deficiencies of workers'.[308]

A decade later, little either ideologically or discursively seems to have changed. With a presidential changeover looming in 1999, albeit within their own political party, official outgoing government advertisements were appearing in the daily press: 'Education: we invested in Human Capital...a reduction in illiteracy [*analfabetismo*] from 25.8% in 1994 to 16.5% in 1998'.[309] Such figures bear little relevance to the actuality of rural Usulután, but the vocabulary speaks for itself. A columnist on the fiercely pro-government national newspaper *El Diario de Hoy* noted that the new government's educational reform programme 'is centred in the efforts to get closer to the opportunities which favour the processes of development / training[310] of human capital'.[311] Clearly, the terminology of structural adjustment has struck a chord.

For the State, then, literacy is constructed primarily as an autonomous model in the frame of the deficit discourse described above, rooted in the ideology of human capital development.

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[306] PAEBA – Adult Basic Education Programme
[307] FUSADES (1989) p1
[308] O'Connor *op. cit.* p4
[309] Government of El Salvador (1999) p5
[310] *formación*
[311] Castro de Perez (1999) p20

Yet this view is not limited to the enhancing of social conditions within the nation. In a step further, literacy is constructed in discourse as a vehicle for improving El Salvador's position in the global competition, that is, the race towards the capitalistic goal of 'development', in which all countries are competitors and where success is directly dependent upon a nation's human and economic resources. Thus, an educational reform process 'constitutes for Salvadorans the means of making our education the key for inserting ourselves into a competitive and globalised world'.[312] Literacy becomes in this way the unproblematised ticket for the journey into a new national and global order. But such discursive approaches inevitably summon up the darker side of any contest, the threat of being left behind, isolated, vulnerable and powerless, a poor and suffering nation in a modernized, unattainable world. Such fears resonate powerfully with rural dwellers in particular, whose history of suffering and resistance, as will become clear, stems from precisely such experiences. Their State wants its people not only to understand its discourse, but is using the power of coercive force to persuade them to accept it.

While these dimensions of the discourse focus on the Salvadoran nation, another subtler and perhaps more threatening strain points its finger at the individual. 'Everybody is aware that *education is the solution* to achieve the *economic and social development* of Salvadorans'[313] (italics added). Such vocabulary is firmly located within the productionist discourse of the deficit literacy model outlined in Chapter 1 above, with 'the people' being constructed as still 'undeveloped', that is, as unready blank slates. At a local level, through its performance by the agent of the *alcaldía*, this powerful vision is disseminated onto the landscape of rural Usulután; 'The people here', says San Francisco Javier's mayor, 'are not prepared…they are not ready to accept development'. Such words construct an alienated class of rural inhabitants, a problematic 'other' whose outsider status is defined by their dominant characteristic of illiteracy. In addressing this difficult question, the State locates itself, through its discursive performances, in a paternalistic role: 'Our greatest wealth is the men and women who make up this country, and to educate them is to invest in the future'[314] (the national newspaper); 'The people here are our [the *alcaldía*'s] responsibility, we have to take care of them' (San Francisco Javier's deputy mayor). It is worth noting that the verb 'to educate', like its adjective 'educated' carries a particular sense in Central American Spanish; in El Salvador, an 'educated' person is a socially and culturally confident individual, who has the training and the language to conduct him or herself 'correctly' in the social circles of the

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[312] *Ibid.* p20
[313] *Ibid.* p20
[314] Salvadoran Ministry of Education (1999) p39

elite; it carries the connotation of the English 'cultured'. By contrast, an uneducated or 'badly-educated' person is one who lacks social training, who is less able to engage in the discourses of polite society. For the State to suggest that its role lies in educating its people, therefore, is to imply a transition from a state of implied naturalism and roughness to one of smoothed edges, of cultural and social acceptability in the eyes of the elite.

We see then, within the overarching framework of paternalism, the beginnings of a doctrine of personal change. The State education reform process taking place in 1999 and continuing into 2000 argues the need for local teachers to develop 'psychological characteristics' of vocation, good interpersonal relations, to be a supporter [literally: lover] of human values, ethical and civil, to have an interest in serving others.[315] Echoing the above notions of ordinary men and women as still 'unprepared, untrained' for entering the race towards development, we can see the State revealing educational change as part of this agenda of character, as well as social, reform; the development of new characteristics through education, whether of teachers or of local people, which will enable individuals and country to take part in the quest for modernity. This discourse of personal and national redemption suggests a vision of a sort of salvation, of the 'uneducated' Salvadoran people guided by the beneficient, knowing figure of the State, which will lead them to the holy grail of economic and social development.

In constructing such a discourse, any 'lack of development', or unwillingness to change – for example being reluctant to attend literacy classes run by the State - is placed squarely on the shoulders of the individual. Through submission to State doctrines and projects both individual and nation may become ready for the global race; failure to embrace the ideology of personal development through the saviour's deficit model of education is to reject one's responsibility to one's fellow citizens and summon up the spectre of abandonment. In combining the discourse of competition and the fear of being left behind with the notion of personal redemption, the State is constructing itself as a benign, benevolent figure, a sort of kindly God who guides and offers resources, but simultaneously through its discourse places the responsibility for failings firmly at the individual's door.

Within Usulután, the performances of such ideological constructions can be heard resounding with conviction in the remote *alcaldía* of San Francisco Javier. 'Communities have to develop themselves…They have to educate themselves, learn how to manage themselves. I

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[315] Castro de Perez *op. cit.* p20

would say the gravest problem we have in this area is the lack of education; people don't attach importance to education. They just think of their little piece of land, their few animals. But in that way the country won't march onwards, the rural zones won't develop themselves.' Such words – those of Don Alfonso, the mayor - both enact and actualise processes of exclusion.

It is thus with this construction of themselves as 'undeveloped' and 'uneducated' and thence the excluded, problematic 'other' that the people in rural communities must contend. 'Illiteracy' is 'improving through the programmes of the State…But the people who are illiterate, it is they who often don't attach importance to education. They don't want to get into that' (Don Alfonso). Only by taking responsibility for – that is, assuming the guilt of – their 'failings' and then inserting themselves into the canon of the State can individuals find redemption, and in doing so save both themselves and that greater embodiment of their consciousness and identity, the nation.

The fragments of conversation above reveal also the State mechanisms' centripetal tendencies towards the constraining and limitation of diversity. Reluctance to engage in the given model of development or literacy is attributed to a lack of 'vision', a focus firmly on the daily or on one's 'little piece of land'. Within this view, space for competing ideologies is scarce; refusal to comply means that one is characterised as 'passive' or 'like stones', as one local official put it.

We have seen above how literacy for the State in Usulután is constructed as an ideology, embedded in wider discourses of power and control. The tenets of authority and its doctrines of literacy as redemption echo right through layers of Usulután society and into the very rural, very poor communities, through the local agents of the State, who simultaneously keep their relationships with the rural communities at arms' length. Yet this is not the only voice in the landscape of Usulután. A powerful discourse rings out in seeming opposition to these doctrines of power; that of the popular sector.

6.1.2 The dissenting voice: the popular sector

We have considered above the role and influence of the popular sector within people's lives in Usulután, and we have established that both CIAZO and COMUS construct their identities very distinctly within this political and ideological framework. This CIAZO / COMUS view

is the more immediate and powerful vision of literacy in the communities of this study, due to its more direct presence through the REFLECT literacy circles. Therefore, these stakeholders' ideological constructions of literacy will be discussed in depth here, to illuminate the primary discourses with which community inhabitants have to engage.

As has been made clear in Chapter 2 above, the ideological heart of the COMUS / CIAZO view of literacy is that of Freirean revolutionary education; their discourses around literacy are deeply rooted in this tradition. The most powerful theme which emerges in analysis of their discursive practices is that of literacy as a symbol of struggle. It is pertinent to remember here that CIAZO's original generative words, formed out of struggle in the mountains of Morazán, were taken from the landscape of the civil war – terms such as revolver, bullet, and battle. In 1999, while the terminology may have been less militaristic, the vocabulary was not so very far removed from the combative tones of the past; a very commonly used phrase within CIAZO to describe the context of their work was 'we have a battle', or *lucha*, a powerful and emotive word, invoking irrevocably the *lucha armada*, or armed struggle of the *campesino* movement. The terminology is uninhibitedly Freirean; REFLECT was many times described by both CIAZO and COMUS staff as 'a project of liberation for oppressed people'.

As a way into exploring CIAZO and COMUS' constructions and perceptions around literacy, and the ways their relationships are negotiated with rural communities, three texts produced by them will be employed as a basis for discovery. All three act as illustrations of the ways in which literacy discourses are ideologically created, as well as constituting, of course, literacy acts and artefacts in themselves. Emphases are added.

The first is the 'literacy song', which is familiar to most people of rural Usulután. It was written by a man with close ties to COMUS, and its history stems from the time of popular education during the civil war. It was employed with particular effort during the REFLECT pilot programme of 1994 and is still deeply associated with COMUS and literacy classes today. It is sung at social events connected to the learning process – recruitment meetings, for example, or facilitator training sessions - as well as at parties and gatherings as part of the canon of popular songs of resistance.

The Literacy Song

We're all going to learn to read and write
This guarantees the popular culture.
First there's the A
For *alfabetizar* (becoming literate)
Then there's the E
For *escribir* (writing)
Next comes the I
For incorporation
Then there's the O
For organisation
The last letter of all will be the U
Of the popular unity[316]

The second text comes from a literacy manual, produced by CIAZO through a process of PRA, for use in COMUS and other grassroots organisations at the beginning of the REFLECT course. The theme is *analfabetismo*, or 'illiteracy'. Page 1 lists CIAZO's objectives for the learning programme.

1. that people learn to read and write without difficulty
2. that people become capable of reflecting on the theme; that they have more opportunities to work, leave unknowingness, equality between women and men
3. that people participate actively in programmes and activities that take place in communities
4. that parents help and motivate their children to go to school and to do school tasks
5. that there is harmony and unity in the community
6. that the people take their own initiative to resolve the problems and necessities of the community.[317]

The third text is taken from a COMUS literacy manual, produced with CIAZO support in a similar way to that above. Its theme is 'organisation', and the following extract comes from its introduction, intended for facilitators to read to students.

> If we have bad organisation we will have many problems in our community, primarily because we will never change our level of existence, either in economic or personal terms...Well comrades,[318] we hope that with this theme of bad organisation we will learn a lot...that we will learn reading and writing to follow up our education, that we will learn mathematics so that we can work out the number of people here at this meeting...but above all we hope that in the next meeting everybody will be present, that nobody will be missing.[319]

These artefacts reflect the ideological constructions of literacy by what are, as has been made clear in Chapter 2, a key source of social, economic, and political support of Usulután communities. They reflect how local stakeholders of the popular sector attach the symbolic

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[316] author: Omar
[317] CIAZO facilitators' manual, 1999
[318] *compañeros,* a term to be explored below
[319] COMUS facilitators' manual 1999

value of collective history to such textual constructions. In their performance, the symbols of history are both reiterated and reinforced, and literacy learning becomes indissolubly associated with political resistance.

The most potent and frequent motif to arise from these texts, evident in all three, is that of literacy as 'organisation'. This term holds a particular ideological force in El Salvador; its sense is strongly rooted in the struggle against oligarchy before and during the civil war, specifically in the creation of the base communities of resistance described above. 'Becoming literate' is an integral part of organisation and its corollaries 'participation' and 'incorporation'. These terms emerged as powerful leitmotifs in conversations in Usulután; they also form a powerful dimension of COMUS' and CIAZO's ongoing dialogue with communities. The significance of participation in literacy activities lies for these stakeholders as much in their status as organisational acts, than in their role as sites of learning. The dialogical encounter which their attendance invokes forms a powerful discourse of inclusion, which operates from COMUS' and CIAZO's point of view as a statement of coherence with their social and ideological vision. This extent to which this discourse has become intertwined into dialogue with communities is succinctly characterised by the CIAZO evaluation of the 'achievements' of REFLECT in Usulután during 1999, identified in order of importance by local literacy promoters as follows: organisation, integration, participation, decentralisation, better knowledge of reality, self-management of communities, and cultural identity. These items, whose list neatly captures the dominating motifs of conversations between COMUS staff and community members, are very distinctly ideological constructions, formed firmly within the popular sector discourses of inclusion and challenge to the hegemony. The distinctly political gloss on the notion of 'outcomes' well befits the deprived model of literacy employed.

Yet there is more to literacy as participation / organisation than simply reifying the old struggle; organisation remains for CIAZO, as these texts reveal, the almost moral duty of the *campesino*. Neglecting to participate in organisational activities will result in an lack of social or economic improvement not only for the individual but also for one's family and compatriots, an injustice for which, in the light of history, much suffering has been endured and much blood been shed. More than this, failing to incorporate oneself leaves one branded as a 'non-co-operant', a betrayer of the Cause and thence one's own people – a powerful instrument of coercion in an arena where history, social harmony and the values of cooperation are so highly esteemed. The rural inhabitant, by location and occupation a part of

the constructed class of the *campesino*, is thus compelled by social duty to commit himself to the common goal of organisation.

Inclusion within the discourse of the popular sector therefore has two dimensions; that of incorporation by moral right into the resources and power sites of the country, and also that of membership of the challenging forces, the locus of the struggle. In stressing that their narratives arise out of the history of the communities CIAZO and COMUS are acting out these discourses of inclusion according to their own conceptual framework. The final exhortation in the third text – 'we hope that everybody will be present, that nobody will be missing' - re-enacts these discourses in a strikingly similar way to the tone of the State's prior threat, that anyone who does not take it upon themselves to seek individual and collective 'improvement' will bear the responsibility for abandoning themselves and their compatriots to the awful conditions of current social reality. Different models, then, but conveyed through a similar discourse.

While the popular sector's view of literacy for organisation stands at variance with the State's model of human capital development, CIAZO and COMUS appear to some degree to in fact buy into these ideologies of the State, albeit with different ends in view. Their spokesman Benjamin for example explains that 'it's necessary to train[320] the people a lot....for example, the people there [in a community he had recently visited], they didn't know what the president had to do, what the secretary had to do, how to make a legalised Act, in the name of the community Board of Directors.' Margarita from COMUS suggests that the role of REFLECT in Usulután is to 'help people legalise themselves, to give them the new structures they need'. Organisation and inclusion, then, may well be constructed in terms of uniting in resistance, but their discursive performance reflects an underlying acknowledgment of the institutions of the hegemony. In constructing organisation as the buying into hegemonic power structures in order to resist, whether unwittingly or consciously the motif becomes a means of reiterating in discourse, and thence reinforcing, these frameworks of power.

How, then in these discourses of inclusion do CIAZO and COMUS account for dissenting voices within communities; how do they cope with diversity and difference? A CIAZO internal document lists the 'problems of organisation' of the communities in order of priority; 'dependency, divisions between institutions, lack of confidence in community leaders,

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[320] *capacitar*

disinterest in being organised…' Reluctance to co-operate in organisational activities, such as literacy classes, is thus constructed as disinterest or dependency, or as structural problems which could be addressed by achieving a greater degree of organisation. As within the State vision above, the mass of 'the people' becomes a problematic 'other', whose outsider status is defined by their illiteracy. The discourse of inclusion is therefore undermined by one of *exclusion*, of labelling and classification. Dissent and diverging voices are couched in the familiar terms of something lacking - an absence of interest or reluctance for independence – a discursive code, then, equally autonomous to that of the State. Just as the local State hegemony constructs a space for blame by placing its emphasis on the social and moral duty of the individual, so the local voices of the popular sector, by construing participation and incorporation in the same terms, lay the responsibility for a lack of change at the feet of the individual in a surprisingly 'deficit' frame.

As within the discourses of the State, then, we see here little space for the addressing of competing ideologies or discourses. CIAZO's reinterpretations of diversity and disorder according to its own understandings, and its subsequent pinning down of these in list form, reflect its determination to impose order on a perceived situation of disarray. Yet this results, as will be shown, in a subordination of heteroglossia and an undermining of the discourses of inclusion, just as the mayor's verbal tying of *campesinos* to their 'little piece of land' limits potentiality for dissent.

The embedding of literacy by CIAZO and COMUS into a politico-historical philosophy allows for its employment in Usulután as a sort of cohesive force or ideological 'glue' in the recreation of their relationships with communities. This invoking of a common cause is a similar social process to those of wartime, when people were brought together under the common ideological umbrella of opposition to the oligarchy. Indeed, it is the political overtones which dominate the notion of *alfabetización* in Usulután; literacy classes have become, in effect, the delivery channel for ideology. Both COMUS and CIAZO place great emphasis on the 'commitment' or 'agreement'[321] between themselves and communities, in their role as local representatives of the people. An unspoken bargain operates: that of support and resources in return for ideological allegiance. In this respect, the ideology of literacy as struggle fits into Illich's vision of development as 'promise'.[322]

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[321] *compromiso*
[322] Illich (1992)

The texts above also reveal a mirroring of the State discourse of literacy as redemption, albeit in a slightly different frame. Reading and writing skills for CIAZO and COMUS are intertwined with the concepts of 'reflecting' and the 'leaving of ignorance'. These themes bear echoes of another leitmotif which emerged in conversations with Usulutecos, that of progress from darkness to light. Waking people up and remedying blindness are common metaphors among CIAZO and COMUS staff, as well as among those literacy facilitators and students who bought most avidly into the ideologies of these stakeholders. Categorising people as illiterate or blind of course merely reifies their exclusion, but CIAZO's position is clear; just as the State becomes the kindly God who can reveal the route to its particular model of salvation, so this agent of the popular sector presents itself in the same light, as the unifying force which can instigate, through collective power, social and political change. Similarly, just as the emphasis of State discourse lies on personal responsibility for development, so CIAZO's and COMUS' voices resound with the same ideal; for the State, this is the obligation of every individual to contribute their human capital to the given model of national progress, for CIAZO and COMUS it takes the form of the obligation to contribute one's agency to the common struggle against hegemony.

Yet ironically, within this discourse of the common good, we may hear traces of the State's emphasis on human capital. CIAZO, says Benjamin, sees its role as 'developing human resources'. The voice and constructs of the State are here co-opted within CIAZO's ideological framework, with human capital construed as fodder for the ideological struggle. By expressing their ideology in the very discourses they explicitly reject, CIAZO are unwittingly both undermining their own position and simultaneously legitimising and reinforcing that of the State.

Literacy for CIAZO and for COMUS, then, as the texts above reveal, operates both as an ideology and a tool of ideology. Margarita, the literacy promoter from COMUS, puts it thus: 'people who don't learn continue with the same language, they don't reflect'; that is, they are bounded by their 'limited words', which are the tools they need to be able to explore and thus escape their otherwise unalterable position in society. Words, in this vision, are the key to accessing thought, a view reminiscent of the technological Great Divide of Goody and Ong, and also of the deprived model, where being 'blind' through lack of literacy leaves one helpless and unprotected. Ironically, through an intended discourse of inclusion, a process of classification and exclusion takes place.

To a considerable extent, then, we see in these local stakeholders of Usulután the event of the 'echo effect', or the uncritical internalisation of external ideology and values. Although many of the ideals on which REFLECT promotes its methodology – an ideological commitment to the liberation and empowerment of the poor - are also deeply rooted within Salvadoran rural social history, their unquestioning and wholehearted co-option by stakeholders into a stream of discourse disseminated into the communities of Usulután shows an unawareness of changing local social reality with the ongoing passage of time, as we shall see below. In holding fast to the values of the past, COMUS and CIAZO are inadvertently preventing the reshaping of the future.

6.1.3 Conclusion

The picture drawn above of the two powerful discourses constructed around literacy in the theatre of Usulután make it clear that, within either of these discursive streams, literacy does not carry the primary force of Bourdieu's cultural capital for the individual.[323] Rather, both these dominant literacy ideologies centre around a process of submission – in one model, to the benevolent wisdom of the State, while simultaneously bearing individual guilt for one's failings; in the other, to the only morally correct course of action, that of engaging in the ideological struggle which will lead to collective liberation. Yet both these discourses are also inherently paternalistic, seeing people as 'blank slates', 'uneducated', 'unseeing', in the mode of the deprived / deficit models delineated above. In this they are constraining the individuals with whom they seek to engage by reflecting back at them an image of their society in which people are forced to see themselves as the lowest echelon.[324]

6.2 Positioning through performance

Power struggles are essentially about challenging meanings. Taking power and holding power is about making meanings stick.[325]

Both the State and the popular sector, through their local actors, want people not only to understand the discourses being promulgated, but to accept the ethics and ideologies behind them; that is, to widen their own power base through the incorporation of adherents. To do

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[323] Bourdieu (1977b)
[324] Bloch (1993)
[325] Harvey (1987) p267

so, both stakeholders employ a variety of communicative strategies to persuade people of the legitimacy of their position.

Let us begin by mapping the ideological location of these texts to one another on the discursive landscape of Usulután. They each take a stance of striking and explicit opposition, reflecting the ideological, social and political divides of history. Conversations are littered with references to 'them and us', 'the others', 'the other party', filtered through a range of different discursive techniques. The *alcaldía*, for example, often employs the discourses of legalisation, constructing itself as the elected government and thence legitimate caretaker of the Salvadoran *pueblo*, or people, a word literally meaning 'village'. The popular sector is labelled by these antagonists as politically and ideologically non-legitimate, lacking as it does the authority of the public vote. 'It's us who have the power', said the mayor of San Francisco Javier, 'because it's us who the people elected, they voted for us, because they have confidence that the party is going to take care of them. Other agencies, the other party...well, they don't have the confidence of the people...because of factors in history, events of the past...the people remember...so they don't have power. They don't represent the people.' As well as linking 'agencies' explicitly with political parties, the mayor's words are establishing a deep divide, an iron curtain rooted in history which partitions ideologies and contrasts legitimacy and representation with illegality and past wrongs.

Yet simultaneously the discourses of the local popular sector call on their own version of legitimacy, locating themselves firmly if somewhat self-consciously within the tradition of what Robins and Kell in another context call 'oppositional narratives'.[326] The private discourses of COMUS and CIAZO are explicitly and openly anti-State, and their communicative strategies carry these ideological visions stridently into the public domain. A text employed by both CIAZO and COMUS in staff training sessions for example discusses the 'banking' model of education, identifying this as one of 'submission' which is 'the style of traditional formal education' – that is, that of the State – 'where there is no participation, there is no space for it.' This booklet then openly criticises the State for reproducing the 'determinated system' within development projects, where project implementers claim to have completed projects when in fact 'nothing has been done' – 'These kinds of technical advisors are found most often in the employees of the Government'. The discourse of

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[326] Robins *op. cit.* p137 and Kell *op. cit.* p247. Kell's map of the dominant discourses in a in informal settlement outside Cape Town is very effective in revealing the subsuming of oppositional discourses into new narratives of reconstruction and development in South Africa

confrontation and challenge tips over into political rhetoric; *alcaldía*s 'only take into account the communities which sympathise with their political party.'

Is there then any scope for dissonance in the narration of such ideological texts within communities? Do COMUS, a grass-roots organisation deeply embedded in the political struggle, and their more powerful mentor CIAZO create a single unified voice around literacy or is there range and variety within monologia? In fact, inside the communities, the performances of these texts revealed some surprising tensions. CIAZO's discourse at times seems almost evangelical. Workshops and training sessions for facilitators almost always began with participants being asked to draw a picture to explain 'how REFLECT had changed their life'. Yet while the COMUS personnel appeared to buy heavily into this ideology in principle, unsurprisingly given their personal histories, they at times implicitly rejected the notion of the 'spreading' of REFLECT as a moral crusade which would necessarily involve personal sacrifice. The issue of staying overnight in communities is reflective of this; it became a source of contention between CIAZO and COMUS that CIAZO personnel viewed some degree of surrendering their family lives to the greater good as a necessary part of the crusade, while COMUS staff rejected this as a step too far. In their refusals Margarita, Robin and Juan were constructing a dissenting view of the CIAZO ideology, a vision less embedded in the history of the revolutionary cause and more, as we shall see, closely tied to and bound up within their relationships to the communities.

Similarly, while the CIAZO staff wholeheartedly emphasised the deeply ideological values of *alfabetización*, echoing in performance their content with words like 'struggle' and 'battle' within the discourses of inclusion, Robin and Margarita in fact considerably tempered this in dialogical encounters within communities. They stressed organisation as a sincere need, in the CIAZO vein, but placed a different construction upon it: they located organisation as a means of accessing claims and entitlements – 'if we have organisation, we can make a proposal, or a budget, we can go to the *alcadía* and they have to listen to us, because we are organised' (Margarita). Resistance, for Margarita and Robin, retains the construction of wartime but now also, and perhaps primarily, represents a way of buying into the discourses of the State, reconstructed as rights and obligations – 'they have to listen to us' – and thence accessing available resources and establishing claims and entitlements. [327]

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[327] COMUS, on many occasions, employed the discourses of the State in order to negotiate project funding from local government, but space limits exploration of this dimension here

When engaging in dialogical encounters with community members, the COMUS promoters would similarly re-interpret the CIAZO literacy manuals according to their own ideologies. These are very much focused around the notion of patronage; that of COMUS as guide and mentor. In Los Rodriguez one day, the facilitator was having difficulty eliciting from students the manual's pre-determined responses to the question 'Why is it necessary to organise ourselves?'[328] Robin, taking over the class, chose to disregard the suggested ideas and began to address the question in terms of the COMUS ideology instead – 'because, comrades, we have to be organised so that we can put in proposals and get funds from COMUS, if we want to clear the streets or fill in the pools of water, COMUS can help us, but first we must be organised…'

Thus, in these performative acts, we see that the discourses of CIAZO are not accepted unproblematically at the micro level, but are co-opted and adapted by their local partners and voices to create a Bakhtinian hybridity of narratives.[329] What Robins calls bricolage,[330] then, takes place at multiple levels; Robin in the instance above was tapping into the oppositional discourse of organisation *and* the notion of COMUS as patron *and* also incorporating his own knowledge of local ideologies, or subtexts, to construct a vision palatable to an audience he knew to be exhausted with revolutionary rhetoric. This then is a moment of Bakhtin's collusion and interaction of authorial voices; in the performative instant, history and ideology, politics and hope unite to create a future vision rooted in a local re-creation of the monologic voice.

Yet despite some areas of tension between the texts offered by CIAZO and their discursive interpretation in the communities by their local partners, these discourses of the popular sector stand in the landscape of Usulután as the largely singular voice of opposition to the hegemony, through their social power, historical legitimacy and their call to unity and responsibility. They create a discursive stream which, together with the discourses of the *alcaldía,* constitutes a commanding force of two, or at times three, powerful monologic voices relating to the construction of literacy as an ideology, which strive to reject diversity and which label dissent as indifference.[331] How, then are these texts supported through communicative practice? Unpicking not just the *forms* of discourses employed but also how

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[328] A powerful indication of how top-down the process was

[329] Bakhtin (1981) *op. cit.* A range of different voices and ideologies around literacy and REFLECT run through the landscape of El Salvador, emphasising how localised these findings are

[330] Robins (1996)

[331] The Church, as will be discussed below, also forms a monologic voice in the lives of some Usulutecos, but does not act as a key player in the role of literacy

they are shaped – their performance - will shed light on the types of communicative strategies which construct the centripetal forces of Usulután, and with which local people, in their striving to negotiate their lives within this social world, must contend. To do so, let us return in analysis to Bakhtin's explication of text. 'Before us are two events – the event narrated in the work and the event of narration itself…these events take place in different times …and in different places.'[332] These moments, or events, are, of course, intertwining and interrelated.

Thus, the first event in the construction of meaning and culture is that of the story presented, its ideological content and assumptions, its existence as a part of history. We have explored some aspects of this dimension in Usulután above, in unravelling the stories narrated in the texts of the State and the popular sector. The second dimension, the event of narration itself, is the moment and means of enactment; the performative act in which historical events are reiterated and reinterpreted. The construction of meaning in the performative instant lies in the strategies employed to locate the story in history and in the local social functions of its discourses.

Accordingly, this section will argue that both the content and the act of narration of these discourses about literacy strive to silence the views of rural people at the micro level of Usulután through their performance as centripetal forces. This has been touched upon above, with suggestions of the kinds of top-down performances used to drown out dissent, but will now be explored in detail. In revealing these, we may, in Rassool's terms above, 'foreground the discursive meanings that traverse the social terrain'.

The first aspect to consider here is the status and role of the discursive methods employed in the local landscape. The State, as has been shown, utilize as their voice the instruments of perceived authority. Press and TV are not just government-run but known to be so: they are symbols of oligarchy, power and dominant ideology. At the level of their local representatives, symbols of power and authority abound; the *alcaldía* in San Francisco Javier, for example, contains political posters on the wall, memorabilia of the ARENA party for sale, and forms and documents on public view encoding the discourses of the State into the public consciousness. Within communities, as has been said, the agents of the State rarely penetrate directly, but its influence permeates nonetheless, in such locations as plaques on the walls of schools claiming their construction for the Ministry of Education. These channels of communication have a long public association with the voice of the hegemony, thus the

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[332] Bakhtin (1981) *op. cit.* p225

ideologies embedded within them are performatively associating themselves with histories of dominance and control. Yet within all these texts and artefacts the State is ironically presenting a contradictory version of the deficit model of literacy; on the one hand it stresses literacy's importance, while on the other it employs modes and codes of communication requiring advanced training at negotiating written text.

By contrast CIAZO and COMUS, as we have seen, use the media of the traditional oppositional voice, embedding their texts within the discourses and symbolic media of the popular sector. In doing so, they are consciously inscribing their discourse within a tradition which simultaneously confers its legitimacy. During the civil war, for example, many texts were produced by the guerrilla forces in the framework of popular education, and certain features of this operate as signals of their social role and status. Such books are, for example, illustrated with a particular genre of art, focusing on minimalist, colourful drawings of *campesino* figures working on the land or spending time with their families. These pictures effectively remind the intended user of the text's status as entrenched within their own lived realities. Those produced by CIAZO in 1999 and disseminated into the communities by COMUS are so created; the two literacy manuals quoted above, for example, bear on their front pages hand-drawn pictures of *campesinos* working on coffee plantations. Yet irony and contradiction arises here too: the relatively advanced skills required to negotiate the texts undermines their social construction in discourse.

The literacy song transcribed above, however, is part of a more local communicative repertoire or 'vernacular literacy' in being part of a long tradition of songs of the revolution. It is sung primarily at gatherings by sympathisers to the oppositional political Cause, also often privately and away from dialogical encounters with COMUS. It is part of a body of work which carries the symbolism of resistance and bravery - such songs were forbidden during the war by the armed forces of the government, and their performance could easily result in extreme suffering and reprisals. The literacy song in this way combines several symbolic meanings at once: it is in its narrative event redolent of new political freedom and a new history ahead, while simultaneously in its performance acting as a reminder of the horrors of the past and making a statement of political alliance. In calling on these textual and discursive symbols in the event of narration, CIAZO is not merely reiterating this discourse of struggle but is reinforcing it, calling for the reconstruction of history in a newly reshaped future.

Therefore, the narrative strategies chosen by stakeholders inscribe their voices within one or

other of the divided, legitimised discourses of power. Yet beyond the significance of the discursive medium lies the question of how, through careful management of these media, ideology becomes legitimised through communicative techniques. One key means, for example, of legitimating and maintaining ideology – which is, as we recall from Chapter 1 above, the meeting place of power and discourse – is through the control of knowledge. The designation of valuable information and, more generally, the very definition of the world, is a form of dominance.[333] Rassool, in her examination of the struggle in pre-revolutionary Iran for the State to maintain ideological and political control over the production of knowledge, argues, albeit from a macro perspective, that 'any examination of the value of societal literacy programmes needs to consider also the forms of control exercised over 'knowledge and knowing' within the culture.'[334] Although this text is not, as has been made clear, an assessment of the 'value' of a societal literacy programme, it will be helpful to our understandings of the kinds of forces with which local people in Usulután have to contend, to consider the limitations and constraints they experience through the power exercised by those same stakeholders over knowledge and knowing.

State control of knowledge in dialogical encounters is very evident in different dimensions of El Salvador's social patterns; in the restrictions placed on textbooks, teachers and academics, for example, or those on political dissent, and in the censorship imposed on most forms of the media.[335] While the latter has become somewhat more relaxed in recent years - there are now local radio stations that are heavily supportive of the FMLN - the two major and only national daily newspapers remain government-run, and the government controls all but one of the main TV channels. Thus, people are excluded from a whole range of knowledges: monopolies of desired resources are preserved through both communicative repertoire and the limitation of information made available. The way this filters down to the local level is evident in the continuation of the story begun in the previous chapter, tracking the same group of men from Los Rivera as they visit the *alcaldía* in San Francisco Javier to discuss the question of legalising their community. To reiterate: this bureaucratic process is one which the government requires to be completed before access to State financial aid can be allocated to the community through the *alcaldía.*

After an hour's wait on that long hot afternoon, the local official, Mr. Hernandez, invited the men into his office, where they removed their hats but remained standing. With the initial

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[333] Bourdieu (1977a)
[334] Rassool *op. cit.* p433
[335] see Murray *op. cit.* for an overview of State control of media in El Salvador

pleasantries conducted, the leader from Los Rivera explained the nature of the company's visit. This speech over, Mr Hernandez sat, and then talked in a monologue for some minutes about the extremely complex nature of the affair. Legalisation was, of course, the right and entitlement of the community of Los Rivera, he said. But it would, of necessity, require the election of a governing body, the presence and services of a lawyer, and an application to central government which the lawyer had to draw up. Such lawyers were only available in the city of Usulután, and would be expected to be paid in advance. However, if the representatives were able to call a community meeting to elect the governing body, to raise the necessary funds to pay the solicitor and then instruct him to draw up the required application, Mr Hernandez would be pleased to forward it to the appropriate office of central government, where the community might expect to wait some time before gaining a response.

