Dedication

To Darcy, without whom none of this would have been possible
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Abstract

In the context of rapidly expanding English-medium higher education in the UAE (United Arab Emirates), this thesis investigates how a group of native speaker English language teaching professionals perceive the social aspects of the environment in which they are working and the extent to which these perceptions affect the conceptualisation of their professional identities. Specifically, it focuses on how a complex interplay of cultural, economic, religious and political ideologies may impact upon the working lives of the respondents.

This research was carried out at eleven higher educational institutes in the UAE and data was gathered through interviews with English language teachers, teacher trainers and managers. The study’s findings reveal a complex, diverse and often conflicting picture of the way the respondents perceive the context in which they are working and a wide variety of attitudes regarding the ideological issues identified as impacting upon ELT in the region. However, emerging from the data was a dominant discourse of fear related to issues of power, religion, gender and money, maintained by uncertainty regarding the extent to which a censorial approach to teaching was required. The perceived precariousness of the respondents’ employment was also identified as the source of practises which raise ethical questions about the construction of professionalism in a context dominated by a discourse of fear and, in turn, implications for both practitioners and institutions.

Overall, this study reveals that in a context where ‘Gulf Arab/Muslim’ students interact with ‘Western native-speaker’ teachers, the preconceptions that often adhere to such labels in their respective societies may bear little resemblance to the attitudes, actions and beliefs of the individuals concerned. This raises implications both for the training of English teachers in the importance of contextual considerations and for the construction of the native speaker teacher in the literature.
Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 – The Focus of the Study

This is a study of how a group of thirty-two experienced native speaker ELT (English language teaching) professionals working in HEIs (higher educational institutes) in the UAE (United Arab Emirates) perceive the social aspects of the environment in which they are working and the extent to which these perceptions affect the conceptualisation of their professional identities. Its title – ‘Tiptoeing through the Minefield’ – reflects the complexity, uncertainty and potential for ‘explosive’ and potentially job-threatening conflict the environment is perceived as presenting to the respondents and the study investigates how they attempt to negotiate the complexities and potential areas of conflict they encounter working in the Arabian Gulf region. Their experiences are explored through data obtained from semi-structured interviews. Emerging from this data comes a picture of how this group of ELT practitioners construct their professionalism in light of the particular social, ideological and pedagogical aspects of the context in which they work – the ELT classrooms of English-medium HEIs in the UAE.

As I interrogated the data and related it to the literature, the themes of fear, gender, power, money and humour emerged as major factors affecting working practices and the extent to which the participants deal with potential areas of conflict, and these are the issues that provide the focus of the five findings chapters. Conflict may arise from potential differences between the social norms and values of Khaliji (Gulf Arab) students and those of the ‘Western native-speaker’ ELT professionals providing English-medium tertiary education in the region, especially with regard to issues such as gender, religion and politics. Given the incomplete nature of each groups’ understanding of the others’ social norms and values, perhaps shaped by the distorted, essentialised views commonly perpetuated in their respective media, the possibility of classroom conflict remains. How this group of native speaker ELT professionals negotiates the complexities of their working lives, where the perceived need for

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1 There is some controversy over the term ‘Arabian Gulf’, with the term ‘Persian Gulf’ having international recognition. However, in the context of this study, the six nations of the GCC – the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar & Saudi Arabia – the term ‘Arabian Gulf’ is the usual expression and so it will be used throughout.

2 Both ‘Western’ and ‘native-speaker’ are contested terms in the literature. However, in this study I use them merely to refer to the backgrounds of the 32 respondents in this study, all of whom were born and brought up with English as their L1 in the major English-speaking nations commonly referred to as being part of ‘the West’ – the UK, the USA, Australia, Canada, Ireland & South Africa.
a strict censorial approach to teaching to accommodate local social norms and values encounters the respondents’ constructs of their own professional and personal beliefs and ideology, provides the main focus of this study.

The research questions that guide this study are:

1) What are the attitudes of a group of native speaker ELT professionals working in HEIs in the UAE towards the social aspects of the environment in which they are working?

2) In what ways and to what extent do these native speaker ELT professionals consider that their teaching materials and pedagogy are affected by this environment?

3) In what ways do these native speaker ELT professionals deal with potential classroom conflicts that may stem from their interactions with the local environment?

4) How do these native speaker ELT professionals construct their professional identities with regard to the potentially conflicting ideological forces that impact upon their working lives?

1.2 – The Importance of the Study

I believe that this study has uncovered new knowledge about the complexity of the lives of native-speaker ELT professionals working in the UAE, knowledge that adds to the increasing body of literature addressing English-medium tertiary education in the region (see Chapter 3). Although studies exist addressing the political, social and ideological implications of ELT in the region, most investigate the issue from the point of view of the students or from that of ‘non-native’ Arab ELT professionals, reflecting on issues such as the threat ELT is perceived to pose to Arabic and/or Islam, its potential socializing effect, the political and economic forces behind its spread, the appropriacy of English teaching methodologies and materials and the attitudes of Khaliji students towards the English language. However, I believe that this study, by investigating how such issues are perceived by the main providers of English language education in federal HEIs in the region: experienced native-speaker ELT professionals,
and by investigating how their professionalism is constructed the context of the UAE, offers new insights into the practice of ELT in the region and presents a view that has yet to be specifically covered in the literature.

I believe that this study is also important in that it serves to inform the debate on the role, position and ‘mythic’ status of the native-speaker English language teacher, especially as it relates to the ideological implications of ELT. Although often problematised and even villianised in the literature, the voices of native-speaker English teachers are rarely heard (Crookes, 1997; Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Aboshiha, 2007; Breckenridge & Erling (2011), especially those with extensive expatriate experience. This study, therefore, provides a view of the construction of professional identities by experienced native-speaker ELT professionals, the complexity and diversity of which could be said to challenge the stereotypical portrayal of a problematised ‘native-speaker’ in the literature.

1.3 – The Participants of the Study
At the time of the interviews, the thirty-two participants were all employed in ELT-related jobs in eleven federal English-medium colleges and universities in the UAE. Their average age was 47 and all held qualifications to at least Masters’ level in ELT-related disciplines, with several also holding PhDs. They had an average of 22 years’ experience working in ELT, nearly 11 of which had been in the countries of the GCC. With a total of over 700 years’ experience it was felt that this group could provide some informative insights into the issues perceived as influencing native speaker English teachers working in the Arabian Gulf.

I wish now to briefly discuss my definition of the native speaker teacher of English, and how this definition relates to the focus of the study.

1.3.1 – Defining the Native Speaker
For the purpose of this study I am defining the native speaker as ‘a person who has spoken the language in question from early childhood’ (online Oxford English Dictionary). The participants of this study are all native-speakers of English from England (36%), the USA (23%), Australia (16%), Scotland (10%), Ireland (6%), Canada (6%) and South Africa (3%).
However, I acknowledge that the term native speaker, when used to refer to English language teachers, is problematic, especially in studies dealing with the relationship between native and so-called ‘non-native’ speaker teachers of English, and is therefore usually written in inverted commas, indicating this problematic nature and the fact that the expression can indicate much more than just linguistic ability. However, as the relationship between the participants and their non-native speaker colleagues does not provide the main focus of this study, I will not be using the expression in inverted commas except when quoting from studies that do so.