The narrative performance of this dialogical encounter, at which the researcher was present, employed codes which were clearly outside the discursive repertoire of the community representatives. Mr Hernandez employed legal terminology extensively; 'instructing the lawyer', 'the government channels of communication', 'the deposition', 'the witnessed signatures of all the community members', this last constituting an impossible proviso. Such terms were not necessarily unfamiliar to those present, but their extensive use within the discourses of power placed Mr Hernandez firmly in the position of dominance, seated as he was at his desk, wearing a neatly ironed shirt and surrounded by the symbols and trappings of authority. The standing, hatless agricultors, many tired and dirty after a day's manual labour, were placed in the role of supplicants, trying to negotiate what should have been their right in a discourse which was far from their own. Indeed, their words were often translated by Mr Hernandez directly into the discourses of power, in an act of conscious bricolage. 'The representatives would like to know where one can contact such a lawyer' said Don Juan; – 'Ah! So you would be interested in obtaining the services of a lawyer who specialises in the process of submitting applications for legalisation' responded Mr. Hernandez. Local forms of discourse were thus not merely subordinated, but actively and knowingly rejected and replaced by the centripetal force of the voice of dominance, which in both its narrative content and its status as the language of power controlled what could and could not be said.

In terms of the control of information, the knowledges omitted from this meeting were various: a) the cost of legal fees for drawing up the application for legalisation is not, in fact, immense, as this is a standard form, and b) there are funds available from many local organisations, including COMUS, for their payment. It is c) not required that the lawyer visit the community, only that the necessary documentation – the list of elected Board of

Directors, the list of community members with their identity numbers and various other information – is brought to the office of the lawyer, who will then prepare the application. And d) in fact, many NGOs, including COMUS, regard this process as an integral part of their work, and have been helping communities to gain legalised status since during the civil war.

Such knowledges, then, were in this discursive encounter kept from the people of Los Rivera in order to prevent them from accessing claims on the State which were in fact their legitimate rights. In portraying the legalisation process as something which was outside the realm and control of supposed *analfabetos*, and also outside their economic possibilities, Mr Hernandez, the local actor for the State, was controlling people's understanding of these rights and doing his best to thwart their opportunity for change.

Knowledge in Usulután, then, is curbed by powerful agents. But at times the process of control goes beyond simple limitation and restriction, moving into one of reshaping, the reinterpretation of knowledge for ideological ends. We may see this in some stories of COMUS' and CIAZO's enactments of written discourses – their literacy practices.

During 1999, government health reforms proposed introducing a charge for health consultations to ordinary people[336] as well as reforming the management structure of hospitals. This proposal was interpreted by the political opposition as the 'privatisation' of the health services, a stance loyally adopted by CIAZO, COMUS, and all other popular sector organisations in Usulután. A handout written by CIAZO and disseminated into rural communities via COMUS was inculcated into literacy classes in four of the communities focused upon here. It referred among other things to the government's initiative as treating health as 'a product to be sold' and as 'belonging to a privileged group'.

In this textual artefact, CIAZO is linking current political change to historic patterns of injustice. Communicative practice is thus entwined with acts of ideological opposition; just as stakeholders control knowledge and information in order to maintain and legitimate their ideologies and powers, particularly around literacy, so they also strive to achieve this through the shaping of the discourses of the social world. Stakeholders employ such discursive strategies to promote their own constructions of history and reality, thereby rendering deeply

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[336] Nominally on a scale according to income, but certainly beyond the reach of many *campesinos*

ideological notions part and parcel of the 'taken for granteds' of the society, or what might be considered by Freire as 'false consciousness'.[337]

We have discussed above how the State communicates and legitimises its approach through a self-projection as the rightful representative of the Salvadoran people, or village. To return to the mayor's quote above: 'it's us who the people elected, they voted for us, because they have confidence that the party is going to take care of them'. The discourses here are embedded within the State's chosen frame of the family. In this narrative, members are supported and given a sense of belonging provided that they behave in such a way that will make the family proud. This means being co-operative and loyal and working in unity with everyone else.[338] Thus, the safety net of the family also requires abiding by its social rules. This discourse is a powerful one in rural Usulután; on many occasions the mayor or his representatives could be heard telling men or women that 'we are united in this matter…we will do whatever is possible to achieve this (thing)'. Yet in constructing rural community members as bound up by birth in this all-protecting, inescapable family, the State is actually restricting room to manoeuvre, and limiting people's space for dissent; together with support, everybody knows, goes obligation.

COMUS and CIAZO communicate their discourses partly, as has been made clear above, through their embedded position as opposing the forces of oligarchy. In ongoing acts of performance they call on history as a validation of their perspective, seeking to re-invoke and reinforce their status as the voice against oppression. Yet they too employ the 'family' narrative to control and shape ideology. A particularly powerful dimension of this is their discourse of *compañerismo*, a compelling tool of legitimisation. The closest English equivalents to *compañero* might be 'companion' or 'kith'. But in the context of Usulután, the term is a highly politicised totem, carrying a wartime sense of 'fellow-fighter' or 'fellow member of the political cause'. Its post-war sense, particularly when invoked with the powerful ideological intent of many players in the Usulután literacy scenario, is more the notion of 'comrade in arms'. It summons up a bond of shared philosophy and a common commitment to the cause; its uttering is an invoking of the collective historical memory.

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[337] Cobden *op. cit.* points out that this is often erroneously attributed to Marx; in fact, the term was never used by him, originating instead by Engels

[338] Similar to Watters op. cit. p87, who found the same process in a private church school in South Africa

Compañerismo is an ideological dimension of *compadrazgo*[339] traditionally the ritual practice of co-parenting, or 'godparenting'. In Usulután this term has also taken on a powerful symbolism of memory. The term *compadre* is used by war veterans to refer to their brothers and sisters in arms, their fellow-suffers on the battlefields. *Compadre* and *compañero* in Usulután both invoke the bonds of fictive kin which have been created before, during and after wartime and which in the post-war landscape have lost little of their ideological force.

COMUS and CIAZO both employ these discourses of moral / ideological obligation through *compañerismo* as tools in both the creation and legitimisation of their ideological position in relation to literacy and development. Let us return, as an example, to the health reform poster described above, created by CIAZO and distributed locally, with positive support, by members of COMUS. The headline stands bold: 'The right of health is an irrenunciable instrument to guarantee peace in the country'. The use of the word 'peace' is a direct appeal to the collective memory of the war, contextualising the health reforms as part of historical patterns of oppression and suffering, the struggle for which so much blood was previously shed. Thus government actions are cleverly invoked as an act of war; casting the oppositional voice in the role of peacemakers. The text reminds its users that 'the State is responsible for the health of Salvadorans, according to Article 65 of the constitution. Because health is not a product to be sold. It does not belong to a privileged group'. The echoes back to the cries of wartime are powerful here – the restrictions of services to privileged elites, the accusations of capitalism and markets depriving the Salvadoran people of their just rights.

The rhetoric continues apace; 'If these aspects of the reforms affect you' – using the informal *tu* to build on the sense of unity in struggle, harking back to the *compañero* discourse of the war – then, in the largest letters of the entire sheet, '*APOYA* – help, support – the initiative, 'Citizens United for Health''. The verb *apoyar* is a powerful leitmotif in Usulután, part of the wartime and post-war discourses of oppression, solidarity and unity. Its invocation in this performative act conjures up the moral and ideological obligation described above of rural Salvadorans to support their *compañeros* in struggle. The textual artefact then continues with a list of all those united in opposition to the reforms – 'NGOs, universities, churches, associations, foundations, inter-organisational movements and civil society' – invoking the roll-call of those involved in the historical struggle of the civil war against the oppressions of the oligarchic powers.

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[339] see Aikman *op. cit.* for an explanation of this in a Peruvian context

This piece of written text, then, and its performance within communities, reveals how CIAZO and by extension COMUS engage in a process of dialogical encounter which acts as a centripetal force in the discursive landscape and consciously restricts space for dissent. By presenting the artefact and its ideologies as rooted within historical legitimacy, these stakeholders are not only limiting but also reshaping the knowledges available to the communities. Similar processes can be witnessed in the letters sent by COMUS to its supporters in rural areas. These invariably begin with an evocation of the *compañero* discourse, and an appeal to the notions of solidarity and struggle. Let us consider as an example the opening of an invitation to a leadership training meeting, sent to community leaders and dated 22nd March 1999: –

> Dear *Compañero*, by this means, please receive a fraternal greeting in solidarity in the name of COMUS, hoping at the same time to find you well and in a good disposition to continue in the training processes, in order to be able to orient activities towards community development.

Within this short text, we may see powerful discursive strategies employed to control ideology and relationship. The recipient is reminded of their social role as community leader – a COMUS-created position - and of the responsibilities and loyalties intertwined with this. The forces of solidarity with and obligation to COMUS are invoked along with all the meanings and histories which surround the discourse of *compañerismo.* The suggestion is that anyone somehow not in a good disposition to continue the training processes must bear responsibility for the failure of community development; a centripetal force, then, which precludes challenge or dissent.

Such communicative strategies, both of the State and of CIAZO / COMUS, may perhaps seem rather coercive in emphasis. There is a hint of underlying threat; refusal to join the struggle / come to the literacy class / educate one's children renders the individual both derelict in their duty and somehow lacking in their historically-constructed identity. It is helpful to reiterate here CIAZO's exhortation in the facilitator's manual above: 'We hope….that no-one will be missing next time…' The moral and ideological legitimacy of family discourses such as these lie in their construction of obligation; anyone who does not actively support the discourse is guilty of its rejection, thence betraying their own identity and their *campesino* fellows, a powerful instrument where the society's unity has been built out of common grievances and injustices.

COMUS employs the family discourse to particular effect, rooting this in the local history of their relationship with communities during and since the civil war, often invoking Watters' 'liberal' discourse as a part of their ongoing narrative.[340] Yet while texts such as the letter above stress the notion of inclusion, they also fix local people within their limitations, subject to all the obligations and ideological trappings that have been described. Although COMUS' Board of Directors is nominally composed of community members, in practice all decisions are taken by the 'internal' Board composed of members of staff. Thus, the minimisation of local voices in decision-making prevents people, even those whose leaders are members of COMUS' Board, from pushing for change.

However powerful may be the rhetoric, moreover, families, like all other social groups, inevitably reflect divisions of power. This becomes particularly striking in Usulután within the many community meetings run by COMUS or CIAZO, performative acts with which the State, as has been suggested, engages little, preferring to retain its voice within the offices of power. Much verbal emphasis is placed within these dialogical encounters on the 'equality' and *compañero* narratives. In fact, though, the discourse is commonly controlled by CIAZO or COMUS personnel. Training workshops for facilitators, for example, began invariably with the iterated emphasis on 'hearing everyone's voice' and 'we are all equal participants' as well as, of course, much emphasis on the importance of *compañerismo*. But the actual processes – the text of the day, or the narrative events - were conducted according to CIAZO plans, and there were many instances of voices being either drowned out or corrected.

One prominent example of this occurred during a meeting for literacy facilitators with CIAZO, held in the organisation's office near to the main town of Usulután one hot day towards the end of September. Some facilitators were trying to explain to CIAZO staff that members of the adult literacy circles in communities were often unhappy with the learning methods of the diagrams and maps that form the PRA learning plank of REFLECT. One particularly vocal teacher, Wilf, a man of some years' experience as a facilitator and now volunteering in a community where a river had flooded and left many people homeless, stood up to make his point. He argued fluently and cogently that the people he taught saw little point in 'drawing' or in 'conducting analysis' – 'what they want and need is to find solutions!' 'They say that a lot of discussion, a lot of analysis won't change things – and what they want is change'.

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[340] Watters *op. cit.* p92

Wilf is articulating here a common critique of the particular learning method employed[341] and embedding this within the historical and ideological fabric of rural Usulután's experiences with literacy. In this theatre, literacy as linked specifically with analysis of the social reality has become an outdated model – this is something which the great flood of post-war aid to El Salvador in combination with the enormous influence of the popular education sector movement has addressed over several years, and people in rural communities often express with vehemence their 'tiredness at more analysis'. In this gulf of understanding between stakeholder and community member we may see the distinction between CIAZO's categorisation of people as 'passive' – in their choosing to remain aloof to meetings, literacy classes and so on – and the stance of resistance to 'words' and to theory taken by many local people, something which we will explore below.

Within this dialogical encounter, however, the CIAZO representative Benjamin, a tall, charismatic, university-educated man from the capital city, countered not by addressing the question directly, but by reiterating and reinforcing the political rhetoric and values in which CIAZO's and COMUS' theoretical and ideological position are grounded. He responded that 'this was the inspiration and the theory of Paulo Freire…REFLECT is not just about simple reading and writing, it is about action…reflection is part of that process'. He then moved the discussion on to a reiteration of the injustices and the oppression of rural people, familiar territory on which little disagreement would be encountered, and Wilf sat down, unable to rechannel the discussion.

The discursive stream in which Benjamin's words find their utterance is rooted in the ideological fabric of the popular sector's vision of literacy. But this event of narration also acts as a symbolic drowning out of local voices, a controlling not just of discourse, through its centripetal tendencies, but also of the space for discourse. Wilf is a member of the flooded community in which he teaches; his voice articulates dissent and dissatisfaction with the model of literacy being imposed from without. Yet his voice was silenced not only through its meeting in dialogue with a different opinion, but by being simply swept away by the sheer force of the monologic tide of history and ideology. Wilf's point was not addressed again and no other facilitator raised it, even though private conversation, and observation in the communities revealed those present to echo highly similar views. The power of the argument, its performance through the articulate, university-educated representative, its invoking of

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[341] There are many other points of interest and critique regarding the implementation and theory of the literacy classes but, as stated, this is not an evaluation of REFLECT, thus here is not the place to explore them

terms like 'the theory of Paulo Freire' – a concept and name outside the experience of most of those present – as well as its call of 'we need action!' (the battle cry of the war) meant that to invoke dissent would be to contradict the historical and ideological legitimacy of the popular sector. Thus both the discourse itself and its enactment – its moment of narration - precluded contradiction or dissonance.

Another focal point of the control of the space for discourse is that of the many community meetings held by COMUS. During these dialogical encounters, staff employed the language of power, referring for example to community members by their position – treasurer, secretary and so on – rather than by name. A prior agenda had generally been drawn up by COMUS, and the formalised nature of these meetings effectively prevented complex subtexts emerging, discussion, for example, of the shortcomings of COMUS. On one occasion, a community leader was trying to press for an explanation as to why a promise of metal sheets for roofs had not materialised. The COMUS representative present stated that 'this question is important, but it is not on the agenda, we can address it another day' – and moved on to reiterate the COMUS vision of 'good leadership' in communities. In this way, people and communities are effectively prevented from negotiating their position of power; they cannot reposition themselves within the relationship.

Such discursive moments reveal a considerable amount about the notion of power underlying CIAZO and COMUS ideologies. Their rhetoric stresses equality and their emphasis on local resources reflects the kind of 'power to' of the feminist models of empowerment described above. Yet this is juxtaposed with the unidimensional vision of 'power over', and 'unity', despite the rhetoric, does not necessarily imply equality in terms of political power, as is evidenced by the patronage-style relationships with the communities. The hidden text is captured in the quote from Angelica, at the start of this chapter, who refers to the communities as 'orphans' and says that 'CIAZO's task is to accompany them [from darkness to light]'. The stakeholders' role in the relationship is that of patron, or guide, and this construction allows for the control, through 'talking over', of discourse, just as in the State's self-construction above.

Both the *alcaldía* and the local voices of the popular sector in Usulután employ, as one of their legitimising strategies of communication, powerful appeals to the collective memory. The *alcaldía* blames the actions of the FMLN – that is, COMUS – for 'holding back education'. 'If they hadn't spent so much time blowing up bridges and getting these people to into the fighting, we could have had schools open, and we wouldn't be in this condition now'

says San Francisco Javier's mayor. In laying responsibility for current social reality at the door of COMUS and its ilk, the mayor is here drawing on the collective memory of suffering to unite people within a particular ideological framework. Meanwhile, COMUS and CIAZO employ a similar tactic, appealing to the collective consciousness of economic and social hardship over the years, and to the failings of the State to provide education for the masses as an example of elitist and oligarchic doctrines. 'They have always had the idea of preventing the people becoming literate, and for that we have suffered, suffered...Well now the people want to become literate so that they can challenge those who hold the power' (Benjamin). Conversations between COMUS staff and community members frequently centred around 'before' – with the overtones of 'before the liberation', juxtaposed with the next step of 'now', and 'the future'. The discourse then is of a journey towards literacy and freedom, where progress has been made but much remains to be done. In reiterating the common experience of prior suffering, and reminding people of the role COMUS and CIAZO played in people's liberation from this, the actors are both legitimising their own ideology and restating the moral obligation for participation through discourse.

COMUS in particular locates its own legitimacy by evoking in performative acts and discursive techniques its very status as an oppositional discourse. The agency's location in the collective memory as a voice against oligarchy confers upon it the moral authority and legitimacy of history; without this, COMUS would find itself ideologically adrift. It is perhaps partly for this very reason that its letters to communities appear so formulaic; they must, of necessity, invoke the discourse which determines their senders' status as a site of resistance. The very legitimacy of the discourse lies in its politicisation, therefore, and COMUS' fear of losing its location in history reflects a fear of losing its own identity, something so painfully carved from suffering and terror over so many years. For COMUS, and also for CIAZO, to abandon their identity and status as a discourse of opposition now would be, in effect, to abandon their symbolic value for both themselves and their constituents, to negate the experience of all the previous pain, and to take a step into an empty unknown. Within the highly divided climate of El Salvador, few role models exist beyond the fierce discursive streams explicated above; a wholly new identity would have to be created where currently little space for meeting exists.

Ironically, however, these constant reminders from both the State and the oppositional voices of injustice and continued suffering serve in fact to constrain the very people they strive to embrace. Such discourses locate people all the more firmly in their own history and remind them all the more conclusively of their own subordinate status. Narratives of powerlessness

and blameworthiness of local people are a powerful force among Usulután stakeholders; people are categorised variously as 'unknowing', 'blind', 'not curious', 'easily tricked', 'resistant', unable to manage themselves and / or motivated almost exclusively by money, 'not civilised', 'indifferent' 'apathetic'. The vocabulary, employed with equal frequency and force by both *alcaldía* and the speakers of the popular sector, is deeply rooted in both the deficit and the deprived models of literacy. Thus, stakeholders' constructions of themselves as the guides to different frameworks of the future – where people's only task is to fulfil their moral duty; that is, to fall in line and abnegate themselves to the greater good / common cause – and the underscoring of this discourse with rhetoric about 'self-determination', is deeply undermined both by their domination of diverging local voices and by the continual holding up for the people a mirror to their status at the bottom of the pile. In doing so, stakeholders are both reflecting and reinforcing a vision of subordinacy, and thereby constraining possibilities for change.

6.3 Performative methods

6.3.1Literacy as totem

Another strategy employed by stakeholders in their striving towards the legitimsation of their voice within the relationships, is what will be construed here as the use of literacy as totem. Totemism, within this study, is taken to be ways that a textual artefact becomes imbued with ideological / symbolic capital, such that the artefact becomes a totemic symbol of the ideological discourse, much as Maddox talks of literacy as a 'sign'. [342]

As we have seen, for both the State and the popular sector, literacy is both constructed as both a way into 'development' / organisation, depending on the model, and simultaneously, it acts as a force for co-option into these ideologies. Moreover, insistence on the authority of the written form – or, as Rockhill would put it, the construction of literacy as power in discourses of power - places, in Usulután, a written statement / decision / opinion within the 'official', the more legitimate, the more powerful, world. Such fragments of narrative thus become inscribed as totems of legitimacy and authority within a sea of fluid discourse and social practice.

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[342] Maddox (2000)

Writing is both channel and text of cultural expression;[343] thus, the doubtful status of 'representation' as regards a 'fixing' of the cultural milieu in ethnography provides a powerful lens of insight onto the roles, meanings and applications of script within the social world. Through it, we can learn how written texts attempt to fix social reality, and how they are employed as means of stamping authority on the social world. What characterisations and assumptions do such texts make about the world? And, significantly, what exclusions, or silences, do they hold?

The case of formal documents is central in this regard, pivotal as it is to the ordered functioning of institutions. Douglas writes: 'The more fully institutions encode expectations, the more they put uncertainty under control, with the further effect that behaviour tends to conform to the institutional matrix: if this degree of co-ordination is achieved, disorder and confusion disappear'.[344] The emphasis of both COMUS and CIAZO on inscribing things into document form reveals literacy's function as totem; vast amounts of information are inscribed within forms, into exercise books, onto scraps of paper which are then filed away and seemingly forgotten. Yet their written status confers on their content a legitimacy without which the text would have been consigned to the fluidity of oral information, something potentially negotiable or deniable, not 'fixed' or held official, being uncommitted to paper. The practice of reiterating things in written form, even when they were already established in oral discourse, was an important part of re-establishing their authority. The weekly Monday morning meetings in COMUS, for example, always involved a painstakingly rewriting of the numbers / names of all twenty-three literacy groups in operation, although the information changed little from week. While the amount of documentation produced seemed to the researcher at times vast and extraneous, Angelica, voicing the wider view of CIAZO, argued that 'we have mainly an oral culture, only with words, no-one is writing anything, no one is noting down the efforts in the communities'. Her distinction between 'words' and 'something written' exemplifies the totemising of the writing down of discourse; its inscription within the narrative of the 'official' world attaches to it the symbolic meaning of legitimacy. This is, of course, Foucault's notion of conferring symbolic capital on discourse.[345] It also signifies the buying by local stakeholders of the popular sector into dominant codes of communication, ironically enough, those historically of the oligarchy.

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[343] Camitta *op. cit.*
[344] Douglas (1986) p48 cited in Malan (1996b) *op. cit.* p145
[345] Foucault (1981) *op. cit.*

The State's application of totemism is reflected most powerfully in the *cédula,* or personal identification card, a small booklet which everyone is required to own. The individual's public and official identity, rights and entitlements, are all determined and voiced by this artefact. Within the Usulután of the past, the *cédula* was a symbol of control – random checks were made by local officials and lacking it, a person was held subject to fines (which almost inevitably they could not pay) or prison. It remains today a metaphor for social control – without the *cédula* a person cannot work legally, open or use a bank account, cash a money order from relatives abroad or a local wage cheque, officially participate in community affairs, become a member of a legalised community, leave the country, buy or rent a house, own land or animals, register the birth of a child and so on. The *cédula* operates as the recognition of existence within the official world and as a mode of formally enshrining, or institutionalising, processes essential to legitimate social life.

The *cédula* can only be obtained by application from the mayor's office, that is, by appealing to, and engaging with, the discourses of authority. It requires the presentation of other documents; its obtaining is therefore restricted by the family's previous negotiations within the official world. It publicly categorises the individual, for a period of several years, as single or married, born within or out of wedlock, and, most powerfully for this study, as 'literate' or 'illiterate'. It thus marks out people in the social world according to the rules of the elite. The State, therefore, encodes the *cédula* as a social totem and by requiring it in all its social transactions, controls the nature of these, locating the people as supplicants and reinforcing the controls over their relationships with authority.

Part of this totemising process is also a process of institutionalising, the way that certain documents, in their set format, become established as the appropriate form for something, and as such the only legitimate mode of discourse. The most obvious site of this process can be seen in the State's adoption of standardised modes and codes of communication such as forms and documents relating to land, animals, and many other aspects of social life. Animals can only be legitimately sold when the paperwork is done; land can only be bought and sold through protracted dialogical encounters with State offices. There are, in these acts of institutionalising, no alternative modes or codes of communication on offer.

The oppositional voice, despite CIAZO's degree of emphasis on Real Literacies within REFLECT, also engages in this practice of institutionalising. For example, requests for aid from communities to COMUS are required to be presented in a specific format, accompanied by the citing of names, dates and *cédula* numbers. Only thus do they become inscribed in the

stream of 'official' discourse, and only as such do they carry the totemic obligation to be addressed. There were several instances of such requests arriving at the office in written form, but which were rejected for not being in the correct format, lacking for example a list of all the *cédula* numbers of applicants (even though these were not at all necessarily relevant to the process of distributing aid), or not bearing the stamp of the community leader, even though he had printed his name. Computer text forms part of this totemisation; COMUS forms were always printed out on the agency computer, even where this was a long and laborious business, and even where the forms were to be taken into communities to whose members these modes of communication were distant to say the least. Such artefacts are totems of monologia; the power of the term 'documents', and the sheer volume of such documents which litter the landscape of Usulután is to an outsider remarkable.

6.3.2 The ritualisation of discourse

The processes of the totemism of literacy described above extend at times in Usulután into the ritualisation of discourse. Kertzer emphasises the role of rituals and ideology in making the social order appear natural and inevitable. His term for this is 'mystification'.[346] For Foucault, ritual is more closely linked to symbolic capital:

> Ritual defines the qualification which must be possessed by individuals who speak...it defines the gestures, behaviour, circumstances and the whole set of signs which must accompany discourse: finally, it fixes the supposed or imposed efficacy of the words, their effect on those whom they are addressed, and the limit of their constraining value[347]

What, then, is the distinction between literacy as totemism, as described above, and literacy as ritual? Totemism, as we have seen, focuses on the symbolic nature of written artefacts. Ritual, by contrast, emphasises the Foucauldian sense of the signs and symbols, or qualities, which accompany these written texts; the aspects of its event of narration which confer its status as legitimate or otherwise, powerful or otherwise. Of course, in the performative act the two are intertwined and interpolating, each creating and shaping the other.

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[346] Kerzer (1988)
[347] Foucault (1981) *op. cit.* pp62

There are many such instances of literacy as ritual in Usulután, practised largely by the two stakeholders discussed here. Within the mayor's office, literacy is ritualised through institutionalised power relations, which are reflected in symbolic discourses. The office is peopled with individuals in uniforms, which within the fabric of local history constitute a powerful symbolic discourse of authority. The office is electrified, it contains typewriters, a radio-telephone and a computer, as well as many 'documents' (books, pamphlets, reports, forms and so on). To meet with a person in authority, a community member must ask one of the uniformed officials for permission and an appointment. They will then take some preliminary details and tell the individual how long he or she must wait. The supplicant then sits on a low bench as the typewriters tap and the radio hums.

The office of the *alcaldía* is therefore imbued with both literacy totems and rituals. When making an appointment, the applicant must stand behind the desk, a process which immediately inscribes the discourse as belonging to the official world. He or she must then be prepared to hand over their personal details, a gesture which carries a powerful symbolic value in Usulután of bringing your presence to the attention of authority, something which in the recent past has been something to be avoided at all costs, the source of great fear and potentially dreadful consequences. In requiring the individual to engage with these rituals, the State is fixing the individual into their externally-imposed place in the power schema of authority. By keeping their discourses exclusive, as we have said, members of rural communities are being placed in the position of being 'brought in' to the discourses, as if they are applying to join the discursive group.

COMUS similarly attaches ritual to discourses around literacy in the same way that it applies totemism. The Monday morning meetings, mentioned above, were striking in their processes of ritualisation. The rewriting each week of the names and numbers of each literacy group not only signifies their inscription into the discourses of power, but is notable for the fact that the numbers were usually the same, even though we were perfectly aware that those figures being inscribed into our records diverged wildly from views in communities. The significance of this discursive event, then, lies not in the actual numbers themselves, their status as a reflector of objective truth or otherwise, but in its role as ritual, where its enactment, conducted within the codes and modes of the 'official' world, signified the COMUS seriousness and legitimacy of approach – counting, measuring, writing. Vagueness, possibility and variety were honed down and pinned to a fixed, immovable statement which could be employed as justification, explanation, rationale or proof; a factual rock in a shifting sea of discourse.

In attributing these rituals to their narratives, then, the discourses and thence the work of COMUS assumed the symbolic capital of legitimacy and reality. Similarly, in visits out to the communities, COMUS staff exported these rituals. They carried the symbolic authority of office into the communities; the official-looking bags, far beyond what a rural farmer could afford, the notebooks and the printed forms. In reiterating through such ideological texts their own authority, and in exporting this specific model, co-opted from the State, of the shape of powerful discourse, other potential modes and codes of authoritative discourse are being subordinated, and relationships reconstructed on COMUS' terms.

But perhaps the greatest irony here lies in the adoption by these agents of the oppositional voice of dominant modes and codes of communication while simultaneously explicitly and vehemently rejecting them. By employing the practices and codes of the oligarchic narratives – and by importing these into the communities, where they are imparted as the 'correct' and indeed the only way to communicate - these agents are undermining their own discourse of opposition, and failing to acknowledge local modes of communication. Through the totemisation and ritualisation of these modes and codes, the popular sector stakeholders are ironically reinforcing their symbolic power.[348]

Of course, it would be possible to see COMUS' and CIAZO's buying into such communicative strategies as a means to further acts of resistance against the State, as part of Freire and Macedo's acknowledgement of the transformation of social conditions often requiring those who are 'oppressed' to appropriate the codes and cultures of the dominant sphere, so that they can transcend their own environments.[349] Certainly, where COMUS is acting as a literacy mediator between communities and State, this may well be the case. But COMUS' and CIAZO's wholesale adoption of these practices, even internally to their own organisations, suggests not subversion but a conscious absorption and buying into the very ideologies they explicitly negate.

This ironic dissonance between the rhetoric of the text and its event of narration is all the more alarming when we consider its powerful effects of subordination on local discursive practices and texts, as we have seen above. Where the discourses of the stakeholders are so firmly entrenched, little or no scope is left for challenge or dissent, except within the frameworks of these discourses themselves. We will address this issue in more detail below,

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[348] This is similar to Meek (1991) who notes that learning classroom language also involves learning formal communication codes

[349] Freire and Macedo *op. cit.*

but the salient point here is that insistence on the symbolic capital and legitimacy of 'documents' and the correct forms of address in meetings reveals a reiteration and a recreation of power relations through discourse. Discourse in Usulután therefore becomes an integral part of the negotiation of power relations, not wholly a reflection of something pre-evident, as some theory might have us believe, but a reiteration of status and relationships.[350]

What, then is the significance of COMUS and CIAZO adopting so thoroughly the rituals and totems of State discourse? We have examined above the question of identity; perhaps a further answer lies in a need for expression of legitimacy. Eriksen notes that in situations of social transformation, rituals belonging to the former social order may be reproduced, although their meaning may change. During periods where a new political power structure tries to replace the old, the new leader may appropriate ritual symbols associated with the previous familiar order in order to create an impression of continuity and legitimacy.[351] Perhaps the emphasis on the modes and codes of communication around literacy in the style of the State is part of the oppositional voice's search for legitimacy; the attempt to establish their own world order through the co-option of familiar ritual and totems. The ways this discourse is reinforced within COMUS and CIAZO themselves, through their own rituals such as the Monday morning meetings or the vast amounts of documentation, reflect the usurping of the codes of the legitimate or powerful worlds to inscribe ideology in understanding and to establish as legitimate one singular truth, rather than engaging in the search for different modes of expression.

We have considered above how people are limited in their access to knowledges by stakeholders; the question here, then, is to what extent does the fact that people are constrained in their engagement with powerful modes and codes of discourse actually silence them in dialogical encounters with stakeholders? After all, COMUS' formal speeches to communities often contain little new information, and such message as exists is unlikely to be contested.[352] Let us look for example at one performative act, a speech given by the head of the education team, Juancito, to one of the communities, for the purpose of explaining a proposal to sponsor some young people in the communities to attend a training school in the capital. This meeting bore the usual formal hallmarks of community meetings held by COMUS; everybody was arranged in a circle, men on one side and the women on the other, and titles - 'secretary, treasurer' - were employed instead of names. The format of the speech

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[350] Harvey (1987) *op. cit.* reached similar conclusions in Peru
[351] Eriksen (1995) *op. cit.* p212
[352] Bloch (1975) p24

followed a familiar pattern; Juancito introduced himself, although he was already very well known to all the people present, gave a formal welcome for the first five minutes, and spent approximately twenty minutes discussing the position of COMUS in the communities, invoking the symbols of historical resistance through statements such as 'if we in the rural areas are to march onwards...if we are to educate ourselves'. He then spent ten minutes explaining the details of the proposed project. At the end he asked for 'doubts or questions'. In fact, this speech contained little new information, the content having already been disseminated over the past few weeks through informal networks; there can have been very few people present who did not already know all of the details of the project, and the message about the role of COMUS in the communities had been heard by them many times before.

The value of Juancito's speech thus lies not in its informational text but rather in its role as cultural text, in its reaffirming of the social relationship between COMUS and the community. Its ritualistic form encodes its information as legitimate, placing it into the domain of the discourses of power, without which it could not be held as valid and therefore as 'real' information. Within this communicative act, silencing is taking place of other modes of communication, since this formal, ritualised mode is presented as the single legitimate way to channel communication. Its effectiveness was demonstrated by the fact that no *explicit* contestation or challenging of the authorial voice took place in the performative instant. In exporting COMUS discourses to the communities in this way, and in presenting them as the only legitimate form of authoritative communication, Juancito's speech becomes another strata of the monologic voice.

In the same way that local voices are silenced through restrictions on knowledges, control of the space for discourse and limitations on modes and codes of communication, so they are also silenced through the public expression of alliances. We may see this most clearly in the letters sent out by COMUS into the communities. Addressing people within written discourse as *compañero* is certainly a sign of respect for an individual's position as a member of the alliance; a co-operant with COMUS has a clear social and a political status. But it also places the relationship within the control of COMUS, very publicly announcing the individual's connection with the ideologies of the popular sector. The sending and delivery of the letter are textual performances controlled by COMUS, who have the discursive power for such enactments of ideology. The public co-option of individuals in this way is difficult for community members to negate, coded as it is in the dominant and most legitimate discourse of text; this cannot easily be outweighed by local communicative methods, so the individual

finds themselves 'fixed' by the textual performance in a role and enmeshed in an alliance to which they have not necessarily committed themselves ideologically. Symbolic practices such as these exercise their own type of violence in so far as they involve the imposition of arbitraries and alliances.

6.3.3 Literacy for control / surveillance

The final aspect of stakeholders' usage of literacy for the dissemination and legitimisation of ideology is through its deployment for control and surveillance, a concept also identified by Watters.[353] Through their engaging in what are enshrined as formal modes of communication, the State and the voice of the opposition are able to use literacy as part of their own monitoring regimes. We may see this in the culture now enshrined in Usulután of signing one's name, or marking with a thumbprint - that is to say, the formal stamping of one's identity - to mark attendance, to receive goods, to demonstrate participation. This is, of course, closely linked with literacy as ritual, yet it also represents for stakeholders a reiteration of their own status and power, a process which evokes a potent historical memory of years of dictatorship. The *alcaldía*, for example, requires the individual's *cédula* number to be encoded on almost every transaction completed within its frameworks; on requests for meetings, on proposals for aid, on animal transfer vouchers, on cheques. Similarly, COMUS requires the mark of each attendee at every community event, however small.

For those who have, within the public domain, opted as their strategy for accessing resources that of public alliance with COMUS, this is unproblematic, merely the restating of a union and ideological engagement already established. Yet for others who take a more cautious approach, the requirement to publicly and formally ally their name to a 'political' organisation is often perceived as surveillance. This is well illustrated by the story of Don Pedro, who went to a village near his community to buy some chickens. The seller of the chickens offered an advantageous price but at the moment of transaction requested the buyer's *cédula* number. Recounting this story, Pedro exclaimed that he could not possibly offer this. 'What am I going to do that for? They might do anything with one's *cédula* number, they might say you're such-and-such a politician [local political activist]...No, I'm not going to do that.' We see here the narratives of the past – the rational fear of making one's presence known to authority – competing with the narrative of economic advancement

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[353] Watters *op. cit.*

of the present, and becoming dominant. Pedro could not overcome his suspicion at the use of literacy for control, based on history and experience, so he did not make the transaction.

Similarly, to return once again to the 'literacy lists' of Monday mornings; these served, like the signing procedures above, as a subtle form of reiterating COMUS control over communities. Both these and papers bearing signatures could be invoked in situations of contestation, they serve as the ultimate act of monologic assertion; an individual's mark indicates their alliance, a factor which contributed heavily to the reluctance of many people in communities to become involved in COMUS activities, as we shall see. There is little space in such acts for diversity or range. The word-processed forms imported into communities are as we have said totems of monologia; they cannot be contested if they cannot be understood; only the stakeholders can interpret them at a moment of dispute, according to their own purposes.

6.4 Conclusion

The above chapter, therefore, has mapped the main discourses constructed around literacy by the key stakeholders in Usulután, showing these to be autonomous visions aligned with the deficit / deprived models above. It has revealed how these are integral to and linked with wider ideologies of power and control. In constructing divisive categories of 'illiterate' or 'literate' people, the State and the oppositional sector are both using the discourses of, and actualising, inclusion and exclusion. People are constructed as a problematic 'other' with their illiteracy defining their subordinate status within the matrix of the hegemony.

Discourses are sites of affirming relationships within these ideologies of power, and communicative strategies employed by local stakeholders both legitimise their authorial voices through centripetal tendencies and effectively prevent other, dissenting voices from rising. A combination of: controlling the modes and codes of powerful discourses in Usulután and the space in which to speak, the restricting of knowledges and discourses in the local communities, the strategies for legitimation and the methods of imparting these discourses, and the social functions of the texts and discourses employed, all create powerful forces for silencing within relationships.

The discussion has shown how meaning in Usulután is constantly iterated and reiterated through discourse, it does not lie 'out there', created by objective social structures. Symbolic

discourses, revealed in rituals and totems, are literacies too, which operate not as power signified, but as power created and reiterated. Dominant discourses of literacy *as* power are constructed within discourses *of* power. The written and the read are presented, within these narrative streams, as the key to 'marching onwards', and little space is left for diversity or dissent.

To finally illuminate the preceding discussion, let us turn to Illich and Sanders' commentary on the journal of Daniel Defoe, a critique which very succintly captures the views and visions we have revealed above. Within Defoe's text, they argue, oral discourse is constructed as not having the capacity for carrying the truth. The crowding out of oral locutions which hint at possibility or tentativeness and which leave room for doubt, and the extinguishing of terms of approximation and their replacement with exact numbers, imply that figures and written facts carry accuracy, precision and thence the truth. They are things that can be believed in and acted upon, just as with the totemisation and ritualisation of discourses in Usulután.

Illich and Sanders further argue that oral discourse, in Defoe's presentation, does not allow for the power of critical analysis. For this, print is required, in order to be able to 'think' about the problem in discursive prose. Sentences must stand still, an impossibility with oral discourse. Those who remain outside this literate circle will in Defoe's construction thus remain incapable of thinking,[354] just as local stakeholders in Usulután describe those unwilling to attend literacy classes as 'blind' or focused only upon their 'little piece of land'.

We have seen in the above exploration of social practice that, just as Defoe is assuming the power of the word to create his own historical fabrication, so do local stakeholders in the lives of community members in Usulután look to literacy to carve out an ideologically-embedded vision of the future. Through their texts, the world is recreated; via the power of the written word, history is recalled and reiterated in the present, shaping current reality and providing a framework on which to hang one's life.

In the face of such powerful ideologies, such centripetal forces and such dominant voices, then, how do local people cope? Are they silenced, passive or oppressed as the discourses would have? Or do they, in the face of these constraints, find inventive ways to negotiate the world, creating an imaginative approach to life and hope? The following section will consider this question.

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[354] Illich and Sanders *op. cit.*

Chapter 7: Dialogical encounters: Moments of contestation or, co-opting monologia

The above chapter has highlighted two powerful discourses around literacy that dominate the arena of Usulután, marginalising the voices of people in communities and fixing them in subordinate positions within relationships. Much research, especially in the feminist and emancipatory traditions, embraces this silencing within doctrines of oppression, the view of 'power over' described in the deprived vision of literacy above. Extending this to a more multidimensional framework, Bourdieu adds the perspective of individual complicity. Speakers who do not possess the competence to speak the official discourse but who recognise its legitimacy (*reconnaissance sans connaissance*) exist in a position of symbolic domination.

> At the basis of self-censorship is the sense of the acceptable – one dimension of that sense of limits which is the internalisation of class position – which makes it possible to evaluate the degree of formality of situations and to decide whether it is appropriate to speak and what sort of language to speak on a social occasion at a determinate point on the scale of formality.[355]

The lack of local heteroglossia, or space for such a voice, in Usulután discourses about power and control, together with restrictions on access to the modes and codes of communication of the dominant spheres and the apparent embracing of the legitimacy of these discourses at community level might well, at first glance, suggest this kind of silencing according to the deprived model of literacy, or Bourdieu's 'sense of the acceptable'. Certainly, many people living in rural communities in Usulután do not openly contest the discourses placed around literacy by stakeholders; 'I conform to the usual' was the most frequent rejoinder to enquiries. And the voices of those who opted against attending literacy classes stand almost in chorus: 'What for, at this age?' 'We've always lived like this and we'll die like this'. It was these expressed views that led literacy promoters and stakeholders in Usulután towards characterisations of 'passive', 'unmotivated', 'unwilling to march onwards'; the vision of the problematic 'other'. Those who took a deficit view, namely local officials, saw their challenge in convincing people of the social and economic benefits of learning, both to the individual and to the nation. CIAZO and COMUS, meanwhile, talked in terms of 'ingrained oppression', where people have internalised their position in society. For them, only an

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[355] Bourdieu (1977b) p655

aggressive confrontation and challenging of one's place in history through radical literacy programmes and projects could redress this perceived problem.

Had a more project approach to fieldwork been adopted, and research conducted only within COMUS or CIAZO, with less time spent in the communities themselves, this might well have been the conclusion reached. Yet as conversations and relationships developed in communities, tensions and dissonances became evident which were not easily reconciled. The tradition of the doctrines of oppression and silencing did not sit well with the mosaic of daily lives being discovered in Usulután. Certainly, a considerable degree of silencing went on, as has been described. But people were in their daily lives far from being passive or unmotivated or 'unwilling to march onwards' in their gestures, texts and relationships. And far from being sites of silent acceptance, or even of still resistance, communities in Usulután in 1999 were loci of immense activity, often discordant and frequently combative, but always eventful. People engaged creatively in textual performances within the negotiation of relationships and the struggle for resources. They identified and followed up openings for dialogue with stakeholders, they spotted avenues of opportunity and artfully pursued them. They did not, it is true, generally go to visit to the mayor's office to challenge land rights questions, or openly disagree with COMUS and CIAZO's vision of literacy, except in rare moments by facilitators, as described above. But there were patterns in the ways in which people often carefully and subtly assessed relationships - with stakeholders and with each other - as potential opportunities for resources, identified appropriate courses of action, and engaged in their pursuit that revealed a creative interplay of discursive streams. Thus this is no simple model of oppression, but rather as Sola and Bennett found in their classroom study, an altogether more subtle process of discursive channels almost defining and constraining each other.[356] Moreover, within community members' gestures and performances, two significant discourses were revealed; the first being of survival, and the second that of aspiration for advancement. Combined together, these discourses constitute the powerful metaphor of 'marching onwards' which represents, in Usulután, people's wishes, dreams and aspirations. Within this single phrase lies a vision of the future, a challenging of history and an articulation of hope.

Thus, discourses within the rural communities of Usulután operate as sites of contestation, challenge and resistance which seem to strike at something more than static objection; less indifference than a studied reaction, less a lack than a purposeful choice. How then to

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[356] Sola and Bennett (1985)

account for this dissonance? 'I'm too old to learn [to attend literacy classes]…what do I want to do that for now?' said many people, *but* they wanted, and tried, to read the Bible, *and* they practiced in private signing their name. 'Nobody listens to us, we are abandoned, the government doesn't care about the *campesino*s and the [other] party has forgotten us' said Don Alberto of Piedra Labrada. But he sowed the seeds given to him by COMUS and sold the resulting cucumbers to the cousin of the mayor.

What then of this tension between voices being silenced, and yet simultaneously taking control of their destiny, of negotiating relationships and resources through communicative performance for personal advantage? It gradually became clear that what stakeholders constructed as passivity was in fact a form of artful resistance and the articulation of life strategies and perhaps the creative pursuit of happiness. Communities were not withdrawing or turning away, they were, through their performative acts, engaging in dialogical encounters, taking on the mantle of Bakhtin's interlocutor on the battleground of cultural contestation. In doing so, their communicative practices were embedded in negotiations of power and struggles over resources and relationships,[357] interplaying with and shaping the hegemonic discourses surrounding them.

The following section will delineate these dialogical acts through some vignettes of daily life in Usulután. They will reveal how the uses of literacy and other discursive methods in social practice are not in this locale primarily a question of 'coping strategies' or of tapping into 'networks of dependency' as many accounts suggest.[358] Instead, they represent the creative management of cultural texts; they are sites of the subtle struggle for purchase on relationships and resources. They are in fact performances, enacted recursively and deliberatively, with an eye to the audience and an ear to effect. By unpicking these performances, which are deeply embedded in the social processes of everyday life, and by exploring both their narrative event and their event of narration we can learn how they both shape and are shaped by acts of resistance and challenge. They reveal the intertextuality of narratives employed in challenges to the hegemony that the chimera of 'literate-ness' disguises.

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[357] This is a somewhat more subversive framework than Sen's co-operative conflicts (1992)

[358] Breier *et al* (1996) suggest that Cape Town taxi drivers use four strategies to help them negotiate their 'illiteracy': official assistance, operating illegally, using support systems and using informal education. Yet they do not explore how these strategies challenge the orthodoxies of power; how they challenge the monologic voice of dominance

Underlying all the theoretical and substantive story of this chapter, then, and indeed underscoring this text, is the notion of local communicative practices as deliberative acts, as statements, exhortations and endeavours, tipping over at times into rituals. This section will consider first the discursive practice of silence according to the Bakhtinian view above, and the role that this plays in local people's contesting and reshaping of the dominant discourses and their negotiations over resources and relationships. Then it proceeds to address the quiet subversion of stakeholders' discourses that takes place behind dialogical encounters. Finally, it will explore some moments of open engagement in dialogue with stakeholders which take place via a range of mechanisms and the forms of resistance which underlie these. This chapter will complement the previous section of the text by focusing on discourses within communities, providing a counterpart to the hegemonic voices of power.

It is important to clarify here that this chapter does not set out to be a fully comprehensive study of the social uses of literacy in Usulután. It does not, for example, consider the many private communicative practices which go on within communities, some of which will be examined later in this text. Instead, it takes as its focus the question of people's responses to and engagement with the dominating discursive streams of their landscape at the moment of dialogical encounter; or, in other words, issues of power and resistance, struggle and control within moments of cultural meeting. In this, it fits coherently into the ideological framework of literacy studies.

This chapter should begin by reiterating the dissonance encountered within Usulután communities during 1999. History and ideology has rendered them often divided, frequently conflictive and always dynamic. The degree of conflict and divergence which underlies the surface of social harmony is a powerful force for dissent and also, as will become clear, a useful tool for social control. This will become more apparent when we discuss the role of gossip in Chapter 8, but a reminder is valuable here that the term 'community' acts within this text as a descriptor of a geographical unit; it does not, in any sense, imply united views, experiences or intentions.

7.1 Silence as resistance

The first aspect explored here of people's and communities' performances in relation to the discourses about literacy and power around them, is their active use of silence. As Chapter 3 above has discussed, silence is a crucial part of dialogue, it represents, to recap, a way of

confronting the monologic voice of powerful institutions, a centrifugal force in dialogical encounters. Yet it is not employed in Usulután simply as a tactic of resistance – for standing firm against hegemony – although certainly this is an important part of its role. More than this, it is used creatively and tactically to negotiate relationships and to engage in struggles for resources, to reshape the dominant stream of discourse.

Finding themselves with little space in which to exert their voice of influence on stakeholders, many rural inhabitants have turned to silence as a means of creatively using the resources available to them. By embedding silence imaginatively within the ongoing discursive tapestry – what a deficit model might read as 'lack of motivation' or a deprived model as 'passivity' - the people of Usulután have found ways in which to iterate with explicitness their political stance, to establish their disapproval and rejection of the prevalent discourses around literacy, power and control, and in doing so to often successfully gain purchase within contestations and agendas.

Let us begin by exploring how silence operates as statement of ideology. At the beginning of March, COMUS wished to establish a literacy circle in a community close to San Francisco Javier, that of El Tablón.[359] The facilitator, Romeo, had attended the training sessions held by CIAZO, he was well known and generally well-liked within the community. He was, though, publicly allied to COMUS through his mother, who had strong historical and social links with the organisation. One hot afternoon in March, Juancito from the COMUS education team, Romeo and the researcher visited each of the 30 houses of El Tablón. The news of the literacy classes was greeted with considerable enthusiasm; 'yes we need that' and 'yes, like that we can learn' echoed in chorus through the landscape. By 2pm, 29 people had signed up to attend the same afternoon. But, four hours later in the appointed place, only three people had arrived. 'The people don't care', explained Doña Marta, Romeo's mother.

That day in El Tablón, silence was employed as the power of selective refusal, reflected in the power of the choice whether or not to endow COMUS or State meetings or events, such as literacy classes, with physical presence. Presence has a particular resonance in Usulután with the powerful symbolic nature, discussed above, of 'organisation' in the popular sector. As part of this, the social function of meetings has been imbued with considerable political

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[359] This serves as another example of the way in which the monologic voice of COMUS is imparted into the communities; El Tablón had not, as had none of the other surrounding communities, actually requested a literacy circle. The notion of 'bottom up' learning processes are often, at the micro level, as top down as anything planned in a Washington office

significance. Presence at meetings forms a powerful part of the ongoing dialogue and relationship between individual and stakeholders, it is imbued with and constructed as meaning; it represents an ideological gesture of alliance. To support the literacy classes with one's presence means making a public statement of adherence to the popular sector's ideology of resistance.

Just as silence forms the ideological corollary of dialogue, so absence also becomes inscribed with ideological force. Absence indicates not mere 'passivity' but is a political statement in itself; it invokes actual resistance, both to the stakeholder and to other community residents who do subscribe to the ideologies being invoked. The vast and empty silences of the literacy classes overall – the 'recruitment' difficulties, the non-attendance in July and August, the early finishing, the hesitations of some facilitators - reflect not a lack of motivation but a public statement of resistance to both the ideology and its dissemination. Absence here is not a comment on the perceived value of literacy skills, as a productionist discourse or project approach might argue, but rather a statement of rejection to the incursion of the monologic voice into the terrain of communities themselves.

As has been explained above, few meetings were held by agents of the State in rural communities, preferring as they did to sustain the exclusivity of their power by restricting its locus to villages and towns. The only real dialogical encounters outside these offices were those between members of communities and local health promoters employed by *alcaldías*. Yet these did not carry the popular sector's ideological force of organisation; rather, they are constructed locally as part of the umbrella of rights to goods and services to which the individual's politico-historical status as a *campesino* now entitles him. While presence at these meetings is therefore construed less as a political gesture than as a legitimate taking advantage of resources, absence is certainly a motion imbued with political intent. A rejection of freely available resources is a much more potent ideological symbol than their acceptance, as Marilu explains somewhat scathingly about her aunt Rosa, an old COMUS ally from Joya Grande. 'If she goes to their meetings, there's no problem! Those medicines are for us, they belong to us...But she doesn't want to go; for her the only thing there is, is COMUS....she doesn't go to those meetings [of the health promoter] because for her COMUS is the only thing there is.' For Rosa, her absence at the State meetings is a deliberate gesture of her alliance with COMUS and her rejection of State ideology; for others, however, her presence at the State-held meeting would not necessarily be construed as a rejection of her shared ideology with COMUS, since the medicines 'belong to us' under the umbrella of *campesino* rights. We see here how the processes of the negotiation of relationships and the

struggle for resources take place within local patterns of history and ideology, and are both dialogically constructed through the discursive practice of silence and differently construed according to ideological position.

These stories about Rosa and Romeo and the people around them reveal how silence is used within the ongoing discursive tapestry as a tool for resistance and the explication of ideology, and how it interplays with the discursive streams which surround it. Yet the real power in the ways silence is employed in Usulután lies in the processes which go around its invoking, in its artful, selective and creative use within these struggles and negotiations. People in Usulután often carefully assess each situation, their own position and the resources available in accordance with their own ideologies, hopes and aspirations, and employ strategies of presence or absence accordingly.

This process is exemplified in a story about COMUS' seed distribution programme, where literacy circles were to be given a certain amount of vegetable seeds to plant and cultivate communally. On the appointed day in Los Rivera, the entire cohort of the literacy circle turned up, even those who had attended just one or perhaps two classes. The class listened attentively while the facilitator, Ermis, and the COMUS agricultural representative, Luis, explained the thinking behind the seed programme (community empowerment, collective agriculture and so on.) This was all liberally laced with reinforcing doses of COMUS ideology and role, and was enthusiastically supported by Ermis, a longtime collaborator of the organisation. To conclude, Luis asked if there were any questions or doubts, a question greeted with silence from some and murmurs of harmony from others, in tune with the ideologies presented – 'it is so's and 'you are right's. Don Carlos, the senior person present, reiterated some of Luis' words, and expressed the class' gratitude to COMUS, which stimulated again the groundswell of 'it is so' and 'it is right's. Luis, reassured that the people were in accordance with the notion of collective planting, then explained that the following day a special meeting would be held to explain the correct planting and cultivation of the seeds, crucial for communal agriculture; he would be making another special visit to this effect tomorrow. He then handed two packets of seeds to the facilitator and the meeting concluded with the literacy song written above.

The following day, the researcher went to Los Rivera at the usual time. Luis and Ermis were present, but not a single member of the literacy group turned up on that long, hot afternoon. Luis, disheartened, returned to the COMUS office, muttering about dependency. Ermis then explained privately that after the class, on the previous day, it had been decided to divide up

the seeds individually, rather than to engage in communal cultivation. Moreover, each student either already knew very well how to sow the seeds, or knew someone who would help them. Therefore, another meeting to receive instruction had been in their opinion unnecessary.

Within this story, the wholehearted presence of individuals on the day of receiving the seeds reflects selective engagement in dialogue with COMUS within struggles for resources; it reveals people's reworking and renegotiating of relationships through engaging with the dominant discursive stream, while holding to their own framework of survival and hope. The members of the class collaboratively decided to access the resources on offer as a part of their construction of their rights, but they knew very well that the giving of seeds by COMUS was not a neutral gesture; it was a process of bargaining, even a buying of adherence and support; I will give you these seeds if you will both conform, and publicly state that you conform, to my ideology. People managed through creative collusion to access the resources on offer yet to simultaneously thwart the conditionality attached to them through the imaginative deployment of silence and absence. This was engaged firstly to create an appearance of unilateral accord with the COMUS discourses of collectivism and organisation, rather than openly challenging these by expressing a wish for individual cultivation, and secondly in the privately and communally arranged and constructed performance of absence at the meeting which would confirm this ideology in practice. Through their artfulness, their own social networks and their private discursive texts formed away from the eyes of the stakeholders, the literacy group managed to access the desired resources while also reworking the dominant discourse through an expression of rejection of the COMUS ideology.[360] Yet simultaneously – through the opting against open challenge – their actions allowed for the strategic maintaining of this alliance. We see here how in the dialogical encounter silence shapes struggles and relationships, and also how, in circumstances of contestation, tensions and dissonances within communities are temporarily supplanted by cohesive collective action, the unifying of heteroglossia and dissent.

The question, of course, is whether this process of creative silence, while it has a short-term gain, actually results in a long-term reduction in resources and losing of position within relationships, as COMUS become disillusioned and moves to co-operate less with communities. COMUS' self-constructed identities and roles, described above, offer a

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[360] Aikman *op. cit.* gives a similar example of the Arakmbut people of Peru acting to control the excessive influence of teachers over their lives – the assertion of their own hierarchies and values was created through walking out of a meeting and thereby stating their opposition to its purpose

response to this dilemma. Support for the communities, as has been explored, is to COMUS less an economic relationship than a promise or moral duty; to leave the communities would be to abandon history and the very values of *compañerismo* from which COMUS itself was formed. Such a move, indeed, would be to abandon their own *raison d'être* and identity. Secure in this knowledge, which is evidenced by the continuing processes of support and fundamentally unchanging discourses even after several years of similar gestures by communities,[361] people know that challenge and resistance to the dominant discursive streams can take place with the site of potential resources unlikely to dry up while the forces of history and ideology are there to sustain it. As long as the connection with COMUS through the network of co-operants and bricoleurs, to be described below, is maintained, support will be forthcoming.

Within communities, therefore, silence is employed creatively to both resist and to challenge monologia, to create room for manoeuvre and to claim entitlements. Its deployment within the discourses of survival and the struggles for resources can also be seen in dialogical encounters where written messages are sent into communities by stakeholders. Such messages are always received with thanks, and the messenger assured that the artefact will certainly be read and the matter attended to. In Joya Grande one day, as happened often, the recipient could not decode the written text, so the messenger orally explained the content, an invitation to a COMUS meeting. The recipient, Don Candelario, thanked the messenger, and explained that the text would certainly be reread later, either by him or by one of his social network. In any case, he would definitely attend the meeting. Once out of view, however, Don Candelario made it explicit that he actually had no intention of reading the message – 'They send me these papers, and [laughing] they are useful for the children to write on! At least they have that purpose!' He later remained absent from the meeting. When questioned later by a COMUS member of staff about this – 'But you received the message!' – Candelario explained that the message was important to him, since it came from COMUS, 'the best bank we have', but that unfortunately he could not read it, and so was unsure of the date of the meeting. Had he been able to read, he defended himself, he would certainly have been present at the meeting.

We can see several things in this story. Firstly, there is the now familiar notion that the information must be coded in the discourses of power to be counted as 'real' and thence

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[361] This was reflected in many stories from COMUS staff, although the organisation's 'Strategic Plan' of 2000 directed at funders takes care to emphasise the 'social programme' and the agency's central aim of 'contributing to the human development of rural communities' COMUS (1999) p*i*

invoke an obligation: COMUS could just as well have sent the message within the oral discourses of communities, but opted instead to reinforce the discourse of power. Secondly, Don Candelario, by accepting in his performance the authority of the dominant discourse of writing but simultaneously constructing himself as unable to access it, is consciously co-opting this discourse of exclusion, and using it to cleverly construct for himself a position of marginality. In this created image, his silence, or absence of reading, becomes embedded in the deprived vision of literacy or the narrative of exclusion adhered to by COMUS; if only I could have read the message, I could have supported the cause... Candelario stresses his relationship of loyalty to / inclusion with COMUS – of course I would have come - while reminding them as audience of his *campesino* status. In doing so he can both thwart their attempts to control him, or retain the autonomy of his own sub rosa discourse, yet remain firmly positioned within the relationship and the network of resources. This act is a very deliberate one, since oral messages in the community, as we shall see, are perfectly legitimate, and carry the same weight as written ones within certain domains. Therefore, Candelario's act is the performance of silence to buy into the discourses of the powerful; to frame his actual act of resistance (refusal to attend the meeting) in the terms of the stakeholders (silence through deprivation), and thereby remain eligible for resources.

The story of Don Candelario, and that about Luis above, reveal the ways in which silence is imaginatively employed within the meshing of discursive streams to convey an impression of adherence to stakeholders' doctrines in the theatre of Usulután. By balancing silence with murmured agreement, people maintain their alliances and options within these arenas of negotiation and contestation. The success with which this tactic is deployed is evidenced by the fact that COMUS continues, eight years after the Peace Accords were signed, to hold constant meetings in the communities, and to talk of 'making progress' in a tone of optimism; they hold firmly to the faith of breaking ground.

7.2 Behind encounters: the subversion and challenging of the messages

We have therefore seen how silence is employed as an active part of dialogue, and how resistance is manifested through the creative use of absence. A further means of challenging dominant discourses within relationships and resource struggles is through their subversion and contestation behind dialogical encounters in communities.

A story to illustrate this takes place in Piedra Labrada. It recounts a discursive performance given by two actors; Don Emilio, who occupies the role of a principal COMUS co-operant in agriculture, and his longtime friend Osvaldo, who has strategically kept his connection much looser.

The five members of the literacy class are grouped around the blackboard on a rainy afternoon, together with some of the key figures in the community, including Don Emilio and Don Osvaldo. Sebastian, the COMUS agriculture specialist, is holding a large bag of soya beans which COMUS are intending to donate to the community. But first, Sebastian has to explain the planting and cultivating procedures, as this is a new crop for the community. He draws diagrams on the board and demonstrates in the dust at his feet. People listen carefully and Osvaldo and Emilio, who can both read and write to some extent, copy the diagrams down.

Sebastian emphasises that it is necessary to plant the beans a considerable distance apart; he indicates in the dust and asks two or three people to show him the same distance, in order to verify understanding. He explains that the soya plants have very long roots, and that they can become entangled and die if planted too close together. People nod and murmur agreement. Satisfied with the understanding, and assured of co-operation, Sebastian makes his farewells and heads for the upper part of the community, to repeat the exercise with another group.

On his departure, the group remains, discussing the beans and their planting. Don Emilio's voice rises from the chatter:

> I agree with this method. If you plant them further apart they will grow better. The only problem we have here is that the rabbits eat them, so for that reason if we plant them too close together the rabbits will eat them more…but he [Sebastian] is the production expert and they know best, without doubt. We are *campesinos*, we've stayed with the same method for years, we always do the same, but here people come with these new methods, which can be better, and we have to take advantage of this, we have to be willing! This model [gestures at the drawing on the board] teaches us how to do it…

His friend, Don Osvaldo, picks up the cue:

> I think the *compañero* is right, it's a very good method, the only problem is with the rabbits; I don't know what the other *compañeros* think, but maybe in this case, because of this big problem that we have, it would be better in this case to plant them a little bit closer than Don Sebastian tells us…it's good advice, in other places it would certainly be very successful, the only thing is with this big problem that we have…this model is good, no doubt about it, but I don't know what the other *compañeros* say…

We can see several things here. Firstly, and most significantly, is Don Emilio's engagement with ideology. While ostensibly supporting Sebastian, Emilio is actually stating his disapproval and rejection of the new method. Everybody present realises this, and since the subtext of the discourse[362] is that Don Emilio is the resident agricultural expert, his words are considered authoritative; his is the voice of internal wisdom. External expertise, then, cannot compete in terms of status with local standing, experience and wisdom.

Secondly is the artful way Don Emilio draws on particular discourses to apparently advocate, yet actually undermine, Sebastian's ideology. Firstly, he invokes the stereotypical image in Salvadoran society of the *campesino* as innocent, 'backward' person; 'we are *campesino*s, we've stayed with the same method for years...' Yet he is simultaneously subverting this notion by calling on the authority of years of experience. 'We always do the same' carries the undercurrent of 'we have always done it this way and we have always been successful with other crops' an implicit rejection of others' views of *campesino*s as unknowing or unlearned.

Don Emilio also draws on the known narratives of COMUS; their discourse, as we have seen, is that of change, of marching onwards. 'We have to take advantage [of the new methods], we have to be willing!' Yet this is undermined by his mocking of COMUS in their self-identification as agricultural 'experts'. The subtext to his piece, understood by all those present, was that Sebastian learned his initial skills in the university, and now lives in the town rather than in a rural area. Although Don Emilio, like everyone else present, has considerable regard for Sebastian personally, he is contrasting the totemic 'this model' (the diagram on the board, written by a university-educated production expert) with the years of experience of the farmers present in the local soils. 'New' models of expertise – the written – are being subjugated to the authority of local forms of knowledge.

Yet Don Emilio could not, as principal co-operant of COMUS, be seen to publicly make any statement which might undermine this alliance and thence damage his and the community's access to resources. He is acting within the constraints of his position, while performing to maximise both the alliance and its benefits. But through a cleverly fabricated piece of discourse he is able to both sustain unity with the values of COMUS in public while simultaneously undermining them sufficiently to give a cue for his colleague – in whom he knew he could have absolute trust since they are engaged in long-established networks of *compañerismo* – to make a more explicit critique. We see then Bakhtin's hybridity of

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[362] Contextual information not needed to be said since everyone was well aware of it (Besnier *op. cit.*)

heteroglossial narratives, here of resistance; drawing on hidden subtexts, and on the rich and multiple layers of the local cultural text, Emilio is cleverly straddling the divide between his role in the community and his public alliance with COMUS within the discourses of survival and hope.

Yet there is an underlying irony of which Don Emilio is perhaps unaware. He adopts the familiar discourses of COMUS in saying that 'we have to take advantage' while simultaneously rejecting these ideologies; yet he himself is actually engaged in a process of 'taking advantage' of COMUS resources as a matter of the survival narratives of the community. So in the midst of rejecting COMUS, Emilio is actually acceding to their values – or alternatively, of course, using intentional irony to maximise gains from stakeholders.

We see here, then, within the negotiation of resources and the struggle for survival, the triumphing of local networks of *compañerismo* over those COMUS is attempting to set in place under the umbrella of ideological unity. The performance was carefully calibrated; an ostensibly supportive enactment of Emilio's role as principal COMUS co-operant, yet with just the right amount of subtle doubt, defiance and mockery to provide a cue for his fellow-actor.