Indeed, during the data collection for this study, interviews were conducted with ELT professionals working in the UAE, regardless of nationality. However, due to the large amount of data collected and given the fact that, as an Englishman married to an American who also works in ELT, the experiences of the native speaker ELT professional were more familiar to me and I decided not to include the data collected from respondents whose first language was not English.

1.4 – The Setting of the Study
This study is located in the English language classrooms of HEIs in the UAE, places where, due to political and economic considerations, predominantly native speaker ELT professionals and their Gulf Arab students meet. According to Smith (2008:20-1), the countries of the GCC:

‘may be in the process of creating the world’s most globalised higher education system ... largely built upon standards, systems and faculty imported from Western Europe and North America and which operates almost entirely in English.’

At the same time, according to Lo Bianco et al (1999:91):

‘the Gulf States have explicitly stated as their foreign language objective … [that students] acquire a good understanding of English speaking people on the condition that this will not lead to the creation of a hostile or indifferent attitude to the students’ Arab/Islamic culture.’
So, although many Arab nations are actively encouraging English-medium Western higher education for their citizens with the aim of increasing their productivity in the globalized economy of the 21st Century, according to Dahl (2010:31), ‘differences in educational theory and ideology between the two cultures often results in difficulties’, both for students and for their teachers.

This research aims to investigate the difficulties that may arise when imported faculty interact with their Khaliji students in a society that has been transformed over a relatively short period of time from one of the poorest regions in the world to one of the richest. These individuals are charged with the task of providing ELT while avoiding any threat to their students’ ‘Arab/Islamic culture’. However, unsure and often ignorant about what aspects of ELT may provide such a threat, Western faculty and management usually opt for a strict censorial approach to ELT, stripping lessons of anything they perceive as being potentially offensive to local norms and traditions. And yet outside the higher education classrooms, English plays a vital role in the functioning of Gulf society.

Since it achieved independence from Britain in 1971 the UAE, like the other countries of the GCC, has undergone massive economic and social change, brought about by oil wealth. This has also led to a huge increase in population in the region. The UAE’s population rose from about 1,500,000 in 1990 to an estimated 8,264,000 in 2010 (UAE National Bureau of Statistics), and although the birth rate amongst nationals remains fairly high, this increase in population has come mainly from the influx of (mostly male and mostly non-Arabic speaking) expatriate workers. Due to this large number of non-Arabic-speaking workers in the region, English has become the lingua franca in much business and industry, as well as in day-to-day interactions in shops, restaurants and on transport. English may also be used in many national homes, where large numbers of South and East Asians work as domestic servants.

This need to import skilled and unskilled workers has led to a society that is ‘kaleidoscopic … with multiple layers of distinct divisions between public and private sector, between national and expatriate, and between male and female’ (Malecki & Ewers, 2007:477), and English plays an important role in facilitating communication between these various layers. As the findings show, these multiple layers of social identity could be said to add to the complexity of the participants’ lives as they struggle with unfamiliar societal roles and attempt to understand the tribal and hierarchical structures (Al-Qassemi, 2012) of their new
home. Paramount in this society are the Gulf Arabs, the vast majority of whom are currently government employees (Malecki & Ewers, 2007:477), but with the rapid growth of national populations, governments are realising that the continued provision of government jobs for nationals is not a sustainable position and recognise the need to train their people in order to replace some of the imported labour. To that end, and due to the historic lack of higher educational institutes in the region, the decision to use oil wealth to import higher educational systems wholesale was made, with English as the medium of instruction.

To summarise, this study is located at the intersection of Western tertiary education and Khaliji society, a place where, according to Dahl (2010:18), Western educators may be introducing ‘Western educational systems that promote egalitarianism and individual freedom as well as personal independence and accountability’ – systems that she claims are ‘disturbingly revolutionary to Arabic thinking.’ However, as the findings show, the prevalence of a strict censorial approach may mean that Western educators are actually adapting systems to suit the local context rather than imposing unfamiliar ones wholesale.

In the UAE, as in most of the GCC, free education from kindergarten to postgraduate level is available to all nationals (Jendli, Troudi & Coombe, 2007), but despite having had English classes throughout primary and secondary school, 94% of all national students in federal HEIs in the UAE need to take a year-long English foundation course before they can proceed to their chosen subjects (Bardsely & Lewis, 2010). They also need to pass the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) examination to graduate. The participants in this study work either in such first-year Foundations classes, which usually involve around twenty hours of general and academic English language instruction a week, in IELTS preparation classes or in Bachelor of Education courses, along with some of the managers of these departments and colleges.

1.5 – The Motivation for the Study

Having discussed the focus of, the participants in and the setting for this study I would now like to discuss the factors that provided its motivation.

Holliday (2007:22-3) states that ‘much qualitative research ... is in response to problematic or otherwise puzzling social realities that people find around them, whether personal,
professional or institutional’. To illustrate this, I share the following story, and then discuss how it relates to my motivation to pursue this research:

February 2006 saw the height of the Danish cartoon scandal, a time when the supermarkets in the UAE had stripped their shelves of Danish products and protests were being held worldwide to express anger at the offence that the cartoons’ publication had caused. During this month Claudia Kibutz, a recently-arrived American professor of English at Zayed University in Dubai, photocopied the cartoons for discussion in her English class. When the students protested and threatened to leave the class, she told them that if they did, they would be marked absent. She later claimed that her actions had been done ‘within the rights of freedom of opinion and expression’ (Saffarini & Shamseddine, 2006) but at 10pm that same day an order was issued by the Ministry of Higher Education and both the professor and her supervisor were dismissed from their jobs and deported within 24 hours (ibid). The Vice-President of Zayed University, (and future Minister of Education) said at the time, ‘we are with the freedom of expression but at the same time we have to maintain the standards and values of our community (ibid)’. This incident became a major news story in the local newspapers and was also covered internationally.

2006 marked my 20th year working in the field of ELT, and, at the time of the Claudia Kibutz incident, I had spent twelve years teaching in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. As such, I was considered an ‘old Gulf hand’ – a group for whom the Claudia Kibutz case was the cause of incredulity that anyone in the profession could show such insensitivity and such a lack of understanding of the context in which she was teaching. However, her case was not entirely unexpected. Unfortunately, Kibutz was just the latest example of a phenomenon familiar to those who had spent any length of time working in the region, a phenomenon jokingly referred to as ‘the gin and tonic and a window seat’. This refers to the immediate dismissal and deportation of a colleague who has, either through action or word, been seen as violating local norms and subsequently finds him/herself unemployed and on a plane home, albeit with the consolation of alcohol.

Another phenomenon that has entered the lexicon of experienced native-speaker ELT professionals in the region, especially those who have worked in Saudi Arabia, is described as ‘the Saudi twitch’, and refers jokingly to the self-censorship (Docherty, 2005; Picard,
2007; Baalawi, 2008; Dahl, 2010) prevalent amongst educators, both non-Arab and Arab, in the Middle East. The ‘Saudi twitch’ involves loudly stating ‘Well, in my opinion ...’, then mock-fearfully glancing over both shoulders before continuing to speak, which could be said to indicate the importance of humour to expatriate identity construction. In a context where wealth, fear, politics and religion combined to make a working environment quite unlike that of my previous career in ELT, a desire grew in me to unpick the effect that such phenomena may have upon the construction of professional identity, and this desire could therefore be said to provide the professional motivation for this study.

My desire to research the relationship between native speaker ELT professionals and their Khali Ji students and society also stemmed from wider geopolitical events. Although I was born and brought up in England, in 1988, just over a year after starting my career in ELT, I had met the woman who would become my wife at a teachers’ meeting in Japan, and from 1990 we spent 4 years teaching at a language school in her hometown of Los Angeles before moving to the Gulf where we have remained ever since. Our shared Anglo-American identity, and our love of living and working in the Gulf, meant that the events of 11th September 2001 had a major impact on both of us. On that dreadful day Robert Eaton, a close boyhood school friend, was killed leaving behind a widow and an infant son. His killer, the pilot of Flight 175 which hit the south tower of the WTC where Robert worked for Cantor Fitzgerald on the 105th floor, was Marwan Al-Shehhi, an Emirati from Ras Al Khaimah, the town where I was teaching at the time, and where at least a quarter of the students in each class I taught were from his tribe, the Al Shehhis. The struggle to comprehend the global ideological forces that had led to this event and its aftermath, and how they impacted upon my own life working in ELT in the Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, could therefore be said to provide much of the personal motivation for this study.

1.6 – The Positioning of the Study

‘To come up with an … accurate reflection of what takes place in language teaching classes, an important assumption must be made and accepted. Our profession must come to the realization that no grand theory or overarching idea can capture the local narrative of all L2 classes across time and space, … [we] must get … [our] inspirations not from postmodern philosophy or academic discussions per se, but also from the reflections of teachers and their practical
wisdom. ... [we] must be able to help teachers theorize their practices by including their voices in its tenets, not speaking on their behalf from a purely theoretical perspective. ... As long as our academic discourse community ignores practitioners’ plight, continues to make impossible demands, and refuses to replace idealism with realism, … [this discussion] will remain just a topic for lectures and argumentative academic articles’ Akbari (2008:650-1)

This study positions itself within Akbari’s (2008) call for the inclusion of the reflections and the practical wisdom of teachers in the discussion for the development of a viable pedagogy for ELT. Given that this particular group of ELT professionals could be said to work in a context in which ideological forces, be they political, economic or religious, probably exert a more extreme influence on ELT than elsewhere in the world, I believe that this study’s inclusion of their voices will be able to inform not only current debates on ELT in HEIs in the Gulf region, those on the wider global ideological implications of ELT and those on the relationship between the Muslim and the non-Muslim worlds, but also be useful in informing the discussion on the role of contextual considerations in the training of new English language teachers.

This study will therefore be positioned within current studies that specifically discuss the socio-cultural-political-religious implications of ELT in HEIs in the UAE and the wider Gulf region (Mercer, 2005, 2007; Picard, 2007; Baalawi, 2008; Dahl, 2010; Raza, 2010; Elyas, 2011, Karmanai 2011, et al), discussed in Chapter 3. To place these Gulf-specific studies in a wider context, Chapter 2 discusses how this study positions itself with regard to the ideological issues concerning the global teaching of English that have arisen out of the field of critical applied linguistics. This includes reflections on the extent to which this field’s definitions of the native speaker English language teacher could be said to represent the complex reality of the lived experiences of the individuals who are the focus of this study: experienced expatriate ELT professionals. To reflect this complexity, this study is positioned within what Canagarajah (2006:30) describes as ‘the messy practice of crossing boundaries’, a definition that encompasses much of the lived experience of the expatriate native speaker English language teacher and highlights the complex nature of personal and professional identity construction for those who chose to live and work outside of their homelands. This study also aligns itself with Breckenridge & Erling’s (2011:98) position that:
researchers who criticize the reliance on essentialised ideals of native speakers of English in applied linguistics should also consider local and/or national ideologies … which work to perpetuate essentialised identities. A thorough consideration of the effect of such essentialisation on native speaker English teachers and recognition of their ‘multidimensional and multilayered’ identities is also necessary for their own personal or professional development. Instead of being villianized in applied linguistic discourses and otherized in their teaching contexts … [those] who have gained experience of international ELT and learning about other languages and cultures should be welcomed into the field and provided opportunities to develop into critical ELT professionals. In an era of globalization … [ELT] has the potential to generate meaningful intercultural experiences for the teachers, students and communities involved’

This study, therefore, investigates the attitudes, perceptions and experiences of native-speaker ELT professionals in HEIs in the UAE with a recognition of the ‘multilayered and multidimensional’ nature of their identities. However, it must be stressed that I am writing about the respondents’ perceptions of Gulf Arab society and its impact on ELT in the region, perceptions that show great variety and complexity. It must also be acknowledged that, as the author of this study, I have attempted to raise to consciousness my own beliefs, values and identity as an ELT professional and the impact these may have. This is especially important given the potential differences between my own secular, liberal, humanist beliefs and those of the context about which I am writing.

1.7 – The Structure of the Study
This study is divided into ten chapters. Chapter One has introduced the thesis, outlined the motivation for, setting of, and participants in the study and discussed its positioning. Chapter Two introduces the theoretical basis for this study, discussing the literature on the ideological implications of global ELT, professionalism, professional identities and the portrayal of the native speaker English teacher. Chapter Three discusses the literature on ELT in HEIs in the Gulf, providing an introduction to some of the contextual and ideological issues that may be involved when native-speaker ELT professionals interact with Khaliji students. Chapter Four
introduces the conceptual framework and provides a critique of the research methodology used in this study.

Chapters Five to Nine present the themes identified in the analysis of the data. Chapter Five discusses the theme of fear, which appeared to play a major role in the lives of the participants, both professionally and personally. Chapter Six discusses the theme of gender, the issue that emerged from the data as a potentially major source of conflict, both in the classroom and internally as the participants dealt with the perceived differences between their own views of what constitutes appropriate gender roles in society with their constructions of local views on gender. Chapter Seven looks at how perceptions of power were seen as impacting upon the respondents’ lives. Chapter Eight discusses the theme of money and how the comparatively large salaries and generous benefits available to ELT professionals in the region affect their attitudes toward their jobs. Chapter Nine discusses the theme of humour, a topic that emerged from the data as an important component in the respondents’ lives, in their teaching methodologies, as a way of coping with the complexities of the expatriate life in the Arabian Gulf and as a factor in their constructions of their professional identities. Finally, Chapter Ten discusses the implications of this study, both in the field of ELT and in the wider world.
Chapter 2 – Ideology, Professionalism and the Native Speaker in ELT

2.1 – Introduction
In order to provide a background to the main theme of the thesis, how a group of native speaker ELT professionals perceive and negotiate the complexities and potential areas of ideological conflict in ELT in HEIs in the UAE and in so doing construct their professionalism, I turn now to a discussion of how issues relating to this theme are presented in the literature. The discussion in these chapters will raise issues which help to position the subsequent analysis of the data in Chapters 5-9.