We may link Emilio's performance to O'Connor's study of workplace discourses, where he found that workers often 'quietly resist many official edicts and directives, as their own experience tells them they won't work, or won't work as well as they can perform the task'.[363] Thus workers employ 'unofficial' theories or 'theories in use', or their own specialised knowledge, rather than the 'official' or espoused theories of the organisation. Here, Don Emilio is employing theories in use, derived from years of experience in the local fields, to achieve the purpose of the moment – planting the beans in what he believes to be the most productive way, while simultaneously reinforcing his alliance with the discourses and resources of the stakeholders.

We may also see the thwarting of stakeholders' ideologies in the visual performances of what might be called local identity and status narratives. These discursive practices are employed particularly in moments of dialogical encounter between the local world of the community and that of external stakeholders, and often result in explicit statements of resistance towards identities ascribed to rural people by the State in particular. We have discussed above the

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[363] O'Connor *op. cit.* p267

symbol of the *campesino* and its meaning to different stakeholders and to the inhabitants of rural communities themselves. The visual narrative of the *campesino* in El Salvador is signalled by differences in dress; generally less elaborate clothes than are found in the city, for example, and possibly a lack of shoes; the *campesino* male, if he can, generally wears a hat and carries a *corbo* (curved scythe for use in working in the fields) while the woman often carries a basket on her head. Such symbolic texts serve the purpose of locating the individual within the historical narrative of Salvadoran society, with all its attendant meanings and ideological constructions.

The people of Usulután, however, frequently engage with and challenge these narratives. The rituals of changing clothing for going out into towns is an important part of the contestation of identity in people's engagement with dominant discursive streams. Men in particular do not generally allow themselves to remain contained by the texts of power within communities; they seek out and engage with the offices of the hegemony. They visit mayoral buildings, banks, post and political offices; they leave the communities and travel to the towns. When they do so, people often wear clothes in the mode of city-dwellers; the women choose elaborate suits and the men smart shirts and trousers. However poor the family, no female child will be without a highly decorative dress, worn on such visits, although she may not possess shoes. In all these gestures and performances, just as when men set down their *corbo* at home for visiting the town, individuals are leaving behind the symbol of their working on the land and in doing so challenging others' perceptions of them as poor uneducated *campesinos*.

It is important in analysis of the social fabric of Usulután that these acts are not seen simply as the adopting of the modes and codes of dominant discourse. They are much more than this: they are artful performances of contestation, which carry with them the subtext of identity assertion. The wider construction of the 'poor unlettered *campesino*' of the towns (for it is here, as we have said, that most agencies of the State reside, and most visits to towns are to engage with State agencies on business) is being challenged, not through people's rejection of their own identity, but rather through a creative reshaping of the narrative. Men may leave their *corbo* at home when 'visiting', but they still often wear their *campesino* hats, a source of great pride and a symbol of status and relative wealth in the rural areas. Women wear their suit to the town, but the tendency to make such visits, if permitted at all by their husbands, accompanied by friends or family means that the discourses of the rural areas penetrate the agencies of the State – discussing for example the state of employment on the coffee plantations while waiting for attention in the *alcaldía*, or exchanging familial and community

news while standing in line in the quiet bank. Thus, we see the intertextual resources of local identity construction and the ways in which people draw creatively on the texts of the stakeholders' world to challenge and subvert their location within the dominant social text. The two streams of discourse intertwine and redefine each other. Communicative strategies here become sites for the contestation of identity and the construction of rights to resources and also loci of engagement with the discourses of power.

7.3 Undercurrents of discourse

Another way in which people in the rural communities of Usulután subvert the localised silencing of their voices is through the iteration of local discourses within dialogical encounters with stakeholders. These local 'primary discourses'[364] often act as sites of challenge and resistance, of the iteration of heteroglossia in the face of dominant discourses. In discursive interactions with the ideological texts of stakeholders, local narratives are employed as performative acts of the re-creation of local identity. At these moments, such texts become subversive 'undercurrents' of communicative practices; a term selected here to reflect the fact that, though they may often be drowned out in terms of volume in Usulután, they operate as a powerful tide in shaping the dominant streams of discourse. They are, as with their corollary silence described above, creatively and imaginatively employed to powerful and gainful effect.

Instances of such undercurrents can be found in many moments of dialogical encounter, and in particular within the struggle for resource negotiation between community members and local stakeholders. Let us focus for example on a meeting between Margarita and Robin, the COMUS literacy staff and members of Joya Grande community. The meeting had been called because the literacy class had been 'failing', to employ productionist terminology, that is, minimal attendance had meant that the facilitators had been unable to hold classes for the last month. This happened despite the initial signing-up of sixteen people. At the meeting were present nine men and seven women, also various children, the two facilitators and two COMUS staff, as well as the researcher.

There had been considerable difficulty in convening the meeting; house-to-house visits had to be made in order to persuade people to arrive. This community, however, to reiterate from

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[364] Gee (1990) *op. cit.* and O'Connor *op. cit.*

Chapter 2, is much more deeply entwined with COMUS practices and ideologies than others in this study because of the agency's assistance in legalising their land. This factor was strategically employed by Margarita and Robin as a tactic to morally oblige people to attend their meeting.

The event began in the usual way, with greetings and a speech from both COMUS staff about the benefits of literacy, emphasising the need for communities to 'march onwards - and how are you going to do that if you don't educate yourselves?' The accent was on the patronage relationship between COMUS and the community and on the rhetoric of development – 'here we have a great opportunity to develop ourselves, to march onwards...if one can read and write, one knows a lot....one can go to the mayor's office to make a proposal [for aid], you can make a proposal to COMUS!'. The speech, from both Margarita and Robin, with occasional support from Ignacio and Santiago, the facilitators, lasted about twenty minutes. During this time there was at no point any explicit questioning or commentary by the people; indeed, at no time did any open dialogical interaction take place. Yet while the speeches continued, a rising tide of informal conversation swelled up slowly, and the degree and extent of this was much more noticeable than in other similar events. Women admired each other's babies, and children were attended to. A man and his neighbour exchanged news about the harvest. The problems of the poor weather conditions of the year were considered, and inquiries about families made. All of the above took place in undercurrents, murmurs, whispers and asides.

We see here the local discourses of survival confronting the monologic voice of development. In invoking their own subtle tide of heteroglossia, the community members were creating a sort of informal commentary of events and engaging in the subversion of monologia, via the reiteration of local identity and hierarchy. The ideological discourses of COMUS were incursing onto the community; moreover, these were being imported in terms of blame – of accusations of reluctance to engage in the political cause which, as we have seen above, is perceived as the moral duty of every *campesino*. The people of Joya Grande were resisting this; they had their own, very powerful reasons for not attending the literacy classes. Yet rather than engage in open challenge to the resource holder, an act which would in any case be difficult according to the social code of Usulután, they adopted the strategic tactics of language. Silence by absence was the first ploy attempted, despite the fact that moral obligation to COMUS through the land legalisation process more or less required people's presence. But in the face of this weapon being defeated by Margarita and Robin's determined rounding-up, people invoked their own discursive performance to act out a stance

of resistance. In this act, community members were subtly but constantly undermining the voice of patronage; they were rejecting what COMUS saw as a resource – literacy – but what many people perceived as an incursion of ideology. The social hierarchy and relationship being established by the two COMUS voices were quietly but deliberately thwarted; reciprocal family and community relationships and concerns were being called upon and reiterated as a more powerful, albeit more subtle, cultural text.

The story above suggests a note of defiance on the landscape, a more explicit tone than silence. A yet more striking example of local voices rebutting dominance and monologia occurred in a tripartite dialogical encounter, where both the dominant streams plus the sub-rosa discourse of local heteroglossia met in confrontation on the dialogical plain. This moment of textual meeting occurred at a fiesta in the central village of San Francisco Javier.

While, as has been stressed, the agents of the State rarely penetrate directly into the rural communities of Usulután, the *alcaldía* of San Francisco Javier is responsible as part of its civic duties for the organisation of the celebrations to celebrate the village's patrimonial day. People from all the local communities came from far throughout Usulután to join in the party. The event was marked by speeches and a band, as well as by flags on the street and stands selling fruit and sweets. The main street of the village was colourful with the many stalls and people in bright clothes. Yet amongst the chattering and children laughing, the powerful monologic tones of the State rang out in its discursive performances. Speeches, delivered through microphones by local officials, all stressed 'our gratitude to the mayor and to his party not just for these celebrations but also for the development of our communities which have taken place…' The band added its echo too; a mention of the mayor's successful tenure occurred in between almost every song. Visual performances were also employed; many new political posters for ARENA had gone up overnight, and a good number of people present, presumably the guests of the mayor, were wearing caps or T-shirts bearing its slogan.

Against this backdrop chimed the quieter yet confident voice of the popular sector and the political opposition. It found its utterance in the graffiti on the walls, in the number of COMUS staff and supporters wearing sloganed red T-shirts, and in the large volume of people who clustered around the COMUS offices, almost seeming to lean against its walls as a form of symbolic support. These celebrations being effectively the domain of the opposition, COMUS had no legitimate right to assert its voice, but managed nonetheless to perform its discursive text through concerted effort and creative management. The murmurings and comments of its supporters during speeches reiterated its ideology through a

similar practice to that adopted by the people in the communities described above. In Bakhtin's terms, then, the centripetal tendencies of the voice of COMUS and that of the State were pushing, at this moment of textual enactment, from their separate poles towards the integration and unification of meaning of discursive streams according to their own distinct ideologies.

What, then, of the heteroglossia of the communities? Against the force of two such dominant discourses, how could local people assert their own voices and texts? Yet they achieved this unwaveringly, through careful and creative communicative and spatial performances. Like the supporters of COMUS, many people from the rural communities created a soft and murmuring commentary during the speeches of the State and through their discussion of COMUS activities with each other. As described in the instance in Joya Grande above, people asserted their own ideologies through establishing the significance of their own social relations, chattering about families, friends and events, expressing hopes and future aims. Space was artfully employed within this act; all over the main street of the village stood people selling things, exchanging news, escorting family members. Transactions were taking place according to the local exchange system, which will be described below, and in the light of ongoing relationships, with old debts and favours being invoked to account for today's dealings. Community history, hierarchy and social relationships were being powerfully invoked to transform the space from a performance of dominant ideology into an opportunity for the confirmation of local and community identity and practices; the iteration of a rich and multilayered shifting stream of discourse. Local social process, to complete the Bakhtinian allegory, was acting as a centrifugal force to create space for heteroglossia and dialogue; a meeting point of cultures.

7.4 Investing in literacy / communication brokers

The processes of local identity assertion described above form part of the contestation of monologia in a subtle, indirect mode. More explicit contestation in Usulután takes place in instances of dialogical encounters with stakeholders. But such moments of discursive interaction do not occur somehow separately from practices and processes in the more private worlds of the communities, there exists no such easy disjunction between the two domains. Behind open dialogue lie ongoing social processes within households, in fields and on coffee plantations, part of the private fabric of positioning that is created collusively within communities through everyday social practice.

One dimension of these processes is the investing in, or deploying of, textual brokers, a concept for which writers in the New Literacies framework have adopted Levi-Strauss' above-mentioned notion of bricoleurs.[365] The deployment of bricoleurs enables individuals and communities to position themselves better within discursive struggles. While writers such as Malan draw our attention to the role of agency and power relations in communicative mediation,[366] most accounts focus on how local discourses are 'translated' into the language of power. Yet two key assumptions underlie this predominant view. Firstly, such a conceptualisation appears to accept the 'language of power' uncritically. Neither how this language is reiterated through bricolage, nor how it is challenged in dialogical encounters, is addressed. Secondly, in focusing on the translation process, all attention is trained on the role of the bricoleur, on this individual alone as the active, creative agent. The question of how local people wisely and imaginatively select and appoint some of their number into bricoleurs, that is, the processes of *investment* in brokers, which are also performances of ideology, remains neglected. This section will therefore consider these processes of investment in an attempt to return the act to its creators and thereby consider how, in the instant of textual bricolage, the language of power is challenged and subverted.

Within the rural communities of Usulután, investing in / becoming a bricoleur is an integral part of the struggles over relationships and resources. Two different kinds of bricoleurs exist in Usulután: *scribes,* such as Jaime, the writer of the story related in Chapter 5, whose social function at the given moment is to reinterpret oral discourse into text, and what will here be conceptualised as *textual bricoleurs*, whose more wide-ranging role is deeply integrated within local constructs of power and ideology. People consciously and creatively select and invest in their bricoleur according to the unfolding of positioning within relationships and the nature of the resources at stake. Findings in Usulután thus accord with Fingeret's argument that literacy practices are not performed by individuals but take place within social networks and are characterised by processes of exchange.[367] Her skills-based model does however somewhat underplay the role of agency and power in such transactions, running the risk of presenting literacy 'mediations' as an alternative 'technology' to individual literacies. It is argued here that viewing literacies as interactional strategies better captures the ideological nature of bricolage and allows for understanding of how those without 'literacy' skills are thus not as dependent and marginalised as the deficit / deprived model would have us believe.

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[365] See Robins *op. cit.* and other papers in the same collection.
[366] Malan (1996a) *op. cit.*
[367] Fingeret *op. cit.*

Writers who adopt these deficit or deprived frameworks of literacy often attribute the occupying of a role as bricoleur as deriving from an individual's 'literate status'.[368] Yet in Usulután, the stance of bricoleur appears to emerge from one of two processes, depending on the nature of the event. Firstly, the role of the scribe, that is, the individual who engages with written text on behalf of a kin or *compañero* group, is primarily derived from economic investment in schooling by the family and operates within local networks of *compañerismo*, to be described in more detail below. Importantly, though, this role does not necessarily involve also acting as the second type of bricoleur, the *textual manager*. This term will be elucidated below, but its significance here is that it represents a position which may or may not involve dealing with written narrative; the text here is the *cultural* text, as outlined above. Status as a textual manager, or someone who is elected to engage in discourse with stakeholders, emerges from a range of complex interacting elements and processes; literacy as written practice is not necessarily involved.

First, though, let us explore the role of the scribe. Although this position is not necessarily limited to the family, the primary investment almost invariably comes from this economic unit. The process is as follows: where circumstances are such that schooling for more than one or perhaps two children is not possible, parents often select one or two members, usually elder sons, to fund their education in the sense of accepting direct and opportunity costs. Investment therefore takes place according to pre-established social ideologies. Once these individuals have reached the limit of education desired by the parents – which may range from completing two grades to finishing high school – their role becomes that of scribe and interpreter; engaging in practices involving reading and writing. They will deal with letters, bills, land transfer papers, renewing identity cards, and so on. They are often proudly referred to as 'my son, who has the fourth / fifth / eighth grade' and take considerable pride in the role themselves. We may see an example of a scribe in the story based in Los Rivera at the start of chapter 5, where 14-year-old Jaime is acting in this capacity.

Thus, enshrinement in one's role as scribe takes place within the existing network of familial and *compañero* relations, obligations and investments and is an integral part of the heteroglossial discursive streams of survival and hope. 'Literacy' as the mediation of written texts is embedded within these social relationships; it has less to do with the creation of symbolic capital in Bourdieu's sense than with local practices of economic barter and exchange. Investing in a scribe creates for the family the capital to engage in literacy favours

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[368] see for example Doronila *op. cit.* in the Philippines

and barter, as will be considered in Chapter 8. Families who 'own' literacy interpreters or 'brokers' are more likely to be able to engage in relationships of advantage, to access external resources and thus draw capital from within and outside the community. This argument may seem to bear echoes of the deficit model above, where 'literate' status takes on the shape of human capital. Certainly those families without any internal resources of reading and writing find themselves more dependent on their social networks than others. Yet this is not purely a question of 'lack', or helplessness; those without such resources simply have to be, and generally are, more creative in building their own capital in order to be able to engage in exchange networks, as we will shortly see.

But while 14-year old boys such as Jaime may act as scribes, they may not speak uninvited at community meetings, nor participate unasked in processes of political decision-making, nor intervene in matters of the accessing of resources. Status as the family scribe thus does not necessarily confer the role of textual bricoleur in dialogical interactions with stakeholders. Rather than 'broker', with its connotations of centred power and control, the alternative term *textual manager* is proposed here to suggest both the degree of agency in the role and to provide space for its potential distinction from the owners of the act of bricolage. These owners are very often the investors in the process, who may not participate in the bricolage themselves, but who have generally instigated the event and shape its outcome through their involvement. We will see an example in a story from Los Llanitos below, where an alcoholic community leader acts within the instant of bricolage through his participation at a meeting with the mayor, but the actual process of this event is owned and controlled by other community members.

Textual managers, then, within dialogical encounters, engage in the act of translating the texts and heteroglossia of the communities into the modes of discourse of stakeholders, with the aim of reconstructing relationships and accessing resources. At such moments, they create a focal point for the meeting of discursive streams. This involves considerable textual code- and mode-switching, requiring expertise in translation into powerful discourses. What it does not require is any ability to engage in writing – to be 'literate' in other words.

Let us consider first the conditions which render an individual eligible to act as a textual manager. Some people become cast in these roles through their legalised positions in the Board of Directors; that is, via the relationship constructed for them by COMUS. Where a community has no Board of Directors, historical and ideological forces come into play, and those who have, over the years, established themselves as COMUS or State co-operants

occupy these roles. The textual manager, then, is enshrined in the position according to the doctrines of the stakeholders – ironically echoing the dominant discourses of requiring the communities to be 'organised' (COMUS) or 'legalised' (the State). Becoming a bricoleur is thus an integral part of the struggle for resources and the negotiating of relationships; it is part of the created social and ideological text of the communities.

The status of such special relationships with stakeholders are both derived from, and also constantly recreating, symbolic capital through two dimensions, those of personal capital and experience. Personal capital derives from a mixture of history - such as war experiences - and age, seniority, political views and personal characteristics. Such aspects operate within local social processes to enshrine individuals as members of the Board of Directors for example, or to be identified by COMUS / the State as people with whom they co-operate. Symbolic capital is thus reiterated in a cyclical motion, and is constantly reinforced through ongoing experience. Holding such a position confers the status, the opportunity and the right to engage in discussion with stakeholders. Even where the Board of Directors is barely operative, as in the case of two communities of this study, the enshrinement within the relationship as textual manager still holds, and experience still takes place. The assumption of the role of bricoleur in this way is reminiscent of the processes of apprenticeship as described by China and Robins,[369] though their description of events in a South African locale is more reflective of deliberately career-related engagement with training organisations. In Usulután, fewer prospects exist for career development in this way, although elements of the same process are certainly present, in respect of the opportunities and access to resources opened up by adopting the position of bricoleur.

Most of these positions are occupied by men, the majority of who, for reasons of age and personal histories, are not experienced with written discourses. Only four of the thirty-two community leaders with which COMUS dealt in 1999 were able to engage confidently with written text. What these individuals do possess, though, aside from their status as bricoleurs, are the accompanying skills of narration and of bricolage, and also local legitimacy as community members, which renders them acceptable to both stakeholders and their investors.

Thus, it is not the simple ability to make discursive shifts into the discourses of power, the 'knowing how to speak' that allows a person to be heard within the discursive landscape of Usulután. Similarly, neither economic status – in all five communities of this study, the

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[369] China and Robins *op. cit.*

people most engaged as textual managers were some of the poorest in the communities – nor, as we have seen, experience with written text, acted as primary forms of symbolic capital in the shaping of local power relations. Educational level is insignificant compared to history, experience and personal capital, which are created through local social patterns, relationships, events and hierarchies – through the playing out of lives, in other words. This is evidenced by the fact that only one of the five community leaders of this study could write his name; the other four had to use their thumbprints, yet neighbours of similar age and experiences who had far greater familiarity with reading and writing, developed through more schooling, lacked the crucial forms of capital required to act as textual managers. The authority of bricoleurs is thus embedded in the existing cultural fabric, unshaken and unaffected by 'literacy' skills. A cyclical and self-reinforcing dimension to the process may well exist; if someone can mystify through the elaborated language of the respective stakeholder then they become imbued with the aura of authority and leadership and thence the right and capacity to engage with the discourses of power is more likely to be cultivated. However, the prevailing force in Usulután is that of experience and the social text creating discursive ability, rather than vice-versa. This contradicts the findings of other writers within a Latin American context, who argue that it is the ability to speak in an appropriate style rather than the holding of a position of status which allows a person to speak and to be heard.[370]

The processes of investment in textual bricoleurs are similar to those described for family scribes above, where families and communities elect one or several local members as 'spokespeople' to act as their textual managers within dialogical encounters. Such investments also operate within social networks of exchange and barter, and through local hierarchies of status. These are highly deliberative processes; communities and individuals elect and invest in their textual managers according to shrewd and calculated consideration. Joya Grande, one of two communities with particularly close relationships with COMUS, as described, chose as their several textual managers people who had built up good relationships with COMUS over the years, they were men of the 'old guard' who had fought alongside COMUS staff during the war. 'They all have a story together, so they can talk together' was the rationale offered, and the success of this tactic was reflected in the large amounts of support that continued flowing into the community despite the kinds of setbacks described. For negotiations with the mayor of San Francisco Javier, however, a fervent representative of ARENA, the two men from Joya Grande who were generally appointed to engage in

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[370] Harvey (1987) *op. cit.*

dialogical encounters in his offices were allied to him through the marriage of one of their nieces to a workmate of his. Thus, each bricoleur was artfully selected within the struggle for resources according to their standing with stakeholders and only thence their ability to engage in discourse; talk must be embedded in experience and status to confer symbolic capital.

An interesting event within this pattern occurred during fieldwork in Usulután. Los Rivera, the community with perhaps the closest ideological and historical relationship with COMUS, held its election for members of the Board of Directors during 1999. This was a part of the legalisation process, initiated by COMUS, and as such those selected would be legally enshrined and empowered to deal with the State at regional, as well as local, level. The literacy facilitator of Los Rivera, Ermis, is a long-time collaborator with COMUS, since well before the war, an ex-guerrilla and beneficiary of the Land Transfer process, for which COMUS was the primary agent in this part of Usulután. He has much experience in acting as textual manager for the community in dialogue with COMUS, although his open ideological and political stance render him unable to deal with the mayor of San Francisco Javier. Ermis through his initiative has brought considerable amounts of COMUS aid and projects to the community.

Yet there has recently existed among many community members a feeling of restlessness and disillusionment with COMUS; many people said that they felt the agency's projects were 'for nothing – they don't benefit us much; we stay in the same conditions'. There has also been considerable discontent at the way the Land Transfer process in Usulután was carried out post-war; only COMUS collaborators such as Ermis, it was felt, had benefited.

Consequently, in the elections for the Board of Directors, Ermis – who had previously been community leader – was deposed from the Board and not admitted to any other post. Although well liked in the community generally, his connections with COMUS had been resented, and discussions behind closed doors had forced a collaborative and strategic change of direction, away from COMUS and towards the focusing of attention on State and other potential sources of aid. The man elected as community leader was recently related through marriage to the deputy mayor of San Francisco Javier and was also a known supporter of the dominant political party, ARENA. Many people said that 'with him (Don Arturo) we have more possibilities'. In this event, then, a conscious rejection of COMUS relationship took place, a sighting of potential elsewhere and an appointing of a new textual manager with the

necessary symbolic capital and experience, through his social and ideological links with this connection, as community representative.

Textual managers then, as the story above reveals, are creatively appointed, with an eye to opportunity and the availability and nature of resources. Selection of and investment in the particular kind of bricoleur depends on the process at hand; a scribe may be required for converting heteroglossia into the discourses of the official world, for signing a cheque, for example, or transcribing a letter into the modes and codes of power. Meanwhile, engagement in the negotiations of relations and struggles for resources requires a textual manager whose specialty lies in the co-option of monologia, and whose symbolic capital in their special relationship with stakeholders allows them to create a space for their voice to be heard. These roles may often be blurred, but the significance here is that people carefully select their bricoleurs according to the agenda at hand and will either cultivate them through existing social patterns, or for a more public role enshrine them in positions where stakeholders are obliged to deal with them, and thus gain greater control over relationships, resources and the dominant discursive stream.

Considering the processes of investment in bricoleurs tells us much about the status of ability to deal with written text in the communities, that is, about 'literacy'. As has been suggested, this is not a primary, or even a significant, determiner of status as textual manager. Often written and discursive skills are conjoined in the performative act, but the fact that a person with little experience in handling written discourse can act as spokesman while a youth of 14 with little status encodes their narrative in written text – for example, writing an appeal to COMUS – shows us how written / read performance - 'literacy' – in certain domains carries no special status as a mode of communication in Usulután. The ability to engage with written text is not an indicator of social capital in itself; the latter is rooted in existing power patterns which may subsequently convey the opportunity to develop discursive skills. There are many people in each community who can use written text in different ways, but who do not necessarily hold the symbolic capital of special relationships to act as textual managers. Moreover, while discursive bricoleurs engage in code and mode-switching between discourses, they do not necessarily, in accordance with Baynham's findings, switch between oral and written sign systems,[371] because the written may not necessarily form a part of their communicative repertoire. Instead, they often operate by controlling primarily oral and sometimes visual systems. Thus written skills for many people in Usulután do not primarily

[371] Baynham (1993)

represent a means to social status or an access route to dominant codes of communication; these routes lie elsewhere, in experience, history, relationships and local social and power structures.

7.5 Local literacies and collective bricolage: the meeting of discursive streams

What, then of the *processes* of textual bricolage, of the ways in which local cultural bricoleurs facilitate a dialogical encounter between the texts of power and those of the sub-rosa heteroglossia? We have stated above that, far from passively incorporating the discourses of stakeholders into their communicative repertoire, many people in Usulután consciously buy into and deploy these narratives in order to position themselves advantageously within relationships and struggles for resources. We have described how this takes place behind dialogical encounters, out of the sight of stakeholders, and we have considered the private practices of investment in bricoleurs that go on within communities. Yet the most striking occasions of textual encounter occurs in moments of dialogical interaction; in face-to-face meetings of the discursive streams of community members and stakeholders. These are instances of the creative adaptation of dominant texts and discursive practices.

There were many instances in Usulután of such bricolage, carried out with the aim of achieving specific, pre-determined intentions. On one level, this process represents the overlaying of local discourses with those of officialdom; the invoking of dominant texts in the employment, for example, of formal letters and other such media, in the holding of meetings, the enacting of agendas, within communities. Most of the literature which addresses bricolage does so from the perspective of the conversion of heteroglossia into the discourses of power. Yet in Usulután these acts are complex and multidimensional; they do not merely reflect a unilateral surrender to hegemony. Rather, in locating their communicative performance within the modes and codes of stakeholders, people and communities are knowingly obliging the respective stakeholders to address their request with due seriousness, through either the historical codes of mutual support and an appeal to the collective history, or the discourse of officialdom and legitimacy. In this way, relationships and discourse are being stage-managed according to local agendas.

Let us examine for example one textual artefact, an appeal to COMUS from members of a health group in Los Llanitos wishing to obtain funds to rent a music system:

The health committee of Los Llanitos of the health clinic.

By this means we greet you hoping that your work is successful. The motive of the present communication is to request from you your valued co-operation in lending us some funds in order to be able to rent a music system and in this way hold a party to raise funds for this clinic, to take place on the 21 of August 1999. This is because of the necessity to buy various materials for its continued functioning. Hoping for your favourable response, the Health Committee

[signed in printing and in signature form, according to each person's position, and stamped with the community stamp]

We can see here that firstly, the communicative act takes place within the dominant *mode* of communication, being in the shape of a formal letter. It thus fits into the constructed category of 'a formal request from the community' which obliges COMUS to address it with an equivalent degree of seriousness and weight, and offer equally formal reasons for its response. Written literacy is thus being treated as a resource, as a tool for accessing other kinds of resources. Secondly, the text itself is constructed within dominant *codes* of discourses. The opening phrase is a formulaic one, used ritualistically in this context. Its purpose is to invoke the historical relations between the writers and the recipient, here the stakeholder and the owner of the purse strings. The text is placed within the socially-constructed COMUS discourse of organisation by listing the sender as 'the health committee', instead of writing individual names, all of whom are actually known familiarly and personally to COMUS staff. Thirdly, the health committee was established by COMUS as part of the organisation process after the war. By coding themselves as this identity, the people are reminding COMUS of the fact that the committee's creation took place within the COMUS ideological framework, and in doing so are calling on shared history and alliances of co-operation and collaboration to invoke obligations to its sustaining. In this act, the writers are placing COMUS, as reader / interlocutor under the moral imperative to consider their request with due seriousness and to reply in a similar vein of solidarity. They are, then, artfully manipulating their relationship with COMUS, its ideological texts and discourses within a specific struggle for resources. Out of heteroglossia and dissonance – disagreement and disharmony is rife in Los Llanitos – a single voice of unity is being constructed, a local form of monologia, in order to gain ground within this struggle. The semblance of unity masks dissonance where the aim is of achieving common goals and presenting a more powerful voice of challenge.

Here again, too, we see the co-construction of narratives in a contextualised written text,[372] those of hope, obligation, identity and even reproach, suggesting that if COMUS does not fulfil its obligations it will be in breach of its historical promises to the communities. The performance of this text, then, is constructing a critical dialogue between members of the community and COMUS; it is creating a meeting point where two discursive streams can join and negotiate meaning. The text is simultaneously an act of alliance and an iteration of obligation; an artefact of local legitimacy, both act and article of faith in COMUS.

Within Los Llanitos a few months later the storms of the rainy season washed away all the paths within the community, leaving them almost impassable, deep trenches of mud. On this occasion discussion took place among the powerful elements of the community, not here the official Board of Directors but two of its members, excluding its alcoholic leader, together with two ladies allied to powerful factions within the community. It was decided that the first post of appeal would be the *alcaldía*; a request would be made to borrow their vehicle in order to transport rocks to rebuild the paths. This would also mean asking someone from the mayor's office to drive the vehicle, since no one in the community possessed the requisite experience.

In this case, the community members involved knew from experience that a written appeal to the *alcaldía* would not constitute the most advantageous mode of communication. The *alcaldía* under which Los Llanitos falls is ARENA-controlled, and the mayor himself is a member of a land-owning family, a symbol of the historically and actually powerful elite. The prevailing view in the community is that Don Domingo, the mayor, does not take kindly to rural inhabitants 'putting themselves on the same level', that is, adopting the dominant modes and codes of communication which for example the mayor of San Francisco Javier employs to restrict people's access to resources. Instead of a written appeal, Don Domingo favours a formal visit to his office by the Board of Directors, where the request is logged on the appropriate form and then dealt with at his time of choosing.

Don Domingo thus controls the local State's relationship with his constituents partly by restricting their access to the powerful modes and codes of communication. In refusing to acknowledge written appeals he is reinforcing their location in history, reiterating the divide between stakeholder and supplicant, middle-class Salvadoran and *campesino*, oral and written. He controls the printed form, largely unintelligible to Los Llanitos inhabitants, on

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[372] Besnier *op. cit.*; Camitta *op. cit.*

which the request is logged. Moreover the process of inscribing the appeal in written text is here taken out of the hands, literally, of the local people; it becomes something over which they have no control. People's claims on the environment are thus transcribed into the discourses of power by those in power.

Furthermore, by requiring a personal visit the mayor is reinforcing the people's status as supplicants; they must wait, surrounded by the kinds of visual symbols of power we have seen above, until he finds a convenient time at which to see them. His insistence on a visit from the entire Board of Directors during the rainy season also obliges people to take time off from their agricultural work, thereby missing out on a much-needed day's salary. This is a powerful act of symbolic violence; Don Domingo's actions force people into a situation of risk assessment where they must decide whether the gains will be greater from taking a chance on the mayoral office's co-operation, and risk losing a day's pay, or opting for the guarantee of 25 *colones*' salary, but to leave their streets in an impassable condition.

Finally, though, there came a day in Los Llanitos when paid work was running out as the end of the agricultural (rainy) season drew close. Santos, one of the two members of the Board of Directors involved in the process, visited the group involved in discussions early in the morning; it was agreed that the Board of Directors would visit the *alcaldía* later that day. These men were accordingly rounded up; all attended, since the force of their legal office required them to do so. The community, at this moment, was willing to create their own form of monologia even where discordance was rife within the community (the alcoholic leader was generally reviled by those participating in the process and was excluded from decision-making as much as possible). His formal role in the eyes of the State was simply co-opted in the struggle towards aspired outcomes.

Within the actual dialogic encounter with the mayor, the discursive text was notable for its artfulness. The opening speech was given by Santos, in his capacity as spokesman for the Board of Directors. Twisting his cap in his hands, and gazing at the floor, unusual for a man who dealt with COMUS quite confidently, Santos began hesitantly:

> It's that...Good morning, *señor*...Don Domingo..... we greet you in the name of the community Los Llanitos, and we thank you for having granted us a little time in which to visit you. We are thankful for your support to the communities, we know that you attach a lot of importance to what happens in the communities, to the conditions in the communities, so we are grateful for your time that you grant us [he then introduces each person by their formal position on the Board]. So we are here today as a legalised community to visit you. It's that...we are here today to solicit a little help with a really big problem that we have in the community, the problem is that the roads are destroyed by this rain we're having....[he

> explains the situation and requests the use of the vehicle and driver]. This problem is so big, we cannot bring our animals out of the community, they cannot pass, they have to be able to pass so that we can use them in the fields to work with the corn and the wheat…It's a big worry because of the harvest. We hope that you will work with us in this difficulty, it's a question of the harvest…we need the harvest to be able to march onwards. The community wants to develop itself, but with this problem...so we hope you can count on you in this matter.

This textual encounter highlights the difference between the narratives employed to position people and communities within relationships with different stakeholders in the discursive text of the struggle for survival and resources. Santos places himself in the light of supplicant to the beneficence of the State, as outlined above. He also calls on the discourse of self-reliance and salvation – the community wants to 'develop itself', to march onwards. But noticeably his text does not include any mention of solidarity, of co-operation, of reminders of moral duty. It uses the more hierarchical *señores* rather than *compañeros*, employing discourses of supplication and the narrative of personal change for the greater good – linking terms like 'develop' to the economic, the harvest. Yet simultaneously Santos' text is underscored with reminders of the *campesino* identity, of animals, corn, wheat and fields. A duality is thus being created in the fabric of the speech; the mayor's discourse of *campesino* supplication is being performatively employed and supported by the using of visually symbolic texts – the wearing of 'city' clothes, the removal of hats, the remaining standing even when invited to sit. Yet simultaneously, the voices of the communities are providing a subtle note of divergence to the performance; the men that day carried their *corbos* and their *campesino* hats, and in Santos' reiteration of the word 'community', in the use of 'these gentlemen' to refer to the people present, there is a note of defiance, of challenge. The moment then is not one of true and total supplication but rather an act of theatre, a purposeful, artful co-option of the monologic text infused with the narratives of the communities, a blending of discursive streams. It is a hybrid story created for gaining purchase on a relationship, the better to struggle for resources.

Into the fabric of his speech, then, Santos is constructing a multivocal narrative, weaving the clever thread of local pride into its interpretation by the mayor as subjection and supplication. This appeal to the State compared to the same community's letter to COMUS above offers insight into the fluidity of discourse, its careful co-option within the cultural text. In the letter to COMUS, that organisation's own discourse of moral obligation and *campesino* solidarity is invoked. When addressing an agent of the State, the discourse employed is the locally-appropriate one of subjection and legal frameworks. To both stakeholders, the appearance is offered of a shared narrative and ideology; local monologia is exerted within the overriding aim of negotiating access to resources. Yet in both cases, this is in fact a chimera, disguising

hybrid and intertextual narratives of local identity. In fact, the construction of a critical dialogue through mosaic composing techniques[373] is taking place, along with the appropriation of the relevant cultural text. We need only look to the conversations surrounding these literacy events – the references en route to the *alcaldía* to 'they will want to hear'; 'you put that so that he understands the message'; 'put down [write] for them' and 'I'll remind him that we are legalised now' (Santos) – for evidence of this; backstage whispers remind us of the artistry and function of the text, its status and role as a moment of theatre.

The employment of stakeholders' discourses in order to further personal agendas is something that has been noted in other New Literacies studies.[374] But in the construction of monologia, this instance in Los Llanitos, like those in other stories related above, is much more than a personal pursuit; such acts reflect a broader aspect of relationships and the struggle for resources. They take place not at the level of the individual but at that of the community. As such, these performances go well beyond the personal to extend into the political. They are symbolic representations of grassroots political mobilisation and activism according to a more locally-rooted model; the challenging of hegemony on multiple levels and the co-construction on the dialogical plain of multiple streams of discourse. We see the iteration of the 'power to' of the communities, strikingly rejecting the model of the traditional oppositional voice in El Salvador, and also that of the State. The individuals which comprise the community are employing the discourses of history and ideology to shape their own future and redefine relationships of power within the framework of their hope. The performance of text, whether oral or written, is being used as a vehicle for accomplishing culture.

What, then, of the claims being made here? In both instances, the collaborators, whether signatories to a letter or presences in the mayor's office, declare their status as community representation; they adopt a stance of authority. Yet as Camitta has pointed out, collaboration in performative events is no less interested than single-authored writing,[375] a notion we can extend to oral performance of text, too. The collaborators in the dialogical encounters described here are hoping to benefit not only from the resources made available through their petition to the stakeholders, but through the reiteration of their own status, their investment in relationships. Thus, the discourse of community engendered by the popular sector is being

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[373] Camitta *op. cit.*; also Bakhtin (1986) *op. cit.*
[374] see for example Robinson-Pant *op. cit.*
[375] Camitta *op. cit.*

subverted for personal ends as well as public entitlements; the claim is to represent a consensus but, as we have suggested and will explore below, behind this declaration of accord lies a considerable range and discordance of voices. The assertion of representation, then, the process of collaboration, is often subversive in itself.

Writers such as Hornberger might see in the actions of the people from Los Llanitos an instance of the people tapping into a 'communicative repertoire,' an idea drawn from Hymes' notion of communicative competence, or the knowledge and ability of individuals for appropriate language use in the communicative events in which they find themselves in any particular speech community;[376] a skills-based view of literacy. Yet the events described in Los Llanitos are much more than a question of ability or appropriateness or competence, and much more than a simple polarised battle between gatekeepers to resources and an excluded class of people. By focusing on the communicative processes described above as strategies of interaction, we have seen how an artful and deliberate usage of language and different communicative repertoires is used to reshape and test relationships, and how the embedding of other authoritative claims is constructed in the cultural texts employed, creating intertextual narratives of survival and hope. This is Bakhtin's vision of language as mask; code and mode-switching in the mould of Foucault, Baynham and Gee taking place as part of an ideological struggle. The men of Los Llanitos are symbolically stepping into the domain of power from which they are excluded by the manipulations of the State, and employing both the discourses encountered there and their own heteroglossia for the creative subversion of ideology and the reshaping and constraining of the dominant discursive stream. Far from accepting their place in history, the people of Los Llanitos and of the other communities in which this study resides are constantly confronting and negotiating to their advantage the demands and possibilities of multiple spheres of action, employing monologia as a tactic to mask disharmony within the struggle for resources and to ingeniously create space for their voice.

We may link these clever deployments of narratives to Gee's notion of 'borderland discourses', where the 'borderland' is characterized by points at which the 'official' or workplace discourses, conflict with and / or are opposed to the workers', or in this case the communities', primary discourse. In these contexts, primary discourses allow continued membership of the work group – or here the domain of official power - and at least the appearance of acceptance and adherence to the normative values of the official discourse. At

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[376] Hymes (1964), (1972) *op. cit.*

the same time this borderland discourse makes sense of and maintains some loyalty and allegiance to the primary discourse,[377] as we have seen above in the reiteration of symbols of *campesino* identity.

In Gee's model, a tension arises through resisting aspects of the powerful discourse which either contradict or are offensive to the 'primary discourse'. Events in Usulután, as we have seen, show in the moments described of interaction between the primary discourses of the communities and the discourses of power – Gee's 'workplaces' – that these are indeed sites of tension and contestation; where power confronts local identity, and history is challenged by hope. But in the mayor's office close to Los Llanitos, this tension was artfully employed by Santos in his narrative to reflect the challenge to the discursive streams of power. By invoking the dissonance between the local and the powerful, Santos was confronting the modern dilemma of the rural Usuluteco and emerging as the controller of the game.

As these vignettes from Los Llanitos reveal, textual managers such as Santos possess the mastery of complex discourses and the ability to construct from these cleverly fabricated hybrid texts. Within rural communities in Usulután, the degree of familiarity with, and extensive usage of, Barton and Hamilton's above-mentioned discourse domains, here those of local stakeholders, is striking; terminology such as aid, participatory development, proposal, budget, literacy for oppressed people and so on is employed with confidence in daily conversations within communities. Similarly noticeable is the extremely artful and tactical employment of these discursive domains as a form of monologia, a representation of harmony. We have seen one instance of this above in the meeting between the men of Los Llanitos and the mayor, Don Domingo. This moment of bricolage was a powerful performance; its actors were pursuing a distinctly strategic agenda, constructing a harmonious intertextual narrative within the discourses of survival and hope. Such performers, when they engage in dialogical encounters, are making a negotiated step in the assertion of legitimate authority with their own and the community interests directing their acts. They are employing the modes and codes of stakeholders to assert rights and claims and entitlements and to renegotiate the relationship through language.

Let us now turn to an instance of textual bricolage in Los Rodriguez, on a quiet afternoon in late May. It has been decided to hold a small fiesta to celebrate the inauguration of the literacy classes (although the classes had actually been running for quite some time before

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[377] Gee (1990) *op. cit.*

this). Therefore, some members of the class have gathered together to discuss arrangements, along with some non-members, the facilitator and the community leader. The plan is to write a list of ingredients for the food that is to be prepared and then construct a request to COMUS for funds. The facilitator, Esmeralda, is in charge of the writing.

Sitting under the shade of a mango tree in the heat of late afternoon, the discussion is focused and to the point, dotted with jokes and references to recent events. It is decided to prepare chicken and tortillas. Esmeralda asks everyone to provide the names of the ingredients so that the cost can be calculated; as the names of the ingredients are called out, she notes them down slowly and asks 'how much?'. Several of those present calculate the sums in their heads – 20 x chickens at 25 *colones* each, for example – including members of the literacy class who have shown difficulty engaging with written text. The speed with which they can do the calculations is notable. Esmeralda notes down all the costs in a neat column opposite the name of the ingredient.

Mardén, the community leader, does not contribute to the calculations but interjects with suggestions and additions, all of which are discussed with seriousness and which also give rise to considerable dissent. Especially debated is the question of whether or not to add salad, a choice between cost-effectiveness and taking advantage as far as possible of COMUS resources. One man says that 'they have to pay for it, we have the right, they are our funds, the funds of the communities'. There is a discussion about how COMUS has withheld monies from several communities in the past. However, in the end it is agreed to reject Mardén's suggestion and miss out the salad, on the basis that asking for too much money might risk jeopardising the entire funds. The discussion lasts about forty minutes.

When the table is completed, Esmeralda asks for help with adding up the total sum, and once this has been established, it is agreed that this is a reasonable amount to request from COMUS. Then begins the process of writing the letter of appeal. Esmeralda licks the end of the pencil and looks expectantly at her community leader. 'Begin,' directs Mardén, 'Dear COMUS *compañeros*, With this present missive the community of Los Rodriguez greets you and hopes you are continuing to find success in your work which is so important for the development of our communities.' The formal phrase trips off his tongue, and the people present nod as if rewarded for their choice of leader. Various suggestions are then offered for how to phrase the remainder of the request in print; yet the discourse is one of considerable harmony, in contrast to the dissent which arose when selecting the ingredients. A few of those present are familiar with the appropriate code and comfortable using it; their voices

therefore carry the weight of knowledge and experience. Moreover, Mardén is a local figure of authority; his status as community leader and his experience and symbolic capital as bricoleur is deferred to and his expertise acknowledged. 'Ah' remarks one man, '*compañero* Mardén knows how to speak, he certainly knows.' The writing of the letter takes about ten minutes; its text runs as follows.

> Dear *compañeros* at COMUS,
>
> With this present missive the Community of Los Rodriguez greets you and hopes you are continuing to find success in your work which is so important for the development of our communities. The motive of the present missive is to invite you to a big fiesta of the literacy class of the community Los Rodriguez to take place on 12th of May in the communal house. And to make a request for the amount of 230 *colones* for the motive of purchasing the consumable items for this fiesta. Counting on your support and hoping that you will not fail us, we undersign ourselves to you… Signed: [the signatures of the community leader and the facilitator].

Aside from Mardén's role as textual manager, contrasted with Esmeralda's - the literacy facilitator - as scribe, we can see within this literacy event the meeting point of the dimensions of Reder's schema of literacy,[378] a moment where technology, function and social meaning come together. This performance is an instance of Reder's 'technological' literacy practices, where people are engaged directly in the coding / decoding of written messages. It is also a moment of functional engagement, where the people present are participating in the practice – shaping the text – without actually doing the reading or writing. Social meaning, which relates to the complex network of social values and effective reactions associated with literacy practices, is also present – this collaborative performance is creating a running commentary on the social values and uses of textual literacy for a group, meshing the subtexts and heteroglossia of the communities into a monologic appeal to stakeholders, within the negotiation of relationships and resources. The discourses of survival and hope are co-constructed with the narratives of the stakeholder within a hybrid text. The people here are once again artfully creating an image of acceptance of the position ascribed to them, while in fact subverting this to claim the resources to which it entitles them. Their employment of a metaphor of harmony to present a semblance of unity taps into the discourses of power – that in this case of 'community' – and masks temporarily their own heteroglossia, enabling people as individuals and as a group, albeit a diverse one, to gain ground on the plain of contestation.

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[378] Reder (1985), although this scheme relates to the acquisition of literacy

This raises, however, perhaps the most significant question which concerns acts of bricolage and one raised at the start of this section; that is, in transforming their own heteroglossia into a political appeal couched within dominant discourses, are people thereby merely sustaining and reinforcing the discourses of power? Do these acts of bricolage in fact simply maintain the subordinate status of the heteroglossial stream of communities? Or are such performances in fact dimensions of the hidden agendas of contestation and resistance? Certainly, sustaining alliances with COMUS is a matter of considerable interest for individuals and communities, since outside of its own potential COMUS can act in turn as bricoleur in encounters with external sites of resources. Individuals are well aware of this factor: 'COMUS,' said Elias, 'is the best bank we have.' From one perspective at least, therefore, this is less a question of submission to a stakeholder's voice than a conscious act of knowing purchase into a discourse which affords rewards. The reinforcing of this discourse thus becomes part of the positioning process within struggles for resources and the negotiation of relationships on the dialogical plain, where the performance of discursive and textual bricolage is also an act of reinforcing the status of communities' own bricoleurs. Bricolage stands therefore not as a simple process of textual interpretation, a unilateral event of discursive shifting, but a multidimensional act, the recreation anew of the cultural text and the rough and tumble renegotiation of discursive streams. It represents the constant, ongoing interpretation and reiteration of text and meaning and the relationships which are an integral part of these, part of Bakhtin's 'contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language'.[379] Individual and collective bricoleurs are thus engaging in the same process as is this ethnographic text; a dialogical encounter, a meeting of worlds on the discursive plain and thence the generation of new meaning. This offers us another insight into the ways in which local voices become embedded in the discursive practices which produce cultural texts; orality and writing combine to create one mosaical fabric of intermeshing voices.

Yet the question still remains; even if creatively adopting the linguistic codes of power, how far are people subordinating their own discourses and in doing so reinforcing dominance, reducing themselves to a position of subordination within the relationship? How far is heteroglossia acquiescing to the monologic voice, and with what loss of diversity and range? Here we may turn to the hybrid nature of the texts described above. Of course, the discourse remains that of power; heteroglossia is still converted into the monologic voice, whether this be the façade of that created by communities or the sincere utterances of stakeholders. But the richness and variety of heteroglossia remains alive around the event; it does not simply

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[379] Bakhtin (1981) *op. cit.* p272

disappear into silence. The borrowing of the dominant text thus becomes not an instance of subordination but a form of Bakhtin's parody, a gesture aimed sharply and polemically against the original discourse, or genre.[380] In adopting dominant modes and codes of communication within dialogical encounters, community members are acting out two or more roles, accomplished in part through the framing of discourse.[381] Thus, to assume a binary opposition between the discourses of the majority class and those of the dominant minority would be to misunderstand the local, or vernacular, modes of communication explored below; these are perhaps best understood in Usulután as choices of channel and genre of communication. The narratives and discursive methods of stakeholders, sustained through ongoing usage, are subtly mocked and undermined through the interspersing of local texts of identity; the issue, then, is not merely that of varieties of communicative performances, but one of privileged channels of communication, which contribute towards the defining and constraining of dominant discursive streams.

This happens as, within their performative acts of transformation in dialogical encounters with stakeholders, local textual managers cleverly construct a bricolage of the narratives of local communities – discourses of anger, hope and a sense of desertion, the struggle for survival and a desperate need for resources. We have witnessed this in, for example, Santos' text above, created in the *alcaldía* of Jiquilisco, or in the missive to COMUS from the health committee of Los Rodriguez. A single phrase from the latter - 'Counting on your support and hoping that you will not fail us' – embraces much of the painful history of Usulután: this is no formulaic sentence but a powerful and hybrid narrative of local identity. Co-operation, depending upon, not failing us, the fear of abandonment and the sense of community, all lie interwoven here within the fabric of an appeal to history, ideology and to the future. Though this is a very theatrical performance, it is also, undoubtedly, one very real facet of community identity and emotion. Through such texts, bricoleurs are able to both pursue their agendas in the discourses of the stakeholder, while also iterating the legitimacy of their concerns and narratives. In doing so, they are linking local and discursive worlds with national discourses of ideology, much as Geertz's early work on cultural brokerage revealed.[382]

Bricolage here, then, is not 'one-way' in the sense that many accounts consider it to be. Indeed, in Usulután the term evokes a recursive, dialogical process. Every day within rural communities can be heard examples of people blending echoes from other texts surrounding

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[380] *Ibid.*
[381] Camitta *op. cit.*
[382] Geertz (1960)

them – those of the *alcaldía*, the television, the radio, COMUS – into local heteroglossial streams. Such moments invariably begin with the phrase 'they say that…' in the manner of reportage. Many people take a great interest in politics and national affairs, discussing such matters at length and in considerable depth despite the general absence of newspapers, televisions and other explicit sources of such knowledge. Thus, a constant discourse about wider affairs intertwines and interpolates with local heteroglossia. This is also, surely, a form of bricolage; the transforming and importing of stakeholders' narratives, both textual and oral, into local communicative texts and codes. In this respect everyone who engages in dialogue within communities is a bricoleur; thus, the divisions between the powerful world and rural communities becomes less stark than a more polarised vision of 'oppression' might suggest. The lines are blurred, the 'them' and the 'us' are smudged, because discursive texts and streams exist in a state of co-construction and flux. There is a continual pulling by individuals to integrate the discourses of power and those of heteroglossia, the written and the oral; it is not the communities but stakeholders who iterate continually the power divide, who reinforce hierarchy through discourse.

The political graffiti found on local buildings and houses in Usulután is an explicit example of this. One day in March, just before the presidential elections took place, a new piece of such graffiti appeared on a wall in the village of San Francisco Javier. It took the form of a drawing of the FMLN flag, and underneath it was written 'don't vote for ARENA – death squads', a reference to the organised murder committed by government forces during the civil war. Within Los Rivera that afternoon, this graffiti formed a topic of avid conversation, many people having seen or heard about it on travels to or from the village. Discussions ranged around a great variety of related subjects: from the personal - memories of stories of the death squads during the war; to the local - who could have done it (most people thought they knew who was responsible) and whether the ARENA supporters would put up a similar message; to the national - how the government operated control over its citizens and the media today, the FMLN's chances of winning the presidential elections.

In such intertwining of literacy events with discursive acts, the 'reading' of the FMLN graffiti is not a neutral moment of analytic decoding. The graffiti itself forms an artefact of textual performance; it is imbued with symbolic and highly emotive meanings of resistance and opposition, suitably embedded in a form and mode of resistance itself (the graffiti). Its 'reading' took place as an understanding of its role in ideology and an interpretation of its symbolic significance within wider discursive streams. In its discussion, people are bridging

the local discourses up to the national, or interpreting the local in the light of broader historical and political narratives.

What implication does this transference of discourses across boundaries have for our understanding of literacies? Barton and Hamilton distinguish vernacular, or local, literacies from dominant ones as informal practices unregulated by external social institutions, with their origins in everyday life. Dominant literacies in contrast are those associated with formal institutions, which carry greater value legally and culturally.[383] While the hybrid nature of local literacies in Usulután corresponds to Barton and Hamilton's understanding of them, it is important to add to our conceptualisation here the dimension of vernacular literacies in Usulután being indelibly, explicitly and deliberately linked to wider discourses by those engaged in their enactment. Vernacular literacies are thus not 'stuck' in rural communities, isolated and romanticised sites of the exotic, but rather their performers are crossing the discursive gap themselves, through their own engagement with wider narratives and practices, the melding of discursive streams.

Local literacies in Usulután thus accord to Street's definition of these as 'efforts by groups of people to promote their own languages and literacies in contexts where non-local forms of literacy brought from national and international centres are already present' – that is, practices which are closely connected with local and regional identities. Yet Street stresses that that local literacies 'have a positive and constructive contribution to make to world development',[384] in other words, the local is linked to the national through threads of ideology and practice. Within most New Literacies studies, this link is often construed as lying in the connection between policy and practice.[385] It is argued here that the relationship exists primarily not at the level of decision-makers, in implications of local practice for national policy, but that in Usulután at least the connection is made by the people themselves; local communicative practices are bound up with broader practices and narratives through people's own interest in and concern for their own future and aspirations, in ongoing struggles and daily re-creation of their world in the light of history. So the question becomes not one of romanticised 'local' literacies, but rather, as Street says, of 'sensitivity to indigenous cultures and recognition of the dynamic processes of interaction with dominant

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[383] Barton and Hamilton *op. cit.*

[384] Street (1997) pp373-374. He suggests three kinds of local literacies; those which consist of the different languages and writing systems within a national context: those that are 'invented' often by indigenous people when confronted by the dominant literacies of colonial powers, and vernacular literacies, which involve not a different language or writing system, but a different literacy practice

[385] Street (1996a) *op. cit.*

cultures and literacies'.[386] The focus, therefore, lies, or should lie, not on the artificial division between local and national, vernacular and dominant, but on the points of intersection between these, on the loci of their melding and interfacing. These processes are highly dynamic in the context of Usulután; they are conscious, deliberate and integrated into daily local practice.

We have learned from the above discussion of textual bricolage and discursive performances that people employ different ideological texts and discourses within their own narratives of survival and hope, of contestation and resistance, and within integrated discourses of positioning within relationships and the battle for resources. This, much more than individuals' possession of autonomous 'literacy skills', determines communicative acts. Creative and artful employment of texts, communication strategies and streams also allows for the negotiation of social position vis-à-vis stakeholders. In Usulután, therefore, discursive transformation is a social process which contributes to the iteration of social identity and the negotiation of social relationships, and to the contestation of power between the agents of dominant and local discourses; the plain where the monologic voice meets heteroglossia and discursive streams intertwine.

7.6 A moment of dominance

There were few moments in Usulután where it was possible to witness heteroglossial discursive streams supersede those of dominance. In part, this was because, as we have seen, hierarchies of power determine space to speak, and in instances of dialogical encounter the place for voices tended to be determined by those with greater control. Even in meetings among the agricultural staff of COMUS and community members – where the degree of expertise among members was considerable – the COMUS voices tended to drown out the local ones in their role as 'experts', as has been described.

There was, however, one occasion on which local voices did prevail, where rich and multilayered heteroglossia momentarily conquered and subdued the monologic voice. This occurred in a bread-making demonstration aimed at income-generation, given by the COMUS literacy promoter, Margarita, to women from five communities.

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[386] Street (1987) *op. cit.* p61-62

Margarita began by laying out the ingredients and demonstrating visually how to mix the ingredients to create dough. Women and children crowded around the table, which stood under a tree in Piedra Labrada, one of the few communities which possesses an oven. Children ran among the bright dresses of the women. As Margarita explained and modelled the procedure, the women watched attentively and talked among themselves as she shaped the dough into balls and then left it to rise on trays.

Two hours later, however, we were still waiting; the dough had risen little if at all and many women were becoming restless, with tasks to do at home and husbands due back from the morning's work. They crowded round the trays, debating the problem. Margarita offered her explanation that the yeast was old, although we had in fact bought it that morning. But one woman contested this; the reason, she said, lay in the fact that a woman who was menstruating had touched the dough; it was well known that this would prevent the mixture from rising. Margarita rejected this explanation forthwith; 'That is just an old story, a menstruating woman can't prevent the dough from rising, the problem is in the old yeast. We bought it this morning but from that shop in Jiquilisco, that woman in there often sells old yeast, this has happened to me various times…' But now individuals were murmuring among themselves and suddenly a cacophony of voices broke out, heated discussions rising in groups, people striving to be heard by the wider audience, with many addressing Margarita directly. A few women supported the explanation of the old yeast, but others offered a range of reasons for the dough's failure to rise: that the day was cold, that it was windy, that the paper on which the dough was resting was unsuitable, that a menstruating woman touching the dough was indeed well known as a cause of 'heavy' dough…that someone who had recently given birth could prevent dough from rising. Each explanation was backed up with evidence from experience, proof cited from other authorities; stories, hearsay and witnesses. The clamour went on for a quite a few minutes, until Margarita, shouting to be heard above the melée, concluded that whatever the reason, the dough was unlikely to rise further and should be placed in the oven. To this, everyone concurred.

This episode lasted only briefly but within these moments of variety, the women were asserting their own ideology and history; exerting the dominance of their knowledge, and backing this up through cited experience and expertise. A wide range of explanations all vied for space in the cacophony, a true moment of heteroglossia where, for a brief moment, the varied anecdotes, folk sayings and songs of the rural communities, Bakhtin's 'rivulets and

droplets' of social polyphony, dominated and subdued those of power and, for an instant, created space for carnival.[387]

The ensuing question from this instance, then, is how far the discourses of stakeholders were in turn affected or reshaped by local heteroglossia, or how far they remained trapped in their own totality. Language is, of course, no fixed determinant, but a shifting sea, where boundaries are sharply drawn within a moment and erased with ease the next. Monologia itself therefore exists in a state of flux. The *extent* of the dialogical encounters between monologia and heteroglossia is then by definition influential; as will be evident from the discussion of this chapter, the State, by keeping its discourses exclusive and retaining control of dialogical meetings, retains much of its force as the authorial voice. The ideological constructions of the *alcaldía* remain constant and in line with wider national discourses, with the mayor at times seeming in his dialogue with community members to almost be quoting verbatim from national newspapers or other artefacts of the party line.

Yet the fluidity of boundaries is evident in one anecdote of local State discourse responding to heteroglossia within dialogical exchange. This occurred when the water pump in the village of San Francisco Javier broke down for a period of four months, requiring people to make long treks to the nearest river for drinking and washing water when the rains stopped for a time. The pump had been constructed by COMUS but was maintained now by the State water company, ANDA. By the end of the third month, many people in the village were becoming restless; the *alcaldía* had frequently maintained that the repair process was due to begin shortly, but when this showed no sign of arriving, a delegation of men from the village went to visit the mayor himself, and requested that water supplies be brought up to the village in ANDA's trucks, the usual occurrence in such a situation. After three such meetings, the mayor agreed to organise this, and two weeks later, the first truck arrived, from which people filled buckets, barrels and as many other receptacles as possible.

This could be seen as a straightforward example of local political pressure, as indeed it is, but what is also significant here is the way the mayor's discourse changed within the series of meetings. Accounts emphasised the way in which to begin with, the mayor had blamed the poor construction of the COMUS pump, and the 'rarity' of the parts which were required to mend it. By the third meeting, it was reported, he was criticising ANDA – a fellow mechanism of the State – for their inefficient response to the crisis. Seeing for himself the

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[387] Bakhtin (1981) *op. cit.* p263

determination and evident dissatisfaction of his constituents, and with local elections looming in the following year, the monologic voice changed its frontiers and unfixed that which had been previously carved in stone, reshaping itself in response to the forces of heteroglossia, which united in harmony to create a narrative of resistance. Thus, the plain of interplay between discursive streams created a context for redefinition and change.

The discourses of COMUS, having much greater daily contact within communities, were considerably more open to shifting and influence within dialogical encounters. On several occasions it was possible to witness changes in discursive position in response to powerful local performance. The corollary to the story of the seed-distribution programme in Los Rivera above, for example, reveals just such an instance. In the next community visited by Luis as part of the same project, he this time handed out the seeds to individuals, citing the example in Los Rivera as his rationale: 'They don't want to work collectively, they want to work each for their own...The people don't want to co-operate between themselves, and one cannot force them'. So the seed-donation became transformed from a symbol and performative act of the COMUS ideology of collectivism and *compañerismo* into a trigger for greater intra-community individualism, a gesture of submission to local ideologies. Similarly, within the REFLECT programme, when facilitators complained about people's unwillingness to 'draw the maps and diagrams', Margarita to some extent and Robin to a much greater one responded by instructing the volunteers to 'do what the people want..if they want to write down letters of the alphabet, go ahead with that...You can't oblige the people to do what they don't want' (Robin).

Thus, we see the co-construction of narratives in daily life at a local level as a constant, ever-changing process, a continual flow, an ongoing reconstruction of history, meaning and ideology. Streams of discourse in Usulután do not exist in totality and isolation, but rather are constantly merging, mixing, and recreating each other in a continual ebb and flow. The struggle for authority, taking place on the plain of language, is no contest between individual wills or logical contradictions but among points of view and interpretations. This state of flux is forged through moments of dialogical encounter, the meeting of two cultures, macro and micro, dominant and subordinate, powerful and resistant. The fluidity of language means that no authorial voice may hold itself enwrapped in its own totality, free from influence and change. It is, then, through the building of discursive bridges that exclusiveness can be challenged and a greater merging of monologia with heteroglossia begin.

7.7 Conclusion

To return to the question posed at the start of this chapter, Bourdieu's assumption that social actors are trapped in a system of their own making because they are unable to perceive the structures of domination condoned and complied with in their practice does not hold true in Usulután. In fact, the people of the rural communities in this locale are highly aware of their domination, and have developed practices which involve the conscious participation of all sectors of society; the melding of the local with the national, the vernacular with the dominant. Thompson remarks that 'The exercise of symbolic violence is so invisible to social actors because it presupposes the complicity of those who suffer most from its effects.'[388] But as we have seen, local people in Usulután are far from complicit in their domination; they creatively take hold of discourses, written and oral, and employ these artfully as tools within struggles for resources and the negotiation of relationships. They place a mask of harmony and unity over their own rich and varied heteroglossia to reposition themselves in acts of contestation and resistance. They are neither passive nor indifferent, but are in daily life actively recreating history and shaping their own future. This ability is a powerful part of people's symbolic capital, yet it often goes unrecognised outside communities. Local narratives reveal, in contrast to the deprived or deficit discourses, little sense of suffering through illiteracy but rather constraint through poverty and the forces of hegemony.

Bourdieu however does recognise that people engage in acts of resistance, arguing that all struggle takes place in the realm of discourse. Those with less symbolic capital may challenge those with more, and battles ensue in which poorer groups adopt strategies of resistance or heterodoxy and thereby force dominant groups to defend their positions through a defensive discourse of orthodoxy, a process which resonates with events as described in Usulután. There are however problems with Bourdieu's insistence that only one legitimate form of speech can operate at any given time; as we have seen, the intertextual and hybrid narratives created in these communities offer space for legitimacy for more than a single voice. Similarly, Bourdieu's conceptualisation of symbolic 'capital' suggests that this is a material reality apart from the individual, something that can be owned and alienated from the person. So the emphasis within the dialogical encounter lies on what each party brings to the interaction, rather than how value is placed on what it brought. Thus, his model precludes the possibility of relative power being negotiated, something which, as we have seen, takes place through the artful employment of this very notion of symbolic capital in Usulután.

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[388] Thompson (1984) p58

In the arena in which this text is grounded, then, symbolic capital is a more fluid model than that presented by Bourdieu; a force rather than an entity, integrally bound to and conditional upon the individual, their history, experience and ideology, a changing tide from moment to moment. The 'passive *campesino*' who lacks symbolic capital is as much a creation of the discourse as is its other extreme, the 'political *campesino*' who bears unknown, unrecognised capital which only needs to be regenerated through submission to the doctrines of the popular cause. Instead of a single model of the 'oppressed' or the 'lacking', a great variety of figures populate the landscape of Usulután, grasping different ideologies and acting in diverse, multidimensional ways, changing allegiances and strategies from hour to hour to live out the discourse of survival and hope, the better to be able to 'march onwards'. People artfully create a vision of acceptance of their ascribed position as the 'problematic other' rooted in deficit or deprived discourses, while simultaneously subverting this through narrative and claiming the benefits it confers. Processes of bricolage, the melding of the dominant and the vernacular, are part of the renegotiation of relationships and the struggle for resources, yet bricoleurs are enshrined in their position by their social role and position, not by decontextualised 'literacy' or discursive skills. The texts they create are hybrid and multidimensional, locally bound yet co-constructed with the discursive streams of hegemony. Their tensions are reflected in the communicative strategies employed in dialogical encounters with stakeholders, which reflect continual challenges to the hegemony.

Thus far, we have considered the relationships between dominant and local discourses as these are enacted within communicative practices, as sites of contestation and negotiation in the renegotiation of relationships and the struggle for resources. Yet people in Usulután employ other imaginative discursive resources in their meetings with hegemony on the plain of dialogue which will now be explored in the following chapter.