In this chapter, I first discuss two issues that could be seen as impacting upon any Western writer who decides to write about the Arab/Muslim world: ‘Orientalism’ and ‘Islamophobia’. I then define my understanding of the term ‘ideology’ and briefly outline the arguments regarding the extent to which the language one uses is perceived as determining one’s thoughts. A general background to current debates surrounding the issue of ideology in the practices and discourses of ELT follows, considering how the modernist and positivist philosophies perceived to underlie ELT and applied linguistics came to be challenged by the development of critical applied linguistics, stemming from post-modernism. Next, the linking of the global spread of ELT to specific historical, political and economic forces and ideologies by critical applied linguists is discussed, and the implications this linking has for ELT’s practitioners. This is followed by a brief discussion of debates on the extent to which ELT involves (or necessitates) the teaching of culture followed by a consideration of the literature (or lack thereof) concerning religion and ELT. The section on ideology is followed by a discussion of professionalism in ELT, including a consideration of the formation of an ‘expatriate’ identity, and concludes with a discussion of how the ‘native speaker English teacher’ is portrayed in the literature.

2.2 – Writing about the Arab/Muslim World
A charge that may be levelled against Western, non-Muslim writers who write about the Arab/Muslim world is that their work is ‘Orientalist’ or ‘Islamophobic’. The adjectives can refer to Western misrepresentations of the Arab/Muslim world, misrepresentations that may
lead to essentialising and damaging stereotypes of Arabs and/or Muslims. In the context of this study, which examines the attitudes of Western native speaker ELT professionals towards Khaliji society, it is important to gain an understanding not only of the origin and use of these expressions, but also to investigate their potentially problematic nature, especially in relation to Western academic study of the Arab/Muslim world.

2.2.1 – Orientalism

The publication of Edward Said’s Orientalism in 1978 could be said to have had a significant impact on the way the relationship between the ‘West’ and the ‘East’ (especially the Middle East) is viewed, in particular in academia. It highlighted how portrayals of the Middle East in Western culture had led to an essentialised view of the region that, Said claimed, had served as implicit justification for European and American imperial ambitions. Jasanoff (2008) describes the book as a founding text of postcolonial studies and claims that it has done much to expand Western views of culture from the simplicity of binary opposition into a richer concept of cross-cultural hybridity. Said’s (1978:204) assertion that ‘every European in what he could say about the Orient was … a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric’ alerted western academia to its own prejudices. Consequently, over the past three decades, as ‘the geographies of power and inequality have shifted dramatically, so have western ideas of belonging, race and difference’ (Jasanoff, 2008:15).

In a study such as this, great care must be taken not to be seen to be adding to what Said (1980:27) described as ‘the web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism [and] dehumanising ideology holding in the Arab or the Muslim’, a web that, it could be argued, has over the past third of a century transformed into something quite unlike the original crude and open racism common in Western society in the 1970s when Said was writing. If we follow Holliday’s (2011:198) description of orientalism as ‘constructing the non-West as culturally deficient’, then it would not take long find examples of such orientalist views in popular media in the West such as Britain’s Daily Mail or the USA’s Fox News. However, media such as these tend to appeal to an older audience and, with the cultural identity of the young being shaped by a much broader selection of media than was available to their parents and grandparents, perhaps the days of such simplistic views are fading, especially considering that, as Kubota and Lin (2006:641) point out, ‘overt racism is becoming a less acceptable form of discourse in democratic societies.’
However, the cultural shift in the West that has made overt racism less acceptable does not necessarily indicate a substantial shift in the dynamics of power. As Said (1978:3) pointed out, ‘Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views, describing it … ruling over it’. As a Westerner writing about Westerners’ experiences in the East I cannot help but add to the discourse and thus lay myself upon to charges of ‘Orientalism’. However, this writing is done with an awareness of Crooks’ (2009:21) warning that:

‘within a substantial part of the ELT world … is a West/East distinction … [which] has often been identified as pernicious and dangerously essentializing or “orientalizing” … [and that] a great ignorance prevails on the part of the “West” and ELT teachers who see themselves as representatives of the West, concerning education in the “East”.’

Given that the focus of this study is on Western educators working in the Middle East, although some of the opinions expressed by the participants may indeed be classified as Orientalist in nature, a critical awareness of, and restive problematization of the assumptions made about Eastern learners may serve to reduce charges of Orientalism.

2.2.2 – Islamophobia

This critical awareness and restive problematization of commonly-held assumptions about ‘oriental’ learners also needs to extend to the most controversial issue that emerged from this study: religion. I am strongly aware that ‘powerful voices both in the West and in the Muslim World advocate essentialist concepts of Islam’ (Herbert & Wolff, 2004:290), voices that argue that the tradition has one single correct meaning or position on any matter, and that all other interpretations are deviant. However, according to Halliday (2000:134), quoting from an unnamed Iranian thinker, ‘Islam is a sea in which it is possible to catch any fish one wants’ and care must always be taken to acknowledge that any interpretation that is put on Islam may reside not in the religion or in its texts, but on the contemporary needs of those articulating on Islamic politics. Indeed, for the teachers in the ELT classrooms of Arabia, it does not take long for them to realise that far from being a monolithic bloc, their students, like students everywhere in the world, will hold a wide, and often conflicting, variety of beliefs.
For Said (1980), Western portrayals of the Islamic world were ‘a series of crude, essentialised caricatures’, and these could be said to continue today in the form of Islamophobia, described as an ‘irrational fear of Muslims and what Islam represents’ (Rich & Troudi 2006:618). The term first gained currency during the early 1990s and Conway et al (1996) described Islamophobia as containing the following features:

i) Muslim cultures seen as monolithic and unchanging,
ii) Claims that Muslim cultures are wholly different from other cultures,
iii) Islam perceived as implacably threatening,
iv) Claims that Muslims use their faith mainly for political or military advantage.

Indeed, in the West there is now said to be an ‘Islamophobia Machine’ (Elmasry 2009), consisting of Western writers with a right-wing political agenda, aided by (mostly female) Muslim or former-Muslim writers, whose aim is to stereotype and demonize Muslims to fill a need created and funded ‘by right-wing politicians, war mongers, racists, lobbyists, and the military war business’ (ibid). This view is supported by Khan (2012:12), who, referring to the situation in the USA, states that ‘in recent years a network of politically motivated special interests has emerged that is determined to stigmatise and marginalise Muslims in all areas of American public life.’

Writing about the situation in Britain, Rich and Troudi (2006:615) point out that there is an ‘increasingly racialised discourse of Islamophobia’ in the UK media and wider society, with discussions of ‘Islam’ or ‘Muslims’ potentially carrying racist overtones which can be ‘sanitised’ by the claim that ‘Islam is not a race’. This racialised discourse has had serious ramifications in the UK, and, as Suleiman et al (2009:26) show, for some Muslims in Britain ‘Islamophobia is a real lived experience, with instances of violence and abuse.’ And, as Esposito & Mogahed (2008:14) point out, this led to ‘a rhetoric of hate and growing violence, manifest in both anti-Americanism in the Muslim world and in Islamophobia in the West’.

Therefore, any research which touches on the subject of Islam from a Western perspective needs to take into account the explosive nature of the debate and the role Orientalist and Islamophobic discourses are seen as playing in shaping Western perceptions of the Arab/Muslim world. In the context of this study, therefore, I need to consider the extent to which these discourses may impact upon the attitudes of the respondents. However, although Orientalist and Islamophobic discourses could be said to be part of the culture of Western
nations, and may have been influential in shaping the attitudes of the respondents, the fact that they have spent an average of over 10 years in the Gulf may also have exposed them to lived experiences that may undermine the cultural assumptions prevalent in their countries of origin.

However, both ‘Orientalism’ and ‘Islamophobia’ are contested terms, and my next section investigates how the problematic nature of these words impacts upon this study.

2.2.3 – Problematizing Orientalism & Islamophobia

Said’s Orientalism has been controversial since its publication. One criticism levelled against it has been the counter-charge of ‘Occidentalism’. MacKenzie (1995) stated that Said’s criticism of Orientalist scholars’ essentialism is reflected in his own portrayal of the West as a hegemonic mass, and that he was equally as guilty in his stereotyping of the characteristics of the West as he claimed the Orientalists were in their stereotyping of the East. According to Kumaravevelu (2008:50), stereotyping is ‘a fundamental trait of the human mind’ and ‘an all-pervasive phenomenon that affects class, race, religion, gender, language, nationality and ethnicity. We stereotype others and others stereotype us. We are victims as well as victimizers.’ Indeed, crude Orientalist stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims in the West are often reflected by crude ‘Occidentalist’ stereotypes of Westerners in the Arab world (Diab, 2010). Therefore, in the context of this study, while the participants may hold essentialised views of their students, they may also be essentialised by their students in return.

Another criticism of Orientalism is that it focussed on the wrong target. According to Irwin (2006, 2008), the scholars and writers that Said highlighted in his book as ‘Orientalists’ had been misrepresented and he describes Orientalism as a sustained libel on the past and ‘a work of malignant charlatanry in which it is difficult to distinguish honest mistakes from wilful misrepresentations’ (Irwin, 2006:4). By focusing on the prejudice to be found in the works of Western academics, artists and novelists, Irwin claims, Said directed attention away from the main source of prejudiced Western attitudes towards Arabs and Muslims. These, claims Irwin, came bubbling up from below; a product of tabloid newspapers, pulp novels, Hollywood blockbusters and other forms of ‘low’ culture. Works such as Shaheen’s (2003) detailed analysis of how Hollywood vilifies Arabs, Gottschalk and Greenberg’s (2008) investigation of how political cartoons in the Western media perpetuate Orientalist and Islamophobic stereotypes and Petley & Richardson’s (2011) in-depth analysis of the portrayal
of Islam and Muslims in the British media would seem to confirm this. And the perpetuation of negative stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims in the Western media could be said to have the potential to influence the participants of this study more now than when the majority started their ELT careers in the 1980s, given the increased availability of communication technology to expatriates.

However, the terms Orientalism and Islamophobia are also problematic with regard to academia. Buruma (2008:16) highlights what he claims has been the corrosive effect the adoption of ‘Orientalist’ as a term of abuse has had on academic writing, and defines the current use of the term either as a ‘catchall for any view of Asia expressed by a westerner that does not contain an explicit criticism of western imperialism’ or as a ‘stick used to beat up anyone whose politics one doesn’t approve of’. Buruma (2008:16) also claims that, ‘the history of colonialism has provided a convenient excuse for many contemporary ills afflicting the non-western world, especially the Middle East, and critical views are too easily dismissed as typical expressions of orientalism.’ For Lewis (2012:269-71), Said’s work has had a negative effect on Western academic study of the region:

‘Despite the historical absurdity and bewildering inaccuracy of most of [Said’s] statements about Orientalism and its role in Western history, his thesis has received not just wide acceptance but has become the enforced orthodoxy … Saidians now control appointments, promotions, publications and even book reviews with a degree of enforcement unknown in the Western universities since the eighteenth century … a state of great detriment to the state of scholarship in the field.’

And according to Halliday (2011:192), since the 1970s Orientalism has been used as a derogatory term linking study of the Middle East to ‘imperialism, racism and disdain for the people’ which has served to ‘divert the academic study of the Middle East away from substantive study.’ This claim by Halliday that Western academic study of the Middle East has been cowed by a fear of charges of orientalism is made more forcefully by Ibn Warraq (2007:18), who claims that:

‘the aggressive tone of Orientalism is what I have called ‘intellectual terrorism’, since it seeks to convince not by arguments or historical analysis, but by spraying charges of racism, imperialism, and Eurocentrism from a moral high ground.’
Indeed, overuse of the term ‘orientalist’ as a pejorative could in itself run the risk of falling into the same crude, simplistic generalisations that Said originally wrote his book to expose, although this time as a form of ‘Occidentalism’ (Diab, 2010).

The problematic nature of the term ‘Orientalism’, with its ideological and political overtones, could also be said to be reflected in the use of the term ‘Islamophobia’. For Halliday (2005:57), the term is a ‘misnomer’, claiming that current prejudice is aimed at Muslims as people and should therefore be labelled ‘anti-Muslimism’ rather than Islamophobia. For Ali (2006:xvii), the labeling of studies critical of Islam as ‘Islamophobic’ is patronizing and potentially racist, especially when it comes from:

‘Western intellectuals … who feel sorry for the Islamic World, which is not as powerful as the West … who feel superior and do not regard Muslims as equal discussion partners, but as the "Others" who should be shielded from criticism’.

As this study will be dealing with the opinions of native-speaker ELT professionals towards the culture of the Gulf, a culture that is undeniably influenced by Islam, and as some of these opinions will be critical, then there is the potential for some of them to be seen as ‘Islamophobic’ or ‘Orientalist’. However, recent theories on the complexity of cultural identity (Kramsch 1998; Holliday 1999 & 2011; Kubota & Lin 2008; Kumaravadivelu 2008) demonstrate that there is a need to move on from ‘the traditional approach to culture that narrowly associates cultural identity with national identity’ (Kumaravadivelu 2008:5). In the context of global ELT this should hold true both for students and their teachers, even when the latter hold a nationality with close historical links to colonialism and imperialism and current links to economic and military power.