Chapter 8: Concealed practices: Constructing the fabric of resistance within communities

The two previous chapters have focused primarily on moments of dialogical encounter; firstly, on the ways in which dominant voices subordinate local heteroglossia, and secondly, on processes of resistance to and subversion of this silencing. Both of these processes form part of the shaping and co-construction of streams of discourse. Daily struggles for positioning within relationships and the control of resources are lived out through creative and artful communicative practices and performances in everyday life. A public representation of harmonious participation in dominant ideologies is conveyed by community members to stakeholders, while simultaneously encoded within this façade lie the heteroglossia of the community narratives – notes of defiance and at times despair, of challenge and hope and a longing for change.

In the preceding chapter we have unravelled the relationships between local and dominant discourses, and between these and the communicative performances through which they are enacted. But people in Usulután draw upon various other forms of discursive capital as they engage with the narratives of power. Behind masks of acceptance within dialogical encounters the weaving of a fabric of resistance takes place, the establishing and reiterating of individuals' and communities' own discursive positions. This takes the form of a rich and varied heteroglossial mosaic of communication and cultural practices which is created within communities, and thus often lies concealed from the gaze of stakeholders. These hidden layers of the discursive text of Usulután are however not bounded within a purely 'local' world, they are not simply vernacular literacies tied to their own domain but rather constitute communicative streams which intertwine with the patterns of power, control and resistance previously described to create a hidden stratum to dialogical encounters. The focal points of these intersections between local and national, vernacular and dominant need to be explored in this text precisely because of this interfacing: to focus only on struggles for resources within explicit dialogical encounters would draw a very narrow picture of the communicative strategies in which people engage in order to 'march onwards'.

So far, in focusing on dialogical encounters between stakeholders, individuals and communities, we have emphasised the political dimension of social power. This final section trains its lens more directly on the personal, on the ways in which communicative practices

are employed not merely at the *individual* level, a unit of analysis that has been employed throughout this text, but within the *private* spaces of experience of people's worlds. This will construct a more striking image of how literacy operates within the playing out of lives, and reveals the context in Usulután to constitute not a polarised distinction between hegemony and community but a dynamic cultural text of hybrid and co-constructed narratives, an ongoing process of permeation, co-option, reinterpretation and reiteration.

This final section of the text then continues the above story by showing how textual and discursive practices and performances are lived and enacted within daily life and relationships as they form part of this fabric of resistance. Assuming communicative practices as sites of ideology and struggle, according to the framework of the previous two chapters, this story becomes an exploration of how power is lived and experienced through events and social relations within the more personal domains of people's worlds. 'Literacy' in Usulután, as we have seen, is no autonomous phenomenon but an ideological construction bound up in the discourses of power; here we will show how the using of written texts in particular is not in itself an entrenched part of the social fabric for men and women in Usulután but is a concept which is intertwined with the heteroglossia of their own discursive text, co-opted by them in their struggles for position and power.

In Usulután, a striking dissonance exists between people's constructions of themselves as 'one who knows nothing' and 'one who cannot do [i.e. read and write] anything at all' and their capable, confident, actual practices. People live out their lives both surrounded by and engaged in literacies of all kinds; in daily life most individuals deal with forms, identity cards, mathematical processes, graffiti, agricultural and economic calculations. How then to account for this discordance? The construction of the self as one who cannot, yet being at the same time one who does?

8.1 The hidden practices of literacy

As has been suggested above, Usulutecos' frequent self-identification as 'illiterates' in the frameworks of the deficit or deprived model is both striking and dismaying: 'We are,' said Maria Leocardia, 'the blind ones. We don't know anything, in that condition one goes around blind.' Women in particular often describe themselves as unable to move around in the outside world. 'I can't leave the community...I can't read the bus signs' said many.

A study adopting a more deficit or deprived approach would construe such remarks as evidence of the deficiencies engendered by illiteracy and / or of the scope in this context for empowerment. Yet the ongoing participation and dialogue of the ethnographic framework crafted here revealed that individuals' practices in fact powerfully belied these self-constructions. Women who described themselves as 'one who cannot do anything' certainly did do things; they negotiated, for example, their way to the country's capital, a minimum of three hours away on three different buses, to sell their home-grown produce. During this process many engaged in a range of complex calculations; working out how long it would take them to get home and therefore at what time they would have to leave; calculating their net income for the day, minus the bus fares, and deliberating about their budget for the week. Men, meanwhile, often engaged both collaboratively and alone in complex calculations about amounts of fertiliser and seed required for sowing; estimated yield and profit.

The point here is twofold. Firstly, many of these practices remain concealed not only from stakeholders and literacy 'experts' but from those same people who perform them. For the inhabitants of rural communities in Usulután, literacy, or *alfabetización,* almost entirely consists in the practices around 'essay-text literacy'; that is, schooled literacy.[389] Conceptualisations around literacy in rural communities will be further explored below, but the second and associated point here is how successfully dominant discourses and ideologies around literacy have become integrated and assimilated into the landscape of Usulután.

Yet to accept uncritically a process of cultural 'internalisation' would be to unselfconsciously adopt the very discourses of power that this text has explicitly rejected. Moreover, within Usulután another dimension exists to the matter; that of the status of *alfabetización* as a challenge to dominant narratives and ideologies. Literacy learning represents for many people, as we have seen, a shift into ideology, a statement of political alliance and, more than this, a rejection of one's own existing social status and identity – effectively a wish for the renegotiation of position, the reconstruction of the self in the social landscape. This, of course, is the discourse of transformation described in Chapter 6 above, that of personal salvation through the acceptance of and self-abnegation to powerful ideological doctrines. In constructing their own practices as literate ones, people would in this act be constructing their identity as part of either of these narratives. This gesture of refusal to adopt uncritically the dominant discourses is not, then, merely a question of the internalisation of outsider

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[389] as Mpoyiya and Prinsloo found in Khayelitsha *op. cit.* p187

values, it is an actual challenge to these narratives and performances, almost a mockery of them in tone.

Various kinds of concealed discursive and textual performances relate to the construction of relationships and the struggle for resources in Usulután. These do not generally take the form of letter or telegram-writing, newspaper reading, and so on, since as has been made clear, such artefacts find their ways only infrequently into the communities. What follows is a discussion of some of the kinds of practices and performances that are most integrally linked to the discursive struggles outlined above, developed according to the leitmotifs and metaphors that arose out of conversation and participation in daily social life. The discussion will reveal how the hidden practices of the communities – hidden, that is, from the eyes of stakeholders – challenge dominant ideologies of literacy through the construction of a powerful and complex heteroglossial text. It will trace the social constructions of power within communities and help us understand how oral and written discourses operate as part of the communicative repertoire in people's personal worlds.

This section is not intended to be a comprehensive review of all the private discursive practices of Usulután – many more exist which space does not permit us to explore here.[390] Rather, elements have been selected which form focal points for the meeting of discursive streams and thence act as loci in struggles for resources, the negotiation of relationships, contests of power, identity and control. Those aspects described here were selected for their significance on the dialogical landscape in relation to the themes which traverse the previous chapters, and in respect of their volume and emphasis within the present process of unravelling the cultural text. In this they evoke, as has been stated in Chapter 3 above, only a partial view; an exploration of some central foci, filtered through the lens of dialogue.

8.2 Identity discourses

As previously discussed, the discourses of COMUS and the *alcaldía* serve both to iterate and reinforce their own authority and in doing so, inadvertently or otherwise, subjugate the voices of rural people, thereby often reducing heteroglossia to the status of non-legitimate discourse. This process of constraint is particularly ironic when considered against the often undoubtedly sincere intentions and accompanying rhetoric of empowerment. Yet away from

[390] For example; the sending of private love letters between teenagers, the calculating of costs for community events, the construction of rules for football tournaments

the eyes of stakeholders, out in the communities, a note of defiance sounds, as local fabrics of power and identity are invoked in resistance, created through their constant iteration in discourse. These processes of the evocation of local power and authority interplay with the struggles described above for positioning within relationships and control over external resources.

Within communities, for example, the authority of roles is constantly voiced and thereby established in the social fabric. Sentences commonly begin with statements of status and identity location; 'as a mother, I…', 'as a parent of the family', 'as a man…', 'as a member of the Board of Directors…', 'As the parents of families, we have to make sure that the teacher is teaching what is necessary to know'. Similarly, the many informal gatherings held in private spaces, in which issues of local import are discussed, are notable for the emphasis of speakers on their social roles; as a farmer, as a person with many years' experience, as experts in the cultivation of coffee, we…

But identities and relationships are fluid and various, just as hierarchy within communities is complex and multiple; a process of ongoing iteration and recreation, depending on the exigencies of the moment but having a lasting effect through its inscription in discourse. Roles may be constant but they are also continually changing; breadwinners become mothers and fathers, daughters and sons, 'brothers and sisters' in church services. Sometimes these statuses exist in apparent conflict; people may construct themselves as 'a brother' of the church, or 'a person with fifth grade education' but also in the same sentence as 'a *campesino*' or someone 'of the land'. The intertextual resources of identity and relationship construction are thus drawn upon within dialogue, with different narratives being employed simultaneously to construct a hybrid identity, one which confers a particular status at that given moment – an 'educated' person, or a member of the church - with the underlying constant of the *campesino* self-construction.

How then does this relate to the discursive struggles outlined above? Barton and Hamilton employ the term 'communities of interests' to conceptualise social networks of shared relations in Britain; those of allotment associations, for example, or groups of parents attending a particular school, or those of ideological connections, such as poll tax opponents. China and Robins employ the term somewhat differently, to capture the presence of a range of individuals with distinct ideas, identities and practices.[391] In Usulután such communities of

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[391] Barton and Hamilton *op. cit.* p15 / 251; China and Robins *op. cit.* p159

interests, encapsulated in the utterances of role identifications above, certainly exist in this way but their functions are more strategic than either of these conceptualisations imply. Interests in Usulután are less shared experiences and enthusiasms than *agendas* or strategies for pursuing one's future. Communities of interests are therefore in this context perhaps better described as *strategic clusters* which exist in a state of flux, fading in and out of the social reality at any given time. These clusters are diverse, comprising at any given moment individuals with distinctive and conflicting agendas, needs and understandings. People opt in and out of these groups according to the exigencies of the moment, their own careful assessment of current and future situations and associations, their historical, social and ideological position on the landscape and their envisioned principles and strategies in the unfolding of their lives.

We also learn from this the way that power is linked to roles, which must in turn be constantly iterated and renegotiated to bear authority. Relationships are temporary and infinitely contestable. Thus, power within communities exists not as a fixed constant but as a contestable domain; it cannot be assumed but must be invoked, such as in its evocation by local stakeholders through their uses of signs and symbols. Power in the rural communities of Usulután is not indelibly linked to certain attributes, it is, in the Foucauldian model, relational and productive, a 'mode of action upon actions',[392] constantly voiced and shaped through hybrid and intertextual narratives. It is here that the link with discursive struggle lies.

More specifically, such texts of identity relate to literacy practices through the processes of dialogical collaboration. We have seen how, in the story based in Los Rivera at the start of Chapter 5, events were taking place according to established local social hierarchies. This is a part of the ongoing recreation of local heteroglossia; collaboration serves a purpose but does not guarantee any changes in the hierarchies of existing local power relationships, indeed, these are renegotiated and reiterated within such events of textual construction. As a further example, let us consider a request from Don Ignacio for a quantity of fertiliser from his acquaintance Rigoberto, who is a powerful man in another community. Ignacio and his *compañero* Don Armando composed the following message, to be sent via a neighbour's child:

> Ignacio Flores, the spokesperson of the Board of Directors of Community Los Rodriguez sends his regards and requests a quantity of fertiliser for use in the fields, it can be deposited at the house of his son, Don Luis Flores, in community Los Rodriguez, there we are waiting

[392] Foucault (1982) p222

for you. Signed: Don Ignacio Flores, Spokesman of the Board of Directors of the Community Los Rodriguez.

In the processes of collaboration within which the construction of this letter was enmeshed, Don Armando produced the text in writing but it was Don Ignacio, a member of the Board of Directors – knowing Rigoberto to be a long-time co-operant of COMUS - who mainly formulated the phrases. 'Put it down..' he instructed his colleague, 'write it like this...'. While the two men's relative hierarchy was present in the performative act, therefore, it was underscored by their long shared history and bonds of companionship; the process here was one of negotiation, of claiming and conceding power. Don Ignacio took the lead in formulating the phrases – having in his capacity of alliance with COMUS access to wider discursive resources – and stands therefore as the primary 'owner' of the literacy artefact, while his social bond with Don Armando is being reconstructed in its enactment. Similarly, Don Rigoberto and Don Ignacio were already acquainted; there was no actual need for Ignacio's title to be inserted into the message, but adding it serves to reiterate and reinforce Ignacio's status to the ears of others and invoke his authority to one more senior than himself, thereby giving himself greater claim on relationships and resources.

This then reveals the power of local heteroglossia, the rich and multilayered stream of discourse which gathers force within communities, away from the view of stakeholders. Authority within communities is defined primarily by one's discursive position, which in turn allows for the renegotiation of both local and wider relationships and enables greater purchase in contests for resources. This impinges on constructions of literacy in that there are few social situations within the local world in which a lack of ability to engage with written text is construed as a social deficit. What is constructed by stakeholders as illiteracy is for many people in Usulután not in itself a stigma; rather, local social authority and status are built up by other attributes, as the above anecdotes have revealed. This finding fits in with much other micro-level research; the cases for example in Prinsloo and Breier's cited collection.

The sending of messages is deeply woven into the fabric of Usulután's unfolding history, the discursive resources, procedures and repertoire of family and community life developed and enacted through generations, as when a man sends a request for money for three barrels of fertiliser to his brother in law, leaving his relative to do the calculation of the amount. Denying the presence of literacy in Usulután communities, or labelling people illiterate in the face of such constant events, would be to deny this dense and complex fabric of practices and

performances which go on in daily life, and through which relationships and identities are created within the cultural text and the dominant discourse challenged and reshaped.

8.3 Gossip and exchange: textual / discursive practice as part of exchange networks

The above section has suggested that textual performances of identity within communities, oral and written, are embedded in social practices and relationships. Similarly, networks of resource exchange are also intertwined with this cultural fabric and with the employment of literacy as a commodity. Such networks are often a physical necessity of survival, especially during the dry season in Usulután, when agricultural work and other commodities are scarce.

These networks also form a powerful dimension of the sub-rosa stream of discourse. They operate both as loci of resources for local people and as social networks of power and obligation. They contradict the notion of dependency on external agencies through their revelation of agency, reflected in people's striving to control as far as possible their own economic / social well-being and future agendas. Their deployment – that is, the act of their invoking - also operates as an iteration of local power, and thence as an implicit challenging of the dominant discourses. They are in their enactment a rejection of patronage and a defying of the *compañerismo* discourse as constructed by local agents of the popular sector.

The actual processes of exchange which take place within these networks are also heteroglossial discursive practices which form a crucial part of the daily social fabric; they are meaningful transactions which construct and recreate the cultural text. The exchange of favour and assistance within and between communities is part of the *compadrazgo* concept outlined above, and extends also into *compañerismo*; it is an integral part of the discourses of survival and hope and a powerful aspect of the challenging of monologia. By engaging in these sorts of ongoing dialogues, individuals and families can tie themselves into local patterns of support and thence challenge the hegemonic discourses of patronage and the problematic 'other'.

In the short term, such exchanges may appear to approximate barter; the trading of mangos for childcare or clothes, for example. In the longer term, though, surpluses in one household are invariably levelled off to those with a temporary deficit. And when, in turn, the giving household experiences a deficit, they can be sure that what was offered before will soon be

repaid in the same spirit. Thus buying into the system ensures the long-term social security of the participants, with repayments never being couched in such terms. Instead, they serve as a positive reminder of reciprocity, of the rights and obligations that go along with *compañerismo*, the sense of 'all being in the same boat' and thereby act as mutual expressions of support.

These networks – that is, these structures - and processes of exchange are denoted by the metaphor of being *en confianza* or 'in confidence' with other individuals, a concept which denotes the operating of relationships among social and kinship networks. Individuals who are 'in confidence' with one another create these transactional networks of support and obligation. To be 'in confidence' with someone implies a stronger bond than merely to be part of the group with which one socialises, since the individual is expected to socialise with everyone, in the name of social harmony.[393] Thus, the exchanges which take place within family or 'confidence' bonds are not simply utilitarian exchanges of resources. They also act as reinforcers of kinship and friendship, of unity and confidence, of spiritual values and feelings which go above the utilitarian. Such transactions operate as a means of cementing and reinforcing these networks. The power the gift / loan / exchange carries is the power to compel reciprocity, that is, it bears a moral and ethical imperative.

We may see here a parallel with the description above of COMUS and other local NGOs' work. By embedding its own resource exchanges within the discourses of these established social processes, COMUS is exerting its own ideological imperative and simultaneously encoding its actions within the narrative of the *compañero* exchange. Yet in the act of asking people to sign for the goods they offer, COMUS are by definition undermining their chosen discourses; the exchange is taken via this dialogical instant into the realm of an official donation, becoming part of the opposing discursive stream of legitimacy and power. Through this choice of performance, these exchanges become differently construed, as rights rather than as dimensions of *compadrazgo*.

Within and between communities, though, such transactions operate as a sort of long conversation between people engaged in their friendly networks and carried on over a lifetime. They represent a simultaneously friendly and moral economy of the poor, against

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[393] Here is not the place for a full description of the processes of becoming 'in confidence' with someone, but it operates basically through a system of social referral and / or shared experience

and within a larger hostile economy marked by scarcity and exploitation. As such they are performances and iterations of local independence and networks of social power; they both protect and remove the individual from the patronage relationship created by COMUS and the *alcaldía*. They are the very enactments of survival and hope, shown to be infinitely reworkable through language.

The social networks described above form then aspects of the tapestry of social inclusion. As such, they are a living part of the heteroglossial fabric of resistance that constrains and defines the monologic voice. They denote belonging, support and companionship. Their corollary is of course that of social exclusion, a fearful prospect in a context where abandonment may literally mean hunger and starvation. The key dialogical tool and discursive practice employed within and between communities to perform acts of inclusion and exclusion is that of gossip,[394] a form of language which is also shaped and formed through relationships.

Gossip in Usulután is a multivocal entity; it is both a metaphor for information and a means of exchange, as well as symbolising the rules governing the transaction – whether a person at any given time is embraced within friendly networks of support or abandoned to their own isolated means. It is a powerful resource, which is traded through the networks of *compañerismo*. It serves as a tool for thwarting dominant discourses and operates as a means of iterating and thereby engendering communities' own procedures of social hierarchy; belonging and not belonging. In this sense gossip is a 'vernacular' literacy, in that it represents the discourse of social life.

Communities in Usulután are not, as has been emphasised, united bodies which share values, aims and ecological concerns. In fact, they are sites of conflict and dissonance; loci of constantly changing relationships, whose view can be magnified through this powerful lens of gossip. Gossip acts both as a social bonding mechanism within the networks of confidence described above, and as a tool for rejection and exclusion which can have powerful and painful effects. Gossip shapes and sustains relationships and bonds; its sharing is conceived as a right, and its withholding as an act of aggression. Gossip extends to everything, from the recent pronouncements of the local mayor, to the daily comings and goings of one's neighbour.

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[394] *platicas*

Gossip, then, is a powerful index of opinion; it is both private and public. It reflects the very dialogical structure of public thought; through its medium opinions are formed and renegotiated. It is, like exchanges, a form of an ongoing conversation, at once intimate and practical; it is the heteroglossial medium through which the *compañero* and *compadrazgo* relationships are constructed and continued. Although practical, gossip is never trivial and should not be taken as such. Being well-connected on the gossip grapevine can mean the difference between having food on the table or seeds to plant in the garden and having none.

Gossip in Usulután is also far from innocuous. Its darker side is *chambres* – a powerful motif denoting 'bad rumours'; that a man's wife has formed a relationship with another man, for example, or that a mother is being a 'bad parent' to her children. *Chambres* are strong and violent tools, which can break up homes and relationships, settle scores and forcefully exclude. In Joya Grande, Ignacio's wife left him and their young child because of *chambres* – which most people seem to believe were unfounded - that he had slept with another woman. Rosa, in Piedra Labrada, claimed that one of her students had poisoned Rosa's chickens, and as a result was disallowed by Orbelina, the literacy facilitator, from continuing to come to class. A learner in upper Piedra Labrada recounted a *chambre* that the facilitator, Marlenis, had stolen money from a COMUS hammock-making project; something which she strenuously denied but which led to a suspension of the classes for two months, and the exclusion for a long period of Marlenis, whose family was desperately poor, from the support network of Don Adan, whose greater wealth offered a safety net during the dry season. In none of these cases could the 'actual' events be discerned, nor were they the most significant aspect of the proceedings. Rather, within the processes of *chambres,* embedded as they were in varied histories and in local constructions of power, social relations were being negotiated and recreated through discourse and performance.

Thus, within such events, a heteroglossial stream of resistance to dominant discourses is being constructed as part of the social mosaic; concealed texts and processes within communities are challenging and subordinating other, more dominant ideologies of 'community' and patronage. People are employing the hybrid and intertextual narratives of community life to create their own networks of resource exchange and thus negate the influences of power, and in these acts reshape the monologic streams of discourse. Stakeholders' notions of information transfer and dissemination which emphasise more formal practices are disregarded and replaced with local constructions of ideology.

To gossip is, of course, to reiterate from Chapter 3 above, also to assert that knowledge is located in the public domain. Through face-to-face interaction, gossip establishes a collectivism of language, an arena in which meanings and interpretations can be negotiated and renegotiated. Knowledge, like relationships, is reworked through gossip, which represents a true collectivism of language, a free creative form, the very essence of Bakhtinian heteroglossial dialogue. Gossip is in Usulután always strategic; individuals try to enhance their fortunes through trafficking in information, and it is also a medium of exchange, just like gifts – it carries the same obligations and benefits. Individuals try to gain access to the resource of privileged information through consorting with powerful persons, whether stakeholders or local sites of power within communities.

Through gossip, then, knowledge and social relations are constructed and deconstructed, reshaped and modified. Gossip is no inconsequential mode of discourse, subordinate or somehow less significant than 'literacy', but rather a much more powerful resource in Usulután communities than the dominant narratives of reading and writing. It provides the medium by which actors engage in the social world, negotiate their multiple relations with others, formulate and justify their courses of action and thereby, little by little, reconstruct the world every day in the light of their own interests and those of others.

Let us relate this more concretely to dialogical contests, or the struggles for resources through the social practices of literacy. Within communities, the notion of literacy gifts and favours is a key part of the networks of exchange described above. A common feature of this process is the bartering and gifting of the resource of literacy skills; the reading of a document, for example, or the signing of a cheque, the employing of literacy as a commodity. This area of discovery coincides with Fingeret's notion of literacy exchange networks, where those with highly developed literacy skills will take responsibility for complex literacy tasks while others will, for example, share their technical expertise with other members of the network.[395] Yet Fingeret's understanding, as we have said, is in danger of underplaying the role of power relations in such exchanges through its emphasis on reciprocity and communality. In Usulután, the striking characteristic of these exchange processes is their dimension of *strategy*. They operate as calculated gestures of positioning; as means of creating and maintaining the types of social-economic relationships described above, which act to the mutual benefit of individuals involved. They are deliberate and gainful, and function within the wider social mechanisms of *compadrazgo* and *compañerismo*.

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[395] Fingeret *op. cit.*

An example of such an exchange process can be seen when Rosa Maria, of Piedra Labrada, received from her sister in the United States a money order for the sum of fifteen dollars. Having neither the writing skills to be able to sign her name, nor a bank account (both requirements for cashing the cheque), she approached her cousin, Laura. Rosa Maria is already to a great extent economically dependent on Laura, since she and her family are refugees from a flooded part of the department; they lost all their possessions in the flood and Laura loans them a small empty house next to their own, albeit in a condition of disrepair. Rosa Maria spends her days working in the maize fields for a little money which buys food for the family; for other necessities they are dependent on Laura, who is by no means wealthy herself.

Rosa mentioned to Laura the fact that the berries on Laura's fruit trees were in danger of decomposing before they could be picked, which would result in a net loss of income, since Laura's economic sideline is selling these among the community. Rosa offered to pick them, to Laura's gratitude, since Laura had no other younger relatives to help her. But as she made this offer, Rosa mentioned the problem of the money order. 'That's no problem' said Laura, and agreed to sign the order, to have Rosa pay it into her bank account and to give Rosa the requisite amount of cash. At the same time that Rosa went to the town to pay the order into Laura's bank, added Laura, Rosa could pick up some materials needed to help build the turkey coop which was in the process of being constructed. Rosa consequently spent the following week, after her exhausting day clearing land with a scythe, picking the berries along with the children, having the previous week struggled back from town carrying several kilos of wire and nails.

This story reveals the ongoing dialogue of the literacy exchange process, and shows how the struggle for resources takes place within the rules of the *compadrazgo* and 'in confidence' relationships. The striking thing about this exchange is how creatively it was managed by both parties. Rosa, in fact, privately agreed that she had already known for two weeks that the berries on the trees were becoming over-ripe, and she also knew she was obliged by the rules of *compadrazgo* to offer to pick them. However, she purposefully withheld this offer, waiting until 'the right time came to mention it'. This right time came with the unexpected arrival of her money order, which presented an occasion to employ the bargaining chip of the berry-picking to a specific, desired end, rather than allowing it to take place within the general networks of obligation already established. By choosing her moment and her task, Rosa avoided creating a situation where Laura had the right to call on her for a different, less favourable form of repayment. Laura, meanwhile, recognised immediately in the dialogical

encounter that the bargain was being controlled by Rosa, and quickly capitalised on the situation to ask Rosa to fulfil another task simultaneously, that of the materials for the turkey coop.

There were many examples of such resource struggles, or literacy exchanges, all as striking in their creative management as this story of Rosa and Laura. In establishing their own systems of support in this way, creating their own hybrid and ongoing narratives of obligation, relation and identity, people are rejecting the patronage system of resources invoked by COMUS or the *alcaldía*; they turn instead to the social networks of power and skill constructed within their own domains, thwarting the dominant stream of discourse and reinforcing the sub-rosa stream of heteroglossia. In artfully employing these networks within their lived realities, individuals iterate their own abilities and 'power to', resisting their characterisation by external agencies as 'helpless' or 'blind' and employing commodity exchange, of which literacy is a part, as a tool to help them do so. Therefore, literacy becomes for local people as much a tool of ideology as it does for local stakeholders; an economic and social resource which can be employed to good effect within networks of survival and hope. Less dependency, then, than the creation and maximisation of opportunities.

8.4 The gender text: practices and performances

We have outlined above some instances of how rich and multilayered streams of local discourse take shape privately to challenge monologia. In this process of iteration, local hierarchies of power are constantly created and reiterated through discursive strategies. We have also seen earlier how textual practices in Usulután are deployed as statements of resistance to dominant ideologies. Now, we will consider how, within communities, textual performances are enacted as statements of challenge to some *local* power relationships and hierarchies, especially those centring around literacy, as well as those constructed by external stakeholders. This is another aspect of the heteroglossial discourse which renders the model of the fabric of resistance being drawn here more multidimensional, reflecting as it does how people employ communicative strategies within power relationships concealed or left unaddressed by stakeholders.

Within the general cultural constructs and relationships of Usulután, it is primarily men who possess the social capital to travel outside the community, to discuss 'external' affairs, and

who assume the primary power of decision as relates to affairs affecting the household; the question of sending the children to school, for example, or whether to sell animals or land. The degree of input held by the female partner into such decisions varies from family to family, but commonly the final power of decision rests with the man.[396] This arises from the generally patriarchal discourse of both communities and stakeholders; men are constructed as the 'real' breadwinners, with their wage being regarded as real income and that of the women construed as merely supplementary. Women's identities are not primarily constructed as workers or decision-makers, but as carers, in terms of the reproductive and domestic domains. Women are considered less as sources of 'official, legitimate or rational knowledge'[397] relating to agricultural or political affairs than as experts in domestic affairs, such as tortilla-making.

This pattern of symbolic capital corresponds to the notion of social space constructed within Usulután communities. Just as social roles are clearly defined, so are the geographical and social domains within which the individual may move. Space is a discursive resource, determined by the same structures of power and ideology and the same rules of negotiation as the other commodities described above. Male space, as might be expected, is more extensive than that of married or accompanied women, whose physical limits are organised around the home.[398] This factor is tied in with socially-defined roles; to leave one's house empty and unguarded, much less one's children, is to attract negative comment and potentially *chambres* for not fulfilling one's social duty. This was one reason that so many women found themselves unable to, or were unwilling to, attend literacy circles. Social roles and duties are a far greater imperative than taking the risks involved in attending an event organised by COMUS, an agency with whom they, if married or accompanied, are within the patriarchal code supposed to have little to do except as relates to their role; with health or bread-making projects, for example.

Thus, spatial strategies are an integral part of discursive strategies in Usulután; they become both symbol and signifier of this struggle where travel and knowledge, and thence control over relationships and resources, are ingrained through discourse into the male role and position. This image is captured in any given momentary scene of local life; men of all ages are to be found on the outside, in yards, on porches, in coffee fields, while women are

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[396] A more detailed account of gender relations in similar Central / Latin American contexts can be found in Stromquist (1992); Vargas (1998); Phillips (1990)
[397] Luttrell (1989) p40
[398] Rockhill found a similar process taking place in her study of Hispanic women in Los Angeles (1993) *op. cit.*

generally located firmly within walls. On visiting women in the late afternoon, it is necessary first to pass by and greet all the groups of men sitting on verandas or gathered in groups by the sides of streets. Most men seem to share the opinion that the house is not the place to be; 'the house is for them' – the 'others', the women. In such discursive acts they are recreating their patriarchal ideology through its signification and reiteration while at the same time, for the woman, being inside the house is a way for her to 'cover herself' in a cloak of respectability.

Thus the employment of space as a discursive resource is another dimension of the heteroglossial fabric of resistance constructed within communities; people's participation in stakeholder-organised events and processes is determined by private social patterns. Moreover, this limitation of social space for women, their tying to the inside – of the home, of the community – is also integrally related to another resource, that of knowledge. Various constructs of knowledge exist in Usulután; we have already seen its social function as information and information-sharing within the concept of gossip. Other dimensions of its construction in this arena include that of knowledge as skill, in which both men and women have particular skills to learn – agricultural for men and domestic for women; how to make tortillas for example – and what will here be conceptualised as 'official' knowledge, that is, knowledge derived from and relating to the dominant discursive streams. The latter is concerned with both information about and methods for negotiating the discourses of power – how to take money out of the bank, for example, or how to deal with the transfer papers for the sale of animals, or how to write a proposal for aid. Such 'official' knowledge, which is an integral part of the discourses of the State or COMUS, as we have seen, is often kept from women on the basis that 'it's not for women; that's a matter for men'.[399] Maria Alejandra, for example, has a fifth grade education and can negotiate written text sufficiently that she is able to read aloud the papers that sit in the *alcaldía* relating to the family's land possession. Yet it was her husband Hermundo, who could not decode this kind of text, who went to the office to 'sign' them using his thumbprint and thereby claim ownership of the land.

These knowledge constructs are both bound up with and themselves a binding mechanism for the restriction of female social space within the negotiation of relationships and the struggles for resources. Women are both vulnerable since they don't *know anything* - 'One who doesn't leave the house doesn't know anything'- while simultaneously they are prevented from

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[399] This is a cursory analysis of different types of knowledge within the context of Usulután but a fuller examination lies beyond the scope of this text. Aikman's *op. cit.* detailed consideration of knowledge constructs within an Arakmbut location has many parallels with those identified in Usulután

leaving the restricted domain in case they do learn things, and thereby threaten male dominance over fields of official, external knowledge. 'He never wanted me to go outside in case I learned something; he didn't want me to learn' is a common epithet among female heads of household in speaking about their ex-partners or husbands.

How, then does this relate to textual practice and meetings between discursive streams? To reveal an answer, we must glimpse inside the houses of Usulután, into the private worlds of women, where many hidden communicative practices go on away from the eyes of men. Behind doors and within walls, many married or accompanied women's lives are hubs of activity, filled with narratives of social activity in the community, of radio sometimes, of children's stories. In Usulután such narratives have a powerful intertextual quality; they are deeply intertwined and interdependent. Stories, television, gossip and events all co-construct each other; the written, the spoken, the overheard and the rumoured are reconstructed in moments of narration to create new meaning and build a recursive, collaborative discourse of history and identity. These hybrid texts are the sites of the negotiation of relationships within households; the contestation of private resource allocations, or Sen's co-operative conflicts.[400] They too are part of the heteroglossial stream of discourse which shapes the fabric of resistance.

Engaging in such narrative processes, even where these involve a written dimension, such as the using of a children's schoolbook in conversation with neighbours or the signing of a COMUS chit, is not generally conceptualised by women as an act of resistance, and may well lie hidden in terms of its conceptualisation as literacy to the actors themselves, much as Rockhill found in California. Often, such motions are viewed in terms of 'helping the family', that is, of enhancing family capital. But they are firmly bounded within existing hierarchies and ideologies; 'If she can sign her name,' said José of his wife, 'she can sign when they [COMUS] come to give seeds.' Yet it was José who would receive and take control of the seeds. 'I can sign at parents meetings at the school' said Juanita, his spouse. 'Yes you're right' said José. But at the next school meeting, only Jose attended. His wife, he explained, 'had to stay in the house.'