Consequently, as native speaker ELT professionals, the participants in this study may have formed professional identities initially influenced by their upbringing and education in their homelands, including the Orientalist and Islamophobic discourses in Western Anglophone society. However, as experienced expatriates they will also have been exposed to ideologies from outside their Anglophonic homelands, both in their working lives and through their experiences living in foreign lands. In concert with this, they may have been subjected to the various ideologies that adhere to the field of global ELT and ideology is the subject of the next section.
2.3 – Defining Ideology

Ideology consists of ‘the set of beliefs characteristic of a social group or individual’ (Oxford Online Dictionary) or ‘the content of thinking characteristic of an individual, group, or culture’ (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary). Both definitions mention the individual nature of ideology, as well as its links to social groups or cultures. This individual nature is important because of the potentially sensitive nature of the terms that I am using to describe the individuals involved in this study. In a context where ‘native-speaker’, ‘Western’, English language ‘professionals’ teach ‘Gulf Arab/Muslim’ students, the ideological connotations that may adhere to these simplistic labels cannot help but invoke preconceptions and assumptions that may in no way reflect the lived reality of the individuals involved.

A second reason for highlighting the individual nature of ideology comes from the complexity of individual identity construction, a complexity which, according to Block (2010:338), is complicated further when it involves ‘movement across borders which are simultaneously geographical, historical, cultural and psychological’. Given the expatriate identities of the participants, care should be taken when making assumptions about any ‘ideologies’ they are assumed to hold based solely on their original countries of birth. However, this focus on the individual is not intended to deny the impact of ideology in the formation of group identity. For Holliday (2011:198), ideology is ‘a system of ideas which promote the interests of a particular group of people’ (my italics), so any individual identity may encompass ideologies that reflect not only the extent to which an individual considers him/herself as a member of a particular group, but also the extent to which they perceive the ideology associated with that group to be in their own self-interest. Therefore, as ‘native-speaker’ ELT ‘professionals’ the participants may adopt the ideologies associated with these labels to varying degrees according to the extent to which they see them to be in their own self-interest, be it professional, economic or social.

Although not mentioned in the dictionary definition I think it is important to state that ideology is also embedded in language. As Jackson & Stockwell (2011:195) point out, all language contains an underlying ideology and no text is neutral. Language is the main medium through which we present ourselves and position ourselves and ideology, therefore, could be said to inform all our thoughts, our actions and the very words we use.
2.4 – Ideology, Language & Culture

Brumfit (2001:56), claims that there are ‘two extreme views’ on the ideological nature of language itself;

‘in one, language is just a tool … [and is] morally neutral. In the other…language is inescapably tied up with culture; each word is resonant with the subtle tunes of a family, a tribe, a class, a nation.’

As an example of the latter view, Tsui & Tollefson (2002:2) state that:

‘language is not a purely technical tool; it is a cultural artefact created within specific sociocultural and historical contexts, and thus carries the characteristics of these contexts … the recognition and promotion of the importance of English by non-English speaking countries, often over and above their own languages, has profound implications for their national identities.’

This linking of a language to the culture (and the ideology) of its speakers could be said to stem from the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (1958), which states that the ‘structure of the language one habitually uses influences the manner in which one thinks and behaves’ (Kramsch 1998:14), or ‘language determines thought’ (Kumaravadivelu 2008:18). In the context of this study, this link between language and thought/behaviour as it specifically applies to the Muslim world is highlighted in the following quote from Kazmi (1997:1):

‘[i]t is often assumed that language is a neutral medium which does not contaminate the knowledge being communicated through it. Soon after being colonized, Muslims, however, realized that in fact language has a being that affects not only that which is being communicated through it but also the person(s) using the language.’

This commonly-held attitude that language may in some way act as a ‘contaminant’ to those who use it may explain the persistence of the censorial approach to ELT in the Gulf region (Findlow, 2001; Batarfi, 2005; Charise 2007; Baalawi 2009; Elyas, 2011); a language stripped of its perceived ‘offensive’ features may be seen as less likely to ‘contaminate’ those learning it.

Nevertheless, even this censored, ‘de-cultured’ form of the language may still be seen as potentially harmful. In Karmani’s (2011) study of perceptions of the socialising effect of
English-medium higher education amongst Emirati students, he reports that almost half the students he investigated agreed ‘that prolonged exposure to English induces Arab students to be more receptive to Western cultural values,’ a situation that he described as being ‘sharply at variance with the university’s Arab/Islamic values’ (p110-1). However, Karmani also claims that the threat that English is perceived to pose to students in the region in no way stems from the language itself, stating ‘there is nothing inherent in … the structure, phonology or morphology of English – or for that matter any language – that might potentially transform language learners in significant ways’ (p4).

Indeed, this direct linking of a specific language to behaviour and thought is now under attack on several fronts. From the field of cognitive psycholinguistics, reflecting on recent studies focussing on the mechanics of human thought and its links to language and behaviour, Pinker (1995:59) concludes that there is ‘no scientific evidence to suggest that language influences a speaker’s way of thought.’ And recent debates on the global spread of English (Jenkins, 2000; Widdowson, 2001; Seidlhofer, 2003) have resulted in what Byram & Feng (2004:158) describe as the:

‘reassessment and redefinition of many ‘common-sense’ perceptions and assumptions with respect to notions such as native speakers, standard languages, national identities, homogeneous target cultures, and a revisiting of the firmly-held belief that language and culture are inextricably bound together’.

The pluricentric nature of modern English could be said to have weakened the link between the ideologies and cultures of the language’s original speakers. The alleged link between ‘culture’ and language is further complicated by the fact that, as Hollliday (2011:1) points out, ‘culture … [is a] movable concept with fluid and negotiable boundaries’ and that, according to Kubota & Lin, (2009:5), ‘theories of culture are … employed by social groups to construct ideological imaginations both of themselves and others’ and these imaginations may lead to a situation where ‘cultural difference is conveniently used to differentiate, exclude, or privilege certain groups of people.’

This study covers a small section of the intersection of the Anglophone world and the Arab/Islamic world and their respective combinations of diverse cultures. Unfortunately, this is a relationship that is too often portrayed, on both sides, within the framework of Huntington’s (1997) ‘clash of civilizations’, where monolithic, essentialised views of ‘culture’ are used to demonize a foreign Other. However, as Wright (2011:8) points out, such
a simplistic view of civilizational schism ignores ‘an alternative truth …[that] even as the outside world tried to segregate Muslims as Others, particularly after 9/11, most Muslims were increasingly trying to integrate into, if not imitate, a globalizing world’. That said, as Elyas (2011:3) points out, in the classrooms of HEIs in the Gulf, ‘a clear distinction can [still] be made between opposing cultural forces which [may] … cause conflict in the … teaching and learning environment’.

This linking of language, culture and ideology is highlighted by Kramsch (1998:78), who states that ‘the spread of English is undeniable, and it is viewed by those who suffer from it as a totem for a certain Anglo-American ‘culture’ or way of life.’ This totemic view of English may be problematic in the countries of the Gulf, where, as Elyas (2011:30) points out:

‘[there are] theoretical debates on, and fears about, English as missionary language of imperialist, Judeo-Christian values … [and] this fear of ‘colonisation’, and consequent loss of local culture and values, is a major concern for many educators and Islamic scholars’.

However, this totemic view of English as the potential bearer of an undesirable Anglo-American culture could also be said to be in conflict with the corresponding instrumental role of English as the lingua franca in the Gulf, the ‘link language when speaking to or between the large contingents of immigrant workers in the region’ (Charise, 2007:7). This instrumental role is one that has been encouraged across the region by governmental implementation of institutional language policies increasing the use of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) (Mouhanna 2010; Karmani, 2011) throughout the education sector, a move that has been strongly attributed to the need to facilitate communication in the wake of the influx of non-Arabic-speaking workers into the countries of the Gulf (Findlow, 2006).

The debate about the extent to which any specific language is in itself a carrier of ideology and can affect the thoughts of those who use it will doubtless continue. However, for Karmani (2011:4), the ideological impact of English comes not from the language, but from its teaching:

‘the underlying beliefs, values, ideals, norms, principles and assumptions in which English-language education – like any other system of education – is ideologically and culturally embedded. … The transformative capacity of English
And this linking of ideology with ELT provides the subject of my next section.

2.5 – Ideology and ELT
For the participants in this study the ideological aspect of their work may be made apparent by the need to employ a censorial approach to their language teaching. As Kumaravevelu (2008:192) points out;

‘[the language] classroom is the crucible where the prime elements of education – ideas and ideologies, policies and plans, materials and methods, teachers and the taught – all mix together to produce exclusive and at times explosive environments that might help or hinder the creation or utilization of learning opportunities.’

For those working in the potentially ‘explosive’ environment of the classrooms of Arabia, the need to censor reflects the fact that, as Rich and Troudi (2006:615) point out, ‘TESOL classrooms are embedded in and thereby seen to reflect important institutional, societal, and global discourses in subtle and nuanced ways … the practice of TESOL is neither value-free nor apolitical.’ An ability to recognise the existence of, and negotiate the complexities of the various ideological forces impacting upon ELT in the Gulf could therefore be considered an important component of the practice of ELT in the region. With this in mind, I now turn to a discussion of how the ideological aspects of ELT are portrayed in the literature.

2.5.1 – Ideology, ELT & Philosophy
According to Crookes (2009:43), the dominant traditions in the field of ELT originated in modernism, defined by Holliday (2011:198) as ‘a perception of social reality which can be explained in neutral rational terms.’ This ‘neutral’ nature of modernism as it relates to ELT has been perceived as problematic. For Crookes (2009:43), it has led to a situation in which ‘our field has been bedevilled by ahistorical, decontextualised presentations of ‘Methods’’. Indeed, for teachers trained in such ‘methods’, their problematic nature when taken into
contexts outside of the multilingual classes in L1 countries for which they were designed may soon become apparent.

In the context of this study, however, a more serious problem arising from the supposed ‘neutrality’ of ELT comes from what Holliday & Aboshiha (2009:669) describe as a ‘denial of ideology’ in the dominant discourses of ELT, stemming from ‘perceptions of objectivity and accountability in the dominant modernist research paradigm’ and apparently ‘neutral’ ‘descriptions of other cultures, under the headings of individualism and collectivism’. This denial of ideology was also highlighted by Phillipson (1992:67), who claimed that ‘a major weakness of ELT professionalism is that it construes ELT as non-political, and falsely assumes that educational concerns can be divorced from social, political, and economic realities’. However, in the ELT classrooms of HEIs in the Gulf I would argue that there is not so much a ‘denial’ of ideology as an attempted avoidance of it, with varying degrees of success.

Although ELT may be based in modernist, objectivist traditions, it does not necessarily follow that ELT practitioners will automatically adhere to these traditions. As Richards (2003:34-5) points out, teachers may hold beliefs ranging from the traditional objectivist, positivist view of ELT to a more subjective, relativist view, which highlights the individual nature of ideology and the complexity of individual identities. As expatriate native speaker ELT professionals, the participants in this study may have been exposed not only to the dominant philosophical discourses of their profession and their homelands, but also to the potentially different philosophies that characterise the foreign societies in which they have lived.

Moreover, as Canagarajah (2006:28) points out, the previous dominance of modernism in the discourses of ELT has been challenged by:

‘a major philosophical change that characterizes our social context. Our quest for objective, absolute, universal knowledge has been shaken by the questioning of Enlightenment thinking and modernist science. Our faith in certitude died when the positivist view of a rational, closed universe was called into doubt. As a result of this epistemological change, we now have a plethora of theoretical positions and philosophical assumptions shaping research and teaching. The debates between the positivists and relativists … [highlight] the dilemmas in all … pedagogical domains.’
In the case of the societies from which the participants hail, it could be argued that Canagarajah’s ‘death of the faith in certitude’ extends far beyond the academy and that society itself is informed by philosophies which will include not only modernism, with its emphasis on the rational and the scientifically observable, but also by philosophies such as post-modernism, feminism and post-colonialism. Additionally, as Kumaravadivelu (2008:165) points out, Western philosophy is not limited to a simplistic objectivist-modernist / subjectivist-relativist-post-modernist dichotomy as ‘between the modernist position that undervalues the agency of the individual and the postmodern stance that overvalues it’ lies a realist acceptance of the individual construction of identity mediated by social conventions.

So, although ELT may have its roots in the modernist tradition, and although it may have been characterised in the literature as ‘clinging to positivistic ideals of neutrality’ (Kabel, 2009:14), for at least the past twenty years ELT has also been increasingly informed by works with their roots in post modernism, emanating from field of critical applied linguistics.

2.5.2 – Ideology, ELT & Critical Applied Linguistics

One of the major writers on critical applied linguistics has been Pennycook (2001:10), who described it thus:

‘Critical applied linguistics involves a constant skepticism, a constant questioning of the normative assumptions of applied linguistics. It demands a restive problematization of the givens of applied linguistics and presents a way of doing applied linguistics that seeks to connect it to questions of gender, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, culture, identity, politics, ideology, and discourse. And crucially, it becomes a dynamic opening up of new questions that emerge from this conjunction.’

Pennycook stresses the need for a constant skepticism about and questioning of what he calls the ‘normative assumptions’ of applied linguistics and calls for recognition of the ideological aspects of ELT. For Kabel (2009:14), these assumptions are characterized by:

‘deep-seated misconceptions about (if not outright dismissal of) the complex political and ethical implications of language practices, a clinging to positivistic ideals of neutrality and a prioritization of efficiency and applicability … [leading
to] a perpetuation of the systems of inequality and domination that characterize applied linguistics and TESOL institutional practices.’