The capital created by Juanita, in this textual event, is constructed as an act of co-operation, of support of the family relationship. This process takes place within the local discourse of male dominance. Few accompanied women encountered in this study explicitly went against

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[400] Sen *op. cit.*

their husband's values, or challenged the wider ideology – 'I conform to the usual [pattern]' was the majority refrain. All the women voiced their desire to learn as part of their discourse of hope, but several explained that they were prevented from attending classes by the symbolic violence of patriarchal discourses; 'my husband is not willing....' Three women participants did take the step of defying their husbands and came to the literacy circles in spite of opposition, although none of them lasted very long. Acts of explicit resistance do therefore take place. But whether private or public, whether undertaken as a co-operative act within the family or as one of open resistance, the processes of learning are challenges to social constructions of resource-entitlement and ideology. By wanting to be the one who signs, Juanita is contesting both José's dominance and the wider discourses of patriarchy, even though she is constructing this in terms of family support. Her private conversation reveals this: 'He is my husband, we make decisions together...I want to sign so that they see that someone in our family can sign, so that I can go to the meetings in the same way as him, if he is busy.' Embedded within the discourse of teamwork, then, is a striving for equality, for greater social space. Literacy functions here not merely as a commodity but as part of the construction of the heteroglossial text and thence the challenge to monologia; not just an ideology but as a tool for ideology within the social construct of the relationship.

These performances of resistance to local ideologies of resource entitlement become much more explicit where the houses are headed by women, about 35% of households in the five communities of this study according to informal surveys during fieldwork. The community with the greatest proportion of female-headed households is that of Los Llanitos, also surely uncoincidentally the poorest, with a rate of nearly 70% of households as single-mother headed. The women here had few resources other than their own ingenuity and skill; most engaged in some small production on rented land, and / or selling at a nearby road junction. Very few had any experience with reading and writing at all and none could sign their name, although two could print it. Yet these women were far from being constrained in their social practices by such conditions. Their mental arithmetic skills were far more advanced than those of the researcher, and they could engage in complex financial transactions with ease and confidence. Abilities such as these might be described by theorists as 'working intelligences', to distinguish them from 'literacy practices', yet in Los Llanitos at least these seemed not distinct from literacy but rather deeply embedded within the communicative practices of which literacy is a part. 'I don't work it out on paper, ' said Elsa, 'what for? I can do it in my head. I always have done, since I was a child, paper is only for those who can't do in their heads'. Written text, in Elsa's view, is thus not woven into the fabric of her life but rather stands as something additional, something distinct. Elsa rates her own ability and skill

above that of 'paper'; her own performances, then, take place in the dominant and technically superior discourse medium of her orality; her primary resource is her own creativity and intelligence. One wonders how the planners of literacy campaigns and projects would respond to such clear and confident logic.

Yet a powerful tension exists between these frequently-expressed attitudes of lone women towards literacy skills – that they were secondary in use within daily life to existing practices and abilities in which they were already confident – and their views about *learning* where this relates to something undiscovered, a goal envisaged. Women heads of household were often openly defiant in their desire to move outside the community – 'I need it to read the names of the buses, to be able to sign my name' said Maria Elena of the skill of reading, echoing the majority in her articulation of primary needs. Yet this was related less to the processes of decoding, than the embodiment of an expression of potentiality, of hope. In fact Elena already went frequently to San Salvador, managing the buses and the spatial negotiation with confidence. 'Oh! That's not problem, I can always ask' she said, when we went together to San Miguel, a city to which neither of us had ever travelled. Within this journey, Elena acted as guide: she asked people which bus to take and instructed the researcher on the processes of the trip. 'I'm never afraid, the war was much worse that this; then one really never knew what would happen….' For women such as Elena, who have been forced by the economic desperation of abandonment to confront their restriction of social space, a new courage has been encountered which could have barely been conceptualised before. 'If you had said to me that I could have done this before he left, I would have said, never! Never, I would have said….one is afraid of what one doesn't know. But when one has to do it, and like that one locates oneself,[401] one sees very well that one can do it….well then one does it, and that is all'. Such women have ventured alone beyond the community, and found the world something they can not only face but embrace.

Literacy learning for such women as Maria Elena is a challenging of the patriarchal and monologic discursive streams around them and thence a reshaping of these; not *in itself* a way of expanding social space, a process whose generation lies in other social forces, but rather a resource which can, in conjunction with other factors, facilitate the negotiation of further space. Many women expressed their dislike of dependency on others as regards the destination of buses, for example, yet like Maria Elena they in no way allowed this to prevent them from travelling. Their discourse of challenge within the struggle for survival and

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[401] *ubicarse*

resources continued regardless of any externally-denoted absences or deficiencies. Literacy learning for female heads of household operates, then, less as a direct conduit to some sort of disengaged entity of empowerment than as part of an ongoing discourse of resistance, integrally bound up with individual experience, situation and lived reality. In wanting to facilitate the negotiation of greater space, Elena is expressing her desire to expand her *choices* – a term which literally means 'possibilities' and which is a powerful motif in Usulután, suggesting rights denied by history. She has, through circumstance and her own ingenuity and strength, engaged upon a path of challenge; 'becoming literate' for her is not a source of social capital alone but rather it is a means of facilitating her chosen road of resistance through the world. Her choice to attend class is, therefore, primarily a discourse of contestation and hope, of potential choice; by learning to read Elena *might* get a good job, or she *might* be able to move to another place. Such expressions form a key dimension of the heteroglossial text of the communities; they offer strength and power in the contest with monologia.

Such women, then, experience greater freedom to challenge ideology because they stand relatively unfettered in their houses by male ideology. In this way they can access space to challenge monologia and redefine the dominant discourses around them. Yet the narratives of male power outside the home are all-pervasive; notwithstanding these women's confidence in their own abilities and in many cases their more varied experiences, it was noticeable that in community affairs they almost without exception deferred to men. The researcher watched while a group of people in Joya Grande worked out the details of a budget they were preparing to submit to COMUS for the purchase of building materials. The discussion was led by the men, who then asked one woman, a head of household and member of the literacy classes, to calculate the final amount, an act which she performed with ease. Yet the formal request to COMUS was signed only by the men, although these were neither the formal Board of Directors nor, in two cases, established co-operants with the agency. Textual practices and language thus may act as sites of contestation and resistance to ideologies within the home, and outside it where male constraint is not an immediate 'blocking' factor, but in some moments of public dialogical encounter, where local structures of power and control remain all-embracing and the force of the discursive stream runs strong, the patriarchal discourse goes uncontested and monologia remains intact.

8.5 The Church: textual performances and practices as cultural anchors

Textual performances can also act as cultural *anchors*, to incorporate and fix people within alternative cultural groups, such as the church, to those constituted and created by stakeholders. These other groups provide both a source of support and an alternative relationship and ideology to those of the dominant voices; they act as both sites of resources in themselves, of knowledge and ideology and support, and as a tool in ongoing struggles between discursive streams. As such, they are another dimension of the cultural fabric of resistance and another aspect of the multilayered stream of heteroglossial discourse.

The most obvious employment of this anchoring process in Usulután occurs within church events. In Los Rodriguez, the local church is evangelical, and most of the participants of the literacy class, as well as many other people, are members. In Usulután the church, of whatever denomination, often acts as another form of monologic voice in its ideological doctrines. While this is not the place to explore its full role as stakeholder in the lives of Usulutecos, being neither a primary player in the literacy debate nor a major social stakeholder in any community but Los Rodriguez,[402] it is in this one community at least interesting in its function as a space for the iteration and reinforcement of heteroglossia.

Evangelical church services here take place in the late afternoon, just after the REFLECT class, when people hurry to the wooden building carrying their Bibles which were gifts from the pastor. During the hour's service some individuals give readings, while others sing psalms and hymns which almost everybody seems to know by heart and in which people participate enthusiastically. An elected member of the congregation gives a sermon for the day, a long and often complex narrative, drawing on Bible text interspersed with accounts of everyday events in the lives of community members. Throughout, space is created for members of the congregation to join in as they wish, with frequent interjections of 'Halleluiah!' and 'Yes brother / sister!' dotted through the ongoing construction of discursive text. The sermon often culminates in a 'weeping session' of collective grief and passion.

The striking aspect here from the point of view of textual performance is the function of these moments in church as a space free from the hierarchical relationships constructed by local stakeholders. The official preacher does not always participate, but sits at the side nodding encouragingly. People occupying low status as regards COMUS or *alcaldía*

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[402] Peterson *op. cit.* examines the role of the Catholic church in constructing resistance in El Salvador

hierarchies of collaboration sing psalms or give sermons, while members of the community Board of Directors sit quietly at the back of the building. Community hierarchies such as those described in the previous section do not of course dissolve within the body of the congregation; they are as present here as anywhere else. But they co-exist with newly created systems of status, people who are more involved in church activities than others and thence hold roles of higher standing. Under the roof of the wooden church, within the dialogical moments of sermons and hymn-singing, externally-created hierarchies are for an instant supplanted by a semblance of equality in the relationship between church and members.

Of particular interest for the discussion of this text is the use within these church services of discursive strategies and visual symbols for processes of unification. The constant repetition of 'brothers and sisters', the reminders that 'we are all equal in the eyes of God', the fact that everyone, no matter how poor or wealthy or whether they could read or not, possesses a Bible given to them by the pastor, reflect ways of expressing and acting upon a certain universalising equality created within the dialogical moment. For an instant, everybody, regardless of their status outside the building, is included as a member of the group of churchgoers. We may see this most clearly reflected in the open space allotted to voices. During the short narratives / readings given by members, frequent spontaneous shouts of 'Amen!' arise. And after each speech the minister asks, 'Does anyone want to comment on that?' The floor is laid open to participation, creating a flood of other varied narratives, at times diverging, at times converging, swaying in an ebb and flow of polyphony.

This is not the enforced moral *compañerismo* of CIAZO or COMUS, nor the rigid insistence of the State on social duty to the nation. Here is a moment where heteroglossia genuinely sounds, where there are real spaces to speak, where the wailing during the sermon truly becomes Bakhtin's moment of polyphonic carnival, with individual voices and stories being given room in which to cry. This was one instance in Usulután when the discursive streams of monologia scattered in the face of a plurality of independent and unmerged voices.

Such moments also reveal the heteroglossial construction of the fabric of resistance through individuals' creation of multidimensional narratives. Textual performances such as the following of readings and interlocutor involvement in these reflect the artful use of the discursive resources of the Bible, drawing on skills in oral and narrative construction. There is no privileging of reading, as in the dominant discourses, under the roof of the church; people classified as *analfabetos* by stakeholders give sermons employing complex narratives, intertwining these with texts from the Bible which they seem to know by heart. Yet, without

exception, speakers carry the books with them up to the podium. In this act, they are symbolising their source of reference as these external, authoritative narratives, Geertz's metaphysic,[403] while themselves creating hybrid texts interpolated with local discourses and references to community life, a narrative dotted with local interjections, exemplars and additions.

These moments in the church building of Los Rodriguez are, of course, acts of bricolage in the manner of those described above. They engender the same two key processes of those performances previously described. Firstly, within these enactments people are challenging the assumptions disseminated by the discourses of power about the authority of the written text. They are drawing on the authoritative metaphysic of the Bible but using this reflexively to create local ideological narratives and thence indirectly contest the dominant discursive stream. Secondly, these narratives are being transformed within the enactment of local social and cultural identities. In this performance, heteroglossia and metaphysic sustain and construct each other,[404] and the ideologies, hierarchies, relationships and communicative strategies of local stakeholders are left at the door of the church.

8.6 Literacy as artefacts of display

The above story reveals how the Bible in Usulután church services is often used as a discursive commodity, forming a basis from which to weave narratives of authority into the fabric of lived reality. However, in its discursive performance the Bible also serves another function which is part of the struggle for resources: that of an artefact of display. It establishes, through this artefactal status, cultural membership, or relationship, and thence the entitlement to certain resources; knowledge, ideology, material goods. It is not, as we have seen, employed primarily as a source of knowledge or information; very few of the Bibles in the church hall were ever opened at all during services. Rather, its significance lies in its employment as a symbol; the books were carried with great care through the mud to church, as a proud display of the owner's affiliation to the group; their public embedding within the popular sector discursive stream.

The Bible is here acting as a *cultural anchor,* a symbolic representation of relationship and cultural identity. In doing so, it is iterating the strength and force of the heteroglossial stream

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[403] Geertz (1973) *op. cit.* p90
[404] as Malan found in South Africa (1996a) *op. cit.*

of sub-rosa discourse, offering an alternative site of power. Many different examples of such anchors are to be seen in the communities, including the discourse of resistance itself. One of the most striking is that of the political posters and similar artefacts in the houses of ex-combatants from the war. For people whose political affiliation is long known in the communities, and who risked their lives during the war to fight for the cause, the statement of ideology engendered in pinning up such a poster to their wall reflects their strategic choice of alliance in the negotiation of relationships and the struggle for resources.

In terms of literacy, the written messages contained within such artefacts are often not decodable by the people in the house, nor is their translation the most significant element of their presence. When the researcher asked Herman, a veteran of long years fighting in the mountains of Morazán, about the words on his FMLN poster – the message read 'liberation of the Salvadoran people' – he replied vaguely that it was 'about the armed struggle – something to do with land reform.' Herman associates the two key messages of the FMLN during the war with the poster, which had been hanging on his wall for six years now. During this time, neither he nor his wife, also a veteran of the armed struggle, had attached interest to decoding the precise words of the text. These are far less significant for them than the function of the poster as a cultural text of display. Like the Bible above, it acts as an artefact symbolising identity, alliance with an ideological stakeholder and thence entitlement to resources; it brings Herman and his wife Leocardia into the embrace of the oppositional movement, creating a rationale for their own history and reflecting their chosen strategy for the future. Contestation and resistance, then, takes place within a multitude of social and ideological alliances.

For many people, though, such posters are decisively rejected precisely because of their political status. Decorations within houses are sought-after, to brighten up the mud walls, but many households hope to obtain sheets of newspaper – with small black and white pictures of film stars – rather than the larger, more colourful free posters circulated by local NGOs or political parties. In Magdalena's house, for example, in Joya Grande, a small picture of a Mexican pop singer in black and white is pinned above the bed. Magdalena said she did not know who the picture represented, but she placed it there because 'my cousin gave me the sheet of newspaper, it's pretty', yet she dismissed out of hand the idea of sticking up a larger, much more colourful poster about community health distributed by an NGO but which was printed in red, the colour of the FMLN. 'No, I don't like those political things....much better not to get involved in that...if someone comes to the house and they see that you have those things in the house, better not...' She associates the poster with a political party, because of

its colour, style and its self-conscious location within the oppositional discourse. Magdalena is here positioning herself carefully within potential ideological alliances, artfully maintaining her strategic options. The poster's features of display, for her, are more important than the text, which in fact deals with malaria prevention. Such aspects reflect an explicit ideological commitment which may enhance certain possibilities but precludes others, and denies the potential fluidity of manoeuvre that many people in Usulután employ to sustain themselves within their discourses and actuality of survival and hope.

A similar process operates in the artefact of the *cédula*. We have seen above how this document is deeply inscribed within historical narratives as a means of surveillance and control. Yet in its formalisation of an identity it can simultaneously act as a symbol of rights and entitlements to resources, as an embodiment of one's dues and a reflection of one's social status. 'With the *cédula*' said Maria, 'I can change a cheque, I can open a bank account, I can do many things...Before [the war] I could not do these things, now I can'. Despite their other associations, *cédulas* remain a symbol of legitimacy and in the new post-war reality, of possibility for 'marching onwards'. Engagement with such symbols then creates a space for their employment within strategies for survival, and thence for the reshaping of dominant discourses.

When people were asked what kind of information about them the *cédula* held, some knew but many did not. 'I don't know what's written in there' said Sebastian; 'that's not a thing for us! It's for collecting my work cheque.' Here, Sebastian is both rejecting the dominant discursive streams – writing is not a thing for us – and he is also rejecting the document as an artefact of display of power over him. Yet even as he uttered these words of dismissal, he carefully folded the *cédula* within the plastic cover he employed for its protection. In this dual act of gesture and discourse, Sebastian encapsulates the *cédula's* conflictive status as an artefact of display; it is a multivocal symbol, reflecting the tensions inherent in the individual's relationship with the State; rights and identity; surveillance and control; enhanced freedoms and access to resources; constraints and domination. It is through focal points of interaction such as this that streams of discourse meet and new meaning is created.

For the people of Usulután, then, the greatest of their challenges is not their inability to decode the letters on their *cédula*, their posters or the cheques which their landlords hand them, but rather the realisation that these artefacts do not always fulfil their promises of resources and / or legitimacy. Such texts may represent access to entitlements but they are also artefacts of betrayal, a representation of disappointment and disillusionment and

abandonment. The State and the popular sector, the powers of hegemony, constantly promise yet also undermine and forget. Many Usulutecos through experience, observation and their own artfulness choose to remain apart, unwilling to step onto the quicksand of an ideological commitment. In this they recognise their difficulties, and work with energy and ingenuity within the framework of constraints surrounding them to enact their own struggle, to draw up their own heteroglossial text of resistance.

8.7 'A knowing person': the links between knowledge and power

We began this analysis of communicative practices in Usulután in Chapter 6 with a discussion of stakeholders' ideologies of literacy. Let us now complete the picture drawn so far by returning to the same location but from a different vantage point; that of the local discourses illuminated above of hope, struggle and survival, and people's understandings of how literacy intersects with these. In order to deconstruct the discordance between self-identification as one who knows nothing, and simultaneously being one who does, it is necessary to consider people's constructions of knowledge and learning as power as they relate to positioning within relationships and control over resources, that is, as they connect with the meeting of two discursive streams. As has been made clear above, the aim here is not to consider models of learning, but rather to examine how the constructs of a 'knowing' person within communities relate to textual and discursive practices, and thence to the construction of the heteroglossial discursive fabric. Let us then incorporate people's views and conceptualisations around literacy into this story of practices that we have unravelled so far.

Doronila uses the discourse of 'motivations' to argue that, in the rural Philippines, people want to go to literacy classes to 'gain knowledge and understand things'.[405] In keeping with the discourse of deficits and deprivations, she attributes these views to the fact that people are a 'marginal non-literate part of a dominant majority' and assumes that their principal aim is to access knowledge and information available to that majority through print. Thus, she concludes, within these communities, literacy acquires its principal meaning of 'to read and write' from the local power structures which exclude those possessing only oral knowledge and valorise only that information which is written.

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[405] Doronila *op. cit.* p132

Such discourse may be doubtful in its emphasis on people's motivations and in its classification of individuals as 'non-literate', as well as in its harking back to the oral / literacy divide. More importantly, though, Doronila's all-embracing delineation of the meaning of literacy in these marginal communities disguises the dichotomies experienced in Usulután. Here, as has been hinted, people distinguish between engagement with formal education and the processes of *alfabetización,* which is deeply embedded in the ideological doctrines of the popular sector as outlined above. The two are however intertwined in their actualisation and conceptualisation, as we shall see. In resisting or rejecting the REFLECT classes, people are calling on formal education as their preferred cultural capital, embedding their own particular model of literacy as part of their battles for resources.

We have discussed above how it is not the ability to employ the discourses of power but rather one's discursive position within the social fabric, shaped through history and experience, that enables the individual in the landscape of Usulután to speak and to be heard. Similarly, formal education is perceived by many people as a commodity, bound up with the negotiation of one's position. This is very much construed in Bourdieu's sense of the generation of social capital, of transforming one's ascribed identity through engagement with and acquisition of the discourses and knowledges of the world of powerholders. People often referred to their own educational history in the classificational terms of the State – 'I'm a second-grader' for example, from a forty-year old coffee-grower, or 'I finished the fourth' from his wife. Formal education in Usulután, for so long a commodity available only to elites, acts as a gateway to resources and a channel to negotiating greater social spaces and choices, much as McEwan and Malan found in South Africa.[406] Many people said that they hoped that by sending their children to school as far as possible 'they can have another life', they can escape the rural zone. 'If he goes to school', said Enrique of his son, 'he can go to Jiquilisco, he can talk with the people there...' He can move towards the city, that is, and engage with the dialogical stream of stakeholders there, because of both his enhanced access to and experience of the discourses and knowledges of power. Parents well know that when the children are older, those who have managed to move up on the social and economic scale because of the initial investment given will repay their families through offering the cultural resources of the city, such as televisions and radios. The processes of investment in education mirror the forming of the family scribe described above, taking place within kinship networks of the familial moral economy. For not a single moment did anyone, when discussing their aspirations for their children and their regrets about their own lives, mention formal

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[406] McEwan and Malan *op. cit.*

education in the context of being able to participate more in community life, or engage in dialogue with local agents of the popular sector. 'Education' is linked primarily not with the oppositional narratives of communities uniting and challenging the oligarchy, but with integrating within the State, with benefiting from its resources and opportunities.[407]

How, then, does the adult learning process within Usulután communities relate to the story revealed in this text of hope and the desire for change? How does it connect to the challenging of monologia? We have discussed how people's narratives reveal their sense of suffering to lie not in illiteracy but in poverty, struggle and the forces of hegemony. Yet literacy classes, part of the process of *alfabetización*, have the potential, in some respects at least, to operate as sites of the generation of capital in themselves and through the ideological commitment implied by their attendance as an alternative gateway to resources. The classes, as we have said, were run in 1999 along ideological lines, and the vocabulary was undoubtedly that of the oppositional narrative. This factor, as discussed, made many people reluctant to attend. But for those who do choose alliance with COMUS as their strategic approach, the classes offer an opportunity to master the discourses of this stakeholder in their lives and thence gain greater purchase on its resources and space to challenge its discourses, albeit with the accompanying caveat of an ideological commitment. People in this framework generally see the literacy classes – as distinct from literacy itself - as broadening their performative repertoire, enabling them to participate in discourse where their position or potential position as bricoleurs will allow them to do so. For those who select alliance with COMUS as their primary way forward, the acquisition of these discourses is part and parcel of the continual construction and negotiation of their social role and identity, and of engagement with the more explicit form of discursive contestation.

In Usulután, many people said that they wanted to attend classes to 'gain knowledge and understand things', usually phrased as 'to learn more, to understand more', rather than 'to read and write'. 'Like that [in class] one learns'. Such fragments of narrative are woven into the discursive stream of resistance within communities, a striving for the challenging of history and future. The texts above have shown us the inappropriacy of a framework of motivation for addressing this question; rather it needs to be explored in relation to social patterns of ideology and hierarchy and the lived realities of power. It may most revealingly be examined in Usulután through the two dominant dimensions which emerge around

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[407] There is, of course, much more to conceptualisations of formal schooling in Usulután than space allows for here; this would engender discussion of models of learning which, as discussed, are beyond the scope of this text

conceptualisations of learning, which is the locus of intersection between *alfabetización* and formal education. The first of these is *knowing how to speak* and the second *signing*. They form two sides of the central metaphor, revealed through the dialogical encounter of this experience, of local people's discourses and lives in Usulután and thence of this text; that of *seguir adelante* or 'marching onwards'.

Many people said that in coming to literacy classes, they hoped to 'learn new words' and it was apparent from literacy classes that individuals were indeed actually experiencing this, acquiring and employing new terminology. Facilitators often said that they felt one of their major achievements in their teaching was in 'helping people to speak more'. 'Speaking' in Usulután is a metaphor for the struggle against subordination by the dominant discursive stream; partly a question of finding a space in which to use one's voice – the enhancing of possibilities - and partly one of the acquisition of wider discourses with which to meet, reconstruct and constrain the discourses of power. Yet as we have seen, the role of textual manager is shaped by many other factors apart from ability to employ the narratives of hegemony. Acquiring these discourses is therefore part of an ongoing process which has its roots in many other acts and iterations distinct from attending literacy classes; participation in COMUS meetings / engaging with the *alcaldía*, and so on, as well as being dependent on all the other aspects of the social fabric and hierarchy outlined above. Construction of the heteroglossial text therefore is rooted in multilayered structures and meetings with monologia, in varied shapes and shades of hope.

For the many people in Usulután who reject a public statement of alliance with COMUS as their primary strategy of survival and hope, this means, as we have seen, opting instead to straddle the divide of the dominant discursive streams, maintaining a position of recursiveness and fluidity. This could take the form of attending the literacy classes, assuming one has the choice to do so, while continuing to engage with the *alcaldía*, or it can mean rejecting the attendance of literacy classes, again assuming one has the choice, and opting in other ways to sustain alliances with COMUS. Integral to this reserving of options as it relates to education and *alfabetización* is the process of educating oneself,[408] in part construed in Usulután as has been explained above in the sense of 'smoothing out rough edges', of creating the capacity and the capital to engage with dominant discourses and their performers. It is the creating of familiarity and confidence with the codes, modes and knowledges of stakeholders, the better to meet with monologia.

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[408] *educarse*

Into this dimension of the metaphor of 'marching onwards' comes the motif of signing. Signing is a powerful emblem in Usulután; the community members who attended class and the many people who did not all, without exception, voiced as their primary desire of learning their aim 'to be able to sign.' Signing one's name is an act distinct from printing; it involves joined-up letters and elaborate script and swirls. It is a highly symbolic performance with which one can dispel the perception of the 'poor unlettered *campesino*'; it is deeply integrated and institutionalised into the discourses of power, both those of the State and of the popular sector. A person who has signed their *cédula* is coded in the eyes of authority with considerably more status than someone who has 'thumbprinted' theirs - an equally instutionalised gesture. Inability to sign reflects a sorely felt sense of powerlessness; many people recounted how the co-ercive act of thumbprinting 'gives one shame' in dialogical encounters with stakeholders, associated as it is with subjugation and control.

The act of learning to sign thus exhibits a tapping into the discourses of the official world, an engagement with the stream of monologia, not primarily this time for the creative accessing of resources, but rather as a question of dignity and pride, a resisting and challenging of the discourses of power. Doña Emilia tells a story about how the teller in the bank of a town reached for the ink pad when she arrived at his counter; 'he looked at me and saw I was from the rural zone and he wanted me to …with the thumb! But I can sign, I learned to sign, and I said to him, listen *señor*, I can sign my name…Eh, he said to me, you can sign? Yes, I said, I have learned to sign, and I signed my name, the letters there on the paper, and it was difficult! But I could do it because I had learned..Eh, said the teller, you certainly do know how to sign, you!' Such a narrative, recounted by Emilia in a tone of wonder and delight, reflects in a moment of dialogical encounter with stakeholders the inscription in discourse of a performance of resistance, and the challenging of the assumption of Emilia's identity as a poor unlettered *campesina.* This was a performance in which she took great pride, where new meaning was iterated in the discursive interaction, hierarchies challenged and history and the social text recreated anew.

This returns us then, albeit again from a different viewpoint, to the debate about documentation raised earlier, to the ritualisation and totemisation of modes and codes of dominant communicative practices. To what extent do the people of Usulután adopt Illich's framework of the crowding out of oral discourse? Certainly, individuals all seemed to view 'lack of knowledge' as one aspect of their marginalisation, yet they did not generally associate reading and writing with this. They spoke instead in terms of dialogue; if I could sign I could go to the *alcaldía*, I could talk with COMUS. What will be called here the

documentation of discourse does not then replace as legitimate local communicative practices, but acts rather as an access route to another world of resources, to which one may gain access if in possession of, or if connected through local networks to someone else who owns, the appropriate textual skills. This then provides a channel to the meeting of discourses.

Thus, by wanting to learn, people in Usulután were pursuing various options; they wished to acquire discourse as part of their identity of integration within the popular sector / the State, *and / or* they were challenging local hierarchies *and / or* they wanted to learn to sign. All these acts are deeply rooted in the ongoing social processes of daily life and integrally bound up with the negotiation of relationships, the acquisition of resources and the challenging of ideologies. In thus constructing their own fabric of resistance, people are resisting the identities and roles ascribed to them, challenging orthodoxy and history, and shaping and pursuing both their own particular paths through the world and the rivers of discourse around them. History and future are being redefined on the plain of language through the recreation of the cultural text.

Throughout the rural communities of Usulután, the repeatedly-voiced opinion that 'it is necessary to learn' was strongly associated with the notion of either a 'knowing' person or the learning process - reached via either the mechanisms of the formal sector or those of *alfabetización* - acting as a channel to knowledge. This too is part of the fabric of resistance and the construction of the heteroglossial text. In stating their desire to become 'knowing', people were articulating a need to challenge their identity as someone 'unknowing' and 'uneducated' and to acquire knowledge beyond that which can be attained through gossip and traditional skill. Here we see also the dimension of knowledge as social capital; it remains subject to existing ideological patterns, but armed with it one has a greater chance of protection in the constant struggles with the forces of power. Usulutecos often described their sensations of being at the mercy of external forces – the weather (not to be underestimated, in the light of the events of Hurricane Mitch the previous year, and the annual flooding of one part of Usulután department; food on the table depends on the nature of the harvest), as well as the whims and winds of stakeholders. 'Knowledge' – perceived not as 'literacy' but as a conceptual umbrella for the acquisition of discourses, experiences and totemic acts such as the ability to sign – offers people additional resources, a greater armoury against these onslaughts, where they can gain some purchase on wider debates and make more informed decisions about their destiny.

The symbolic nature of literacy in Usulután therefore is, to reiterate, multivocal – the construct has differing meanings according to the location of the individual within local strands of power, authority and ideology. It plays a powerful role in the creation of the heteroglossial text, and as such acts as a focal point for contestation and conjunction on the vast dialogical plain where discursive streams meet up, and meaning emerges anew. It acts as a mirror, reflecting the varied strategic choices taken for Usulutecos' management of lives and their active pursuit of happiness. While this is no neat and tidy answer to the defining question of this text, it perhaps better reflects the raggedness and dissonance of daily life in Usulután, the variety and range of ongoing struggles of negotiation, resistance and hope. In acquiring discourses, contesting gender ideologies, becoming 'knowing', learning how to sign and how to speak, we see four dimensions of one metaphor, the desire to 'march onwards'. This powerful leitmotif is, as we have seen, enshrined into the discourses of power, yet it is also deeply intertwined within local narratives of survival and aspiration; it is applied in the struggle over resources and negotiations within relationships on both sides of the power dichotomy. It is embedded within the renegotiation and co-construction of narrative streams. Learning and literacy are a significant part of this process; by incorporating these resources into their lives, individuals can maximise their choices and pursue their dream of marching onwards. Many Usulutecos, as we have seen, employ textual and discursive skills to buy into an affiliation which affords them some control. Their discursive acts are a part of this social process. But marching onwards is pursued not according to some external construction of ideology but rather within a firmly-rooted individual view. Attending a literacy class is an act which may help individuals both better their performances in other areas, and to widen the audiences to whom they can perform. But it is their own artful and creative employment of discourse and text which allows people to contest dominant ideologies, resist externally-ascribed identities, and in doing so forge their own ideological path through the world.

8.8 Conclusion

This section has shown how, within the rural communities of Usulután in which this study resides, communicative performances serve as sites of affirming and testing affinities, constructing relationships and battling for resources. They represent the hidden layers of dialogical encounters, the concealed dimension of the fabric of resistance which meets, challenges and recreates the streams of monologia. No common homogenous community of cultural and discursive practices exists in this arena but rather a range of individuals who

possess differing agendas, and who fluidly move between clusters of interests. Language is not primarily a locus for the confirmation of facts, a source of objective reference, but instead a site of contestation and negotiation, employed by people artfully and creatively to position themselves within social processes, the better to 'march onwards'. Literacy is, then, both an ideology itself and a tool of ideology, manipulated by all the players in the game to enhance advantage and maximise gain.

The uses and values of reading and writing are revealed as context-specific in Usulután; in situations where literacy as it is conceptualised by stakeholders is invested with social power, its value is foregrounded by local people as part of their narratives of marching onwards and their strategic co-option of the discourses of power. The heteroglossial text of the communities attaches no special significance to the written except where embedded in such dominant visions. Local discursive practices meanwhile are embedded in the fabric of family and community which has been constructed over long and painful years. They are both integrated within and sites of the re-creation of these relationships.

Language then forms the creative locus of hybrid and intertextual narratives shaped and performed in challenge to the hegemony. The texts of COMUS, CIAZO, and the local agents of the State are reworked and co-opted by people in the communities within their lived realities; the blending of narrative and history is intermingled in communities with the discursive fabric of heteroglossia, with gossip, whisper, rumour and hearsay, to co-construct a range of cultural texts. Within these hybrid texts, utterances are, in the Bakhtinian mode, 'from one side highlighted, from the other dimmed by heteroglot social opinion' in a complex synergy of light and shadow, his 'living and unrepeatable play of colours and light on the facets of the image'.[409] The arena of Usulután becomes, then, not a polarised distinction between the ruling class and the communities on which they build their own hegemony, but an ongoing merging and integration of these ideological narratives, no simple dichotomy between wills or contradictions but a fluid struggle between visions and aspirations, a subtle and constant battle where rich and various meanings are formed and history recreated in the moment. People's constraining lies not in their 'illiteracy' but rather in their poverty and struggles with the forces of dominance, and their disillusionment at failed promises.

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[409] Bakhtin (1981) *op. cit.* p277

Conclusion: Learning from Usulután: Some theoretical propositions

This text has considered how discursive practices are enacted within the landscape of Usulután. In doing so, it has considered certain aspects of the theoretical debate around literacy, explored through glimpses into the private spaces of people's worlds and lives. It has highlighted and reinforced the significance of some conceptual issues in the field of literacy studies by considering the relationships between literacy and discourse, literacy and power and literacy and ideology, as these have been revealed within certain lived realities. These findings will now be reviewed in this final section, in order to highlight the theoretical conclusions of this experience and text.

Firstly, this concluding summary will return to the issue raised at the very start of this text: how is 'literacy' constructed by all the players in the theatre of Usulután, and how does current literacy theory relate to the practices and realities revealed here? This section will be followed by exploring the picture of discursive streams emerging from this micro world, which both structure and are shaped by the playing out of lives. The subsequent discussion will address the directions this study suggests for further research, in the light of the communicative gap revealed. Finally, conclusions will be drawn as to what the experiences in Usulután delineated here suggest for the New Literacies approach to studying literacy.

Literacy theory and Usulután

In line with other studies in the New Literacies framework, the fieldwork in which this text is grounded showed communicative practices to be deeply integrated within networks of social processes. Uses of reading, writing and orality cannot, as Rockhill argues, be properly understood and treated outside the 'social and political relations, ideological practices and symbolic meaning structures in which [they are] embedded'.[410] Discursive practices in Usulután are to a great extent created and conditioned by wider narratives of power and control.

Literacy then in Usulután operates both as an ideology in itself and as a tool of ideology; as such it is strategically employed by both powerful local stakeholders, within their discourses

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[410] Rockhill *op. cit.* p162

of inclusion and exclusion, and by those over whom they strive to exert control. Literacy practices are embedded in local processes of political and historical reconstruction of the cultural text. The communicative practices of local people in rural communities are both rooted in the quiet rhythms of daily reality and deeply linked to these wider ideological practices; they both unfold and shape people's own construction of the fabric of their lives. They are deliberately and artfully taken up through social practice in settings where they are both meaningful and functional.[411] There exist in rural communities many creative managers of the different discourses echoing through the landscape, who are fully cognisant of, and who ingeniously act upon, the symbolic value of these narratives within the performing of agendas and the shifting of strategic clusters. A purposeful mask of harmony and unity is placed over local heteroglossia to co-opt these discourses and thence pursue stratagems within ongoing struggles and challenges. Within the communities, meanwhile, intricate fabrics of resistance are constantly being constructed, existing patterns of social bonds, hierarchies and exchanges enacted which sustain and reinforce the heteroglossial text, and with which 'being literate' has little to do. As such, literacy does not exist in Usulután as a homogenous, autonomous or neutral technology but is embedded in streams of discourse which are both sites of, and created by, the ideological text of history. It is, in fact, a totemic creation of the discourse itself – an invention of ideology, actualised through its continuing iteration in the social and cultural text.

Likewise, the figure of the illiterate *campesino* who stands 'out there' in the land, waiting to be classified and 'made literate' in the name of the greater good – whatever model of good that may be – exists only as a phenomenon created through discourse. Difficulty with reading and writing certainly does constrain people from e.g. constructing their identity at times in their preferred model, as when they find themselves unable to sign their names. But in contrast to a deficit or deprived model of literacy, or to their accompanying discourses of literacy as power, people's stories revealed that they are not suffering primarily through lack of reading and writing skills. Rather, the sites of their struggle are those of poverty, scarcity and the forces of hegemony, which reflect back at people through discursive texts a view of themselves as subordinate, disempowered, a problematic 'other'. Thus, the discourses of literacy for empowerment as they arise in the literature are critiqued by the voices of adults in Usulután. Literacy skills as construed by the voices of both local stakeholders in people's lives and the wider discourses of the literature do not, in this local world, represent primarily

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[411] Baynham (1995)

a means to social status or a channel to dominant codes of communication; these routes lie elsewhere, in experience, history, relationships and local constructions of social power.

In contrast to the vision of passivity and subordinacy disseminated by the literacy for empowerment / human capital rationales of the deprived / deficit models, local communicative practices have been revealed in Usulután as conscious acts of performance, as moments of theatre in a multidimensional mosaic of discourses. Such a dissonance exists between these actual discursive events, which intertwine reading, writing and oracy within the framework of the social fabric but are often not constructed as *literacy* practices, and people's conceptualisations of 'becoming literate', which are much more deeply rooted in formal schooling, that it is perhaps more useful to conceptualise these processes as textual performances, using a broad, culture-based notion of text. This takes us away from the notion of reading and writing so powerfully associated with the term literacy, and so often presented as separate processes in themselves, and towards the idea of *using* texts,[412] written and oral, social and cultural, within one intricate and complex heteroglossial whole. Through this performative vision of discursive practices and texts, we reintroduce the notion of agency, an ideal which lies at the heart of the ideological paradigm of literacies and a gesture which returns the creative act – Bakhtin's 'event of narration' - and the textual content, or narrative event, to its author. This study therefore proposes textual performance as another of Barton's 'metaphors for literacy',[413] an additional and competing way of talking about the topic. By extending our notion of literacy practices to include the dimensions of performance and text, we can expand our conceptualisation of how communicative practices intertwine with lived realities of power and control and simultaneously restore them to their source.

Thus, divisive and arbitrary categories of 'literate' and 'illiterate' cannot capture the variety of individuals' practices and performances as they act out their own cultural texts within the complex world of Usulután, since these are fluid events which are both shaped by and created for the demands of the moment and the future. Written and read, uttered and left silent, such texts intertwine with wider patterns and histories, they are both dimensions of dialogical interaction and sites of the creation of meaning. They are rooted within the struggle for resources and the negotiation of relationships, within discourses of survival and hope. This study has also questioned the division in the literature between vernacular and dominant literacies, which are at times in danger of being presented along the same lines as the Great

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[412] Rogers (2000)
[413] Barton (1994b)

Divide of yesterday. Acts and processes in Usulután reveal a continuous, conscious interfacing of local with wider practices and discourses through performative events. This interfacing is deliberate and artful; it is part of ongoing battles and the meeting of discursive streams. The notion of 'local' literacies in Usulután reflects no romantic vision of a private world, but rather a conjunction with wider issues of power and control, rooted not in issues of policy but imaginatively iterated through people's own discourses of hope. A key focus for future research, it is suggested here, lies in the loci of intersection of the dominant and sub-rosa discursive streams, and the ways in which this interfacing is conducted within networks of constructed power relations. This appears from experience in Usulután to represent a more valuable direction of pursuit than the constructing of fences and divides.

Literacy and the pursuit of happiness

The emphasis in this text on authorship gives rise to a portrayal of some people in Usulután as creative and shrewd, as consummate and ingenious dealers and, it could be argued, cunning manipulators of people, discourse and ideology. Hence this text may well offend purveyors of those discourses which view 'development' and 'literacy' as part of the requirements for the salvation of a universally oppressed community of people. But unproblematised discourses of liberation and empowerment stand perhaps in contrast to human nature in the face of daily struggles for survival; the luxury of unanimity and its attendant self-denial is scarce in Usulután. In the face of such battles, and surrounded by such powerful hegemonic forces, people here do only what they can, cleverly co-opting existing social practices to create sites of contestation and struggle, challenge and resistance, apparent capitulation and actual rejection.

Many people in Usulután employ the dominant discourses of stakeholders to both construct masks and reshape their own dialogised heteroglossia and narratives of survival and hope, and thence create a fabric of resistance to influence and re-mould the dominant discursive stream. It is the presence and ongoing construction of the mosaic of discursive resources, far more than the possession of decontextualised literacy skills, that affects choices of communicative strategies here. Processes of textual bricolage in Usulután are embedded within the social fabric; they depend on discursive position, rather than on the ownership of a somehow autonomous literacy.

The notion of a homogeneous community in Usulután is a socially-constructed myth; rather there are present in the landscape a range of communities of interests, each themselves ridden with different intentions, understandings and identities, through which people move fluidly according to agendas, aspirations and aims. Within their daily struggles in these discordant domains, narratives enter people's lives from various dimensions; they co-construct each other to form rich and varied heteroglossial texts. No dichotomised distinction of power exists between local stakeholders and the class from whose labour they construct their hegemony, but rather a process of ongoing dissemination and recreation of narratives. The relationships between local and dominant discourses, formal and informal, written and oral codes and modes of communication exist in an ongoing state of flux, constantly being reshaped in light of the strategies and visions of these many and varied communities of interests.

Thus, in accordance with a Bakhtinian view of language, this study has learned that the struggle for voice is an important part of a greater and more momentous battle, between authorial voices and heteroglossia, between monologia and dissent, between history and hope. Yet this is no polarised battle in the frame of Freire or the theorists of oppression, no simple binary confrontation, but rather a reflection of the fluid nature of language. Struggles take place in the shifting sea of boundaries, where positions are negotiated, contested and reformed. It is on the kaleidoscopic and uncertain plain of dialogue that challenges are re-enacted both in face-to-face interchanges and in the private weaving of a diverse fabric of resistance within communities.

Therefore, experience in Usulután has revealed that language and literacy practices do not merely reflect social relations but rather are a major force in their construction, they are constitutive of relationships rather than only indicating them. As social relations are active and dynamic, so are the processes and discourses around them.[414] Discursive streams are thus employed as an integral part of the negotiation of power relationships, rather than being signs of somehow objectively pre-existing structures of dominance. People try to make meanings 'stick' as if they reflected some objective social category because it is in their interests to do so. The legitimacy and force of discourses, relative status of speaker, history, ideology, agenda and strategy are all intertwined within this fabric of negotiation. System and practice interact; discourse is employed as symbolic performance by people in communities in order to reconstruct the world in a process of conscious resistance to experience and history.

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[414] see Harvey (1987) *op. cit.*

Bourdieu's assumption that social actors are trapped in a system of their own making because they are unable to perceive the structures of domination with which their practice complies, comes undone in Usulután, where people are constantly engaging in acts which involve conscious participation in resistance, recreating the world and its discursive streams daily in their own image of their lives.

The communicative gap: moving forwards from this text

It is the common practice in theses such as this to end on a note of recommendation for future policy. Yet as has been made clear, this text does not seek to address this wider angle, believing that 'Policy work...belongs to a universe of discourse as distant from ethnography as it is possible to be.'[415] Policy approaches by definition are obliged to look to the general and the universal, while the focus and, it is argued, the value of this text lie in its exploration of the intricate and the particular, the glimpse it offers into the private spaces of people's worlds.

Yet the experiences explored here seek to illuminate the cultural soil of a social context; as such they delineate the grounding conditions into which literacy projects and programmes are implanted, as well as shedding light on theoretical dimensions and angles. This study has, for example, revealed the vast and empty communicative gap which engulfs the landscape of Usulután. Locked within their distinct discursive and ideological streams, local stakeholders have difficulty reading or understanding the rich and varied discourses in the communities because, despite their strong relationships within the local world and accompanying contextual understanding, they lack the awareness of current realities and concerns that make it possible to engage in mutually comprehensible dialogical encounter. Part of this is doubtless due to inhabitants' highly-developed skills of co-opting discourses of power within their own struggles for claims and entitlements, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of stakeholders' discourses. But simultaneously, stakeholders barely attempt to discover local narratives or discourses, stressing instead the reinforcement of their own stories. The result is a continuing dissonance and incomprehension between stakeholders' and local people's aims and aspirations, and a scene of mutual disappointment.

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[415] Morphet (1996) p260

This communication gap is thus deeply rooted in the powerful ideological and historical divides of Usulután, and also in stakeholders' lack of understanding of the nature and importance of discourse and its relationships to the entity they call 'literacy'. More needs to be understood about the interfacings between dominant discourses of power and control and local narratives of struggle and hope, and the interaction of constructs such as literacy within these relationships. Far greater comprehension needs to be reached of the complex power relations within which people operate, the intricate internal and interrelational dynamics of communities and families, the rich and varied tapestry of lives. Until this gap is bridged, room remains restricted for the meeting of diverse streams on the dialogical plain, and there is less scope still for fusion and exchange. It is only through the building of such discursive bridges that totality can be challenged and a greater merging of monologia with heteroglossia begin.

The New Literacies

This study, in espousing the New Literacy Studies approach to exploring communicative practices, has revealed some of the complex and multi-layered processes in which discourses shape and intertwine with local patterns of power and ideology. Its ethnographic framework has enabled the revealing of patterns of power and control which studies in a deficit or deprived framework, such as those critiqued above, have struggled to capture. Part of the problem with much literacy research in the past has been its decontextualised nature, its separation from lived experience. This text hopes to have gone some way to redressing this imbalance through its approach of dialogical encounter.

In adopting a focus on ideology and power, this research has demonstrated in the arena of Usulután that textual performances are put to use in ways that are not predictable; the particular dynamics and features of this context are not encountered elsewhere in El Salvador, for example. People take hold of discursive resources in ways that are consistent with their own local understandings, aims, agendas and social practices.

As regards further developments within the New Literacies framework, this study has suggested that within the notion of discourse, a more metaphorical reading of text, drawn from thinking in anthropology, where literacy practices are conceived as cultural texts may be helpful in our theoretical thinking. Reconceptualising such practices as texts which are integrally bound up within discourse, as social processes, loci of contestation and of struggle,

sites of the creation and reiteration of ideology, may better position us to unravel the nature of literacy practices and performances and their relation to power and domination in any given context.

Godenzzi argues for a new paradigm for development and democracy, the conversational paradigm. 'One leaves the sphere of I to enter in that of 'we' and establish an interchange between I and you that flows from consensual co-ordination of action...The conversational paradigm...doesn't eliminate one's own voice but rather requires it.'[416] This study contends that by conceptualising the study of literacies, rooted as it is in language, as participation in a conversation, as another meeting on the plain of dialogue, then we may approach a more effective paradigm for research. It is this vision which this text strives to approach. By viewing discursive practices as simultaneous conversations, all taking place under the same vast roof of language, we are nearing a vision of different literacies rooted in overarching patterns of social process, cultural development and human life. The next step then is, through our engagement with these dialogues, to draw some threads between and across that extensive range of conversations, to try to trace some points in common, the semiotic roots of the vast dynamic theatre of language. It is to this process which this text hopes to have contributed.

Conclusion

This study, then, a small and limited story of one corner of the world, has revealed 'something foreign' of discursive practices within the wider strategies of lives. Its has shown how communicative processes, including literacies, in Usulután, both shape and are shaped by broader social actions, in a complex web of human interaction and understanding. Literacy in Usulután is both ideology and ideological tool; it is both symbol and signified, both cultural construct and shaper of society. It cannot be explored away from the processes in which it is embedded, the playing out of lives and the unfolding of history and hope.

Literacy in Usulután is not confined to reading and writing, it evokes and is evoked by a whole gamut of communicative processes which interact within the constant spinning of webs of significance. Its exploration here is best approached from the dimension of the unravelling of the cultural text, of exploring through dialogical encounter the quiet patterns

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[416] Godenazzi (1997) p245

of daily lives. To fully grasp the range and nature of the practices which create the social fabric, and thence understand the daily recreation of the world, we must seek out diversity and difference, and strain to hear the music of a multitude of voices. Only thus can we gain a glimpse into Illich and Sanders' world of richness and variety, 'a world of adventure and beauty' which remains closed to those who stand too tightly chained to letters.[417]

[417] Illich and Sanders *op. cit.* p105

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Appendices

Appendix 1: REFLECT in Usulután in 1999

REFLECT rejects the uses of a primer and aims to combine the techniques of PRA[418] with Freirean theory in an attempt to create a participatory, bottom-up, dialogue-based approach to adult literacy. The specific aims of REFLECT are to stimulate the capacity and tendency for reflection and development-related action in local communities, using maps, diagrams, matrices and other tools of PRA to stimulate diagnosis. REFLECT thus operates on a principle of political commitment to the redistribution of social power, with the emphasis on locally-initiated and controlled action at the micro level. Its theory has been discussed in detail elsewhere,[419] but as will be evident, its conceptual framework found a natural harmony with the ideological and social aims of both CIAZO and COMUS.

> The method aims to promote active dialogue...and empowerment. As participants construct their own materials they take ownership of the issues that come up and are more likely to be moved to take local action, change their behaviour or their attitudes.[420]

REFLECT therefore, in its theoretical basis at least, claims to connect with the vision of ideological literacies - although this assertion is dubious given the project's deprived-style emphasis on oppression and 'power over' with all the limitations this implies - and recognises the difficulties of creating Freirean dialogue[421] as well as some of the limitations and distortions of Freire. It has been criticised for excessive attention to method over aim, and writers who have attempted independent implementations of the methodology have raised questions about its claim of universal relevance.[422] Yet it is now operating in over 30 countries world-wide, with World Bank funding.

ActionAid's 1996 publication of the 'outcomes' of the action research process in COMUS which subsequently became REFLECT showed some encouraging results in terms of social mobility and 'empowerment'. Yet these findings were deeply rooted in their particular moment in history. The social and political climate of El Salvador and Usulután at the time of the evaluation was such that such positive conclusions, in project terms at least, were unsurprising to those who were familiar with the mood of optimism in the country at the time.

Details of the process: REFLECT in 1999

In 1999, CIAZO operated the training of volunteer literacy facilitators directly through workshops in the COMUS offices. Facilitators receive training over a period of 5 days before commencing classes and a total of four subsequent training and 'interchange' days during the cycle, as well as two evaluations of the process, one mid-way through and one at the end of the cycle. Manuals are intended to be developed through PRA exercises in communities

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[418] The theory and practice of PRA has become so well known that it is not proposed to further discuss it here. See the works of Chambers *op. cit.*

[419] Archer and Cottingham *op. cit.*; Dyer and Choksi (1998) *op. cit.;* Rogers (1996a and b)

[420] Archer and Cottingham *op. cit.* p1

[421] *Ibid.* p7

[422] See for example Rogers (1996b) and the reports of Dyer and Choksi, *op. cit.* who implemented a REFLECT pilot project with a nomadic group in India. They strongly criticised the theoretical and methodological approach taken by REFLECT. However, ActionAid's response to their findings also identified several undeniable weaknesses in Dyer and Choksi's own implementation of the method (1998) *op. cit.*

conducted by facilitators once before the onset of the process, in February, and once again in August / September, although the extent and nature of the PRA theory actually involved in this process was questionable. CIAZO also conducts three-monthly evaluations of the education section of COMUS and pays the salaries of three literacy promoters in COMUS (the fourth is paid directly by the organisation itself) who have theoretically 50% of their workload allocated to adult literacy. Their job is to initiate and give follow-up maintenance visits to literacy circles, and they are recommended to make two visits per month. CIAZO also applies the REFLECT process to all other educational areas of its work, for example, in its training of community leaders it uses an adapted version of the same methodology.

REFLECT / community workshops in the communities are best conceptualised as Rogers' notion of learning 'episodes'– 'quite specific timebound learning activities within a wider mass of learning events' where both the learner and the source of the learning intend learning to take place[423] as distinct from what he calls 'natural' learning processes, or learning which takes place away from the learning episodes. It is important to stress that in Usulután these processes are often deeply integrated.

The literacy circles are planned to run in 31 communities from March to November each year in order to coincide with the winter agricultural period. Facilitators vary by level of education, from third-grade to *bachillerato,* the level preceding university entrance. COMUS provides blackboards and chalk to the communities (although this actually goes against purist REFLECT theory) as well as other necessary materials. Circles decide their own timetables; some meet three times a week and others every day, although all meet in the late afternoon, after the day's agricultural work has ended.

The implementation of REFLECT in 1999 in fact sharply contrasts with the theoretical planning outlined above. Literacy circles which were scheduled to begin in March had in fact not yet started by late May and it was in some cases mid-June by the time they were in operation. Most operated sporadically, due to the demands of the agricultural season. By late June approximately 17 literacy circles were active; membership was however relatively low, with some groups comprising just 3 or 4 learners, up to a maximum of 15 and an average of 6 to 8 members, some of whose attendance was infrequent. House to house visits were made to advertise and promote the circle, but many individuals, having expressed interest and been formally noted as a participant, subsequently did not turn up on the appointed day, explaining that they were now too busy or that they had other tasks to do.

The reasons for these constraints are varied and complex, and some of them are captured in the main text of this study. Their inclusion here is merely to highlight the fact that written accounts of the project in 1999 - such as the CIAZO and COMUS documentation produced for the end-of-year evaluation and thence wider ActionAid papers - do not reveal fully the complexities of the experience, and to emphasise the inappropriateness of the 'barriers' and 'lack of motivation' for literacy argument.

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[423] Rogers (1997) *op. cit.* p116

Appendix 2: Sample fieldwork diaries

The following are examples of two different weeks taken from the research diary, to show fairly representative patterns of the fieldwork:

1. Monday 2nd August - Sunday 8th August

Monday: COMUS until 1pm, Los Rivera in the afternoon / evening. Return to San Francisco Javier overnight.
Tuesday: to Joya Grande with agency transport. Stay overnight, return to San Francisco at first light.
Wednesday: 8am, leave for Los Llanitos. Stay overnight.
Thursday: direct to Los Rodriguez. Return to San Francisco 7pm with transport.
Friday: to Piedra Labrada early, leave by 4pm.
Saturday: giving classes in computation and receiving visits from people
Sunday: Los Rivera for the afternoon.

2. Monday 28th June – Sunday 4th July

Monday: COMUS morning; Los Rivera afternoon
Tuesday and Wednesday: CIAZO evaluation with all the facilitators
Thursday: Los Llanitos (stay overnight)
Friday: Joya Grande (stay overnight)
Saturday: computer classes in the morning, afternoon Piedra Labrada (stay overnight)
Sunday morning: Los Rodriguez.

Appendix 3: Research sites

Los Rivera

This community is only a 15-minute walk by a steep footpath from the village of San Francisco Javier and therefore only 15 minutes from public transport. The community consists officially of 94 families, most of whom have lived in the community all their lives, although only 24 of these houses are close to the main part of the community, where literacy circles and other community activities take place, and the part which is to be considered for this study. There is no electricity and little access to newspapers, which would have to be brought into the community through visits to the nearest town, an hour away by a combination of walking and public transport. Water is readily available from the river, which has been connected to a basic pump, although the supply is not potable. The nearest school is in San Francisco Javier, which functioned only partially during the war. The community is characterised by both its own members and COMUS staff as 'disorganised', although in 1999 moves were made to set up a functioning Board of Directors and legalise the community. During the war, many of the men left the community due to the highly politicised and conflictive environment, leaving the women to manage the household. 22 members of the community benefited from the land transfer process after the war because of their work with COMUS, and thus the social base of the FMLN, so that they now live off the proceeds of their own small parcels of land. However, most are also forced to work as seasonal labourers since their own land is not productive enough to feed their family throughout the year. Approximately one-fifth of the members of the community have family living abroad in the US or Canada.

The literacy circle is one of the most active and frequently-operating in the area. The facilitator, Ermis, is an active community worker, with strong social and political links to COMUS. He has 4th grade education and requests help with division and multiplication, but he has been running the literacy circle effectively for four years. He is in his late twenties, married with young children, and was a beneficiary of the land transfer process.

The class meets every day. There are 8 members of the literacy circle; 6 men and two women. The men range from teenage to 60s in age, and the women are both in their twenties, with children. All the men earn their living from agriculture, and four of them own small parcels of land. One of the women, Margarita, is dependent on her husband financially and the other, Josefina, hopes to go and work as a maid in San Salvador.

Los Llanitos

This community is just a ten minute walk from a main road with public transport, but it is an hour and a half's journey from San Francisco. There is no electricity, although a community pump for water exists, albeit non-potable, and also proximity to a river. The community consists of 26 families, who all settled there after the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992 at the end of the civil war; its location is the result of an international aid project to build houses with latrines and make rented land available to tenants. The community is thus very aid aware, having interacted with various aid agencies over the years, both local and international. They have also dealt with the mayoral body for proposals to help renovate the streets, for example, which are so bad that they are at times impassable even on foot. The community was only legalised in 1998, but only two members of its Board of Directors are

considered relatively organised and active. There is a very active evangelical church nearby, which meets every day, and many members of the community are members, or 'brothers'. Approximately 70% of the families are female-headed households.

Few people in the community have relatives abroad, and those that do receive little economic support from them. The result is that this community feels itself to be alone, economically very vulnerable, and subject to the will and whims of external donors. A few people have battery-operated TVs and some have radios; yet while access to newspapers is more readily available than in other communities, since the community is close to a small urban centre, economic conditions are such that people would be unlikely to spend money on a newspaper. Few people in the community own land; most men work as tenant labourers and the female heads of household rely on the small economy, selling food items in the nearby urban settlement of San Marcos Lempa.

The facilitator is Santos, in his late twenties and with a third grade education. He is married with young children and is also the community leader. His wife, aged 24, cannot read and write but will not go to classes – she says she is 'too old'. Like many of the inhabitants, Santos moved to Los Llanitos 6 years ago because land was available to rent there, and in his previous family home, his father could not earn enough money to support a family. He is on an economic par with the other members of the community, dependent on rented land for income, but although it is a struggle economically, the family send all their three children to the local school, a 20 minute walk away. It is Santos' first year as facilitator.

The class meets three times a week, and its members comprise 5 women, Magali, Maria Theresa, Juana, Jesenia and Rosa Miriam. The first four of these are middle-aged and upwards; Miriam is in her twenties. Magali, Maria Theresa, Juana and Jesenia are heads of household and they all have children of various ages. All earn a living through petty commerce or seasonal agricultural work. Rosa Miriam and Jesenia are also members of the evangelical church.

Piedra Labrada

This community is also just a ten minute walk from a main road, although it is a 30-minute bus ride from any urban centres. It has had electricity for 9 years, and there is a pump for water, although again this is not potable. It consists of 52 families in total, most of whom have lived there since before the war. The community is very spread out, effectively divided into three parts separated by tracts of land, with the third part being where the literacy classes take place. It is this part of the community that will be considered here, consisting of 23 families.

Members of the community converted themselves into a co-operative during the 1980s in order to be able to buy land previously belonging to a *dueño* or landowner during the land transfer programme of the 1980s. The land was subsequently divided up between those who took part, so that each member of the co-operative owns a small parcel. However, those who came later to the community do not own land, making for a very socially and economically-divided context. Newspapers could potentially be bought from visits to the town, but only rarely make an appearance within the community. There are televisions in both the facilitators' houses, which many people come to watch. The nearest school is an hour's walk away, with the result that the majority of people do not send their children here, but have them attend the literacy circle instead. There is heavy out-migration, mainly to the US, which has increased the relative wealth of some families in the community.

There are two literacy circles, initial and advanced levels. The facilitators are Orbelina, 20 and Isabel, aged 21. Orbelina has 9th grade education and Isabel 7th. Both are unmarried, without children. The community is relatively 'organised', legalised with health committees and agricultural committees. Orbelina acts as the community leader, and the health promoter; she has close links with COMUS in social terms, although she prefers not to become involved in any political activities or discussion. Isabel is involved in the health committee; there are also groups for hammock-making and *piñatería*, or the making of celebratory papier-mâché objects. Orbelina works in her family's shop, which also serves as the community health centre, and her family are better off economically than the average person. It is their first year as facilitators. Neither girl is very interested in politics and in fact the community as a whole is characterised by looser links with COMUS than the others of the study.

Both classes meet three times a week. Four people generally attend Orbelina's circle; one elderly lady, Virginia Isabel, Rosa Ophelia and Rosa Odilia, who are in their twenties, Federico, 34 and Ana Elisabeth, 14. Virginia is the mother of Rosa Ophelia; they are refugees from Hurricane Mitch and live off their family's charity in the community. In Isabel's circle, the beginners, the membership comprises Consuela, Francisca and Esmeralda, all in their forties or upwards and all members of the agricultural co-operative.

Los Rodriguez

This community is very distant, a 45 minute drive or a two hour walk from the main road and an hour's drive from the nearest town, with occasional pickups making the journey up to the community. It is extremely spread out, consisting of 185 families in total but the nucleus, of 41 families, surround the community centre and are the focus of aid agency activities and community action. The evangelical presence is very strong, with a church which meets every day. The community has a school nearby, but for anything over 9th grade the children make the daily journey to the town. However, a larger proportion of schoolchildren attend school at higher grades than in other communities - 12 attend at *bachillerato* level. There is no organised board of directors, but the community hopes to establish one in the next few months. No potable water supply exists, but the community is, through COMUS, trying to negotiate an electricity supply; there is minimal access to newspapers but quite a few families have battery-operated televisions. Many people in the community have relatives in the States and are partially dependent on monies received from there. Land is rented rather than owned, with most men working either as tenant farmers or as paid labourers.

The facilitator is Esmeralda, 19, who is studying at *bachillerato* level at weekends. She is going to university next year but will live at home. It is her fourth year as a literacy facilitator; she has no strong links with COMUS or with local politics. She is single, but has a boyfriend, and she is a member of the evangelical church. Although the community is legalised, it has a 'disorganised' and inactive board of directors, of which Esmeralda's father is a member. There is a health promoter in the community.

The class meets every day and all those who attend come from the central part of the community. They include Rosa, 62, Lorenzo, 60, Maria, 19, Roberto, 24, Ruth Idalia, 20, Miguel Angel, 41and Jose Vincente, 28.

Joya Grande

This community stands about 40 minutes walk along a dirt track from the nearest village, San Francisco Javier. There is no form of public transport between the community and the village. The community is very small, comprising 25 families who moved there three years ago to in order to work the newly-available land. They are engaged in a legal struggle to gain title to the land, although in the meantime they continue to work it for crops. COMUS is involved in the legalisation process. Economic conditions are severe; there is no access to water, which has to be bought from people who pass selling it, or electricity. Houses in the community are noticeably poor, made of bamboo frames and either adobe or cardboard or plastic sacking, or a combination.

The community is characterised as 'disorganised' by COMUS at the directorate level - COMUS are currently trying to legalise the community. Schools here are very far away, in other communities, with the result that many people do not send their children into formal education at all.

There are two literacy groups, advanced and beginners. The facilitators are Santiago, who has a 9th grade education, and Ignacio, who studied to 3rd grade. Both share the general economic conditions of the community. They also serve as community leaders and are heavily involved with COMUS and with local political meetings of the FMLN. It is their first year as literacy facilitators. Both classes meet twice a week. Frequent attendees comprise: Jose Ricardo, in his 40s, Rosa Candida, Wilma Azucena and Elsy Griselda, all women in their 20s and in the advanced class, and Maria Elena, Rosa Ana and Maria Candelaria, all aged in their twenties in the beginners' class.

Appendix 4: List of dimensions on which data was generated

Participation / observation

- Literacy classes
- Acts and dialogue in home life
- Community meetings and activities including bread-making demonstrations, agricultural activities, organisational meetings, etc.
- Private, public and collective literacy events and practices, particularly the dialogue around these
- Television / radio programmes
- Church services, catholic and evangelical
- Primary school classes
- COMUS activities in communities e.g. gender training, leadership training, medical and health workshops etc.
- CIAZO training days and workshops in REFLECT, leadership activities
- Activities in the local mayor's office
- COMUS / CIAZO implementation and evaluation of REFLECT.

Dialogue with:

- Literacy class members
- Non- and ex-participants
- Community leaders / members
- Local political leaders and workers
- COMUS staff
- Schoolteachers
- Representations of women's groups
- CIAZO staff
- ActionAid London staff
- Gender trainers
- Literacy promoters and participants in 2 other geographical areas

Written data:

- Literacy artefacts from participants, non-participants, community leaders, including: Letters, solicitations to COMUS and mayoral offices, notes, documentation relating to houses, animals, *cédulas*, minutes from community meetings, lists of community members, graffiti, church texts and hymns, political and other songs, posters and other NGO and political artefacts, textbooks from literacy classes
- The process and evaluation documents of the REFLECT programme in COMUS
- Copies of COMUS documents in agriculture, health, organisation and production
- CIAZO documents about literacy and REFLECT; attendance registers; forms for the presentation of items to communities; facilitator's and promoter's diaries
- ActionAid documents about REFLECT
- Newspaper articles
- Surveys of communities

Appendix 5: Theoretical and methodological works used while in the field

Barton, D. and Hamilton, M. (1998) *Local Literacies: Reading and Writing in One Community* London: Routledge

Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (1983) *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* London: Routledge

Prinsloo, M. and Breier, M. (1996) *The Social Uses of Literacy* Cape Town: SACHED and John Benjamins

Street, B. (1993) *Cross-Cultural Approaches to Literacy* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Stromquist, N. (1997) *Literacy for Citizenship: Gender and Grassroots Dynamics in Brazil* New York: SUNY