Indeed, much of the work of critical applied linguistics is tied to issues of power, with various writers challenging what they see as the ‘domination’ of both ELT and Applied Linguistics by powerful forces, usually (and paradoxically often representing both critics and the criticised) forces consisting of middle-aged, white, Anglo-Saxon males. Pennycook (2010:16.4) has recently further highlighted the role of the ‘critical’ in challenging those perceived to be in a position of power:

‘From the humanist challenge to the centrality of religious thought, Freud’s unravelling of the hidden workings of the mind, or Marx’s insistence that history and change had to do with the masses rather than the bourgeoisie, to the feminist challenge to man’s assumptions of centrality, the postcolonial challenge to Europe and European history, the fights against white privilege, or the struggle against heteronormativity, critical work has always sought to challenge an assumed centre, where power and privilege lie, and to rework both the politics and the language that sustain them.’

However, it could also be argued that the increasing number of critical studies challenging the ‘centre’ of traditional applied linguistics by highlighting the various ideological forces at play in ELT, although perhaps slow to filter through to the practitioners of ELT, have lessened the hold of modernist, positivist ideals of neutrality in the field of applied linguistics, perhaps moving the ‘critical’ to the centre. Indeed, as Pennycook (2010:16.1) has recently claimed:

‘although critical discourse analysis and critical literacy still make claims to a territory different from their ‘non-critical’ counterparts, much of this work has become conventional and moribund. The use of the term ‘critical’ (with its problematic claims and divisions) has perhaps reached saturation level.’

This, combined with what Canagarajah (2006:10) describes as ‘the new movements of globalization, digital communication, and World Englishes’, could also be said to have further complicated the political and ethical implications of language practices and its practitioners’ assumptions about the ideological impact of their work.
Indeed, since the 1990s critical studies have impacted upon many domains of applied linguistics, including approaches to language policy (Phillipson, 1992; Ricento, 2000, 2006), discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995; Kumaravadivelu, 1999), literacy (Luke & Freebody, 1997; Morgan & Ramanathan, 2005), approaches and pedagogy (Morgan, 1998; Canagarajah, 1999; Norton, 2000; Norton & Toohey (Eds) 2004), English for academic purposes (EAP) and testing (Benesch, 2001; Shohamy, 2001; Jenkins, 2006) and culture, globalization, multiculturalism, race, gender & identity (Holliday, 1999, 2005 & 2011; Kubota, 2004; Kubota & Lin (Eds), 2008; Kumaravadivelu, 2008). Furthermore, the context of this study, HEIs in the UAE and the wider Gulf region, has also been the site of increasing critical study into the political and ethical implications of ELT (see e.g. Findlow, 2001, 2006; Syed, 2003; Karmani, 2005, 2011; Mohd-Asraf, 2005; Sonleitner & Khelifa, 2005; Charise, 2007; Jendli, Troudi & Coombe (Eds), 2007; Picard, 2007; Bahumaid, 2008; Baalawi, 2009; Mouhanna, 2010; Raza, 2010; Al-Issa & Dahan (Eds), 2011; Elyas, 2011).

However, one of the problematic claims of critical studies is highlighted by Tollefson (2002:4), who states that as well as emphasizing the relationships among language, power, and inequality, which are held to be central concepts for understanding language and society, critical linguists are also supposed to be ‘social activists … responsible not only for understanding how dominant social groups use language for establishing and maintaining social hierarchies, but also for investigating ways to alter those hierarchies.’ This ‘social activist’ role of critical applied linguistics is called into question by Kaplan (2008:295), who argues that the ideology that underlies the activism of the critical researcher may seriously compromise the research ‘by carefully selecting and interpreting whatever linguistic features suit their ideological position and simply ignoring the rest’, and asks whether ‘the theory [in critical studies is intended] … to represent a movement toward a just politics or toward just a politics’. Given that this study deals with ELT professionals working in the UAE, a section of the ELT community with ‘absolutely no job security’ (Mercer, 2007:274) for whom any involvement in activism is strongly discouraged, this study is therefore not intended as a call for activism, but rather ‘stays nearer to the analytical field of the spectrum than the interventionist’ (Edge, 2006:xiv).

Additionally, as Kabel (2009:13-4) points out, ‘the current dominant applied linguistics is a product of Western epistemological and philosophical ideologies. And consonant with most Western disciplinary traditions, it lays claim to universal validity and applicability, thus denying its very historicity and particularity.’ Although Kabel is referring to ‘traditional’
positivist applied linguistics, it could be argued that a location within Western philosophical ideologies could equally apply to ‘critical’ applied linguistics. I therefore consider it necessary to highlight the importance of context, recognising that context is a highly complex phenomena ‘constructed by people through interaction with the affordances that they themselves create in their environment’ (Edge, 2006:xviii). In doing so, it is recognising the need for ‘local situatedness’ (Canagarajah, 2006:10) in research and the contextual nature of international ELT (Bax, 2003; Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2004). Therefore, any ‘critical’ study which highlights the ideological and political ramifications of ELT needs to be carefully contextualised. To that end, this study will follow Sim and van Loon’s (2001) “synthetic or magpie approach” that calls for individualizing and problematizing how critical theories are applied in specific contexts.

To further investigate how the ideological implications of ELT are debated in the literature I now turn to a discussion of how historical, political and economic forces have been portrayed as impacting upon the field.

2.5.3 – Ideology, ELT & History, Economics and Politics
The 1992 publication of Phillipson’s Linguistic Imperialism, regarded as one of the founding texts of critical applied linguistics, could be said to indicate part of the shift in Western academia’s attitude in response to the arrival of Said’s Orientalism fourteen years earlier. In the introduction, Phillipson pointed out that the connections between the English language and political, economic and military power were seldom pursued – an omission that he, and many writers since, have proceeded to fill.

Kubota and Lin (2006:644) state that ‘Phillipson contextualized his linguistic imperialism theory in a postimperial world where political and economic domination is exercised by multinationals and nongovernmental organizations.’ Phillipson’s highlighting of the ideological role of international ELT, and the subsequent development of associated fields such as critical pedagogy, critical discourse analysis and intercultural communication by writers such as Kachru (1992), Pennycook (1994), Fairclough (1995), Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), Holliday, Hyde & Kullman (2004), Kumaravadivelu (2007), Kubota & Lin (2008) and Holliday (2005, 2011), could be said to indicate a significant change in the academic perception of the profession and its role in the world. Just as the work developing a communicative approach to language teaching brought ELT out of its ‘educational vacuum’
in the 1980s (Prodromou, 1992), it could be said that the work of Phillipson and subsequent writers highlighted the ideological vacuum that had surrounded ELT.

Phillipson exposed the connection between the historical spread of English through a process of conquest and colonisation and the continued spread of English in the post-colonial era, with the replacement of the global power of Britain by the global economic and military power of the United States. For critical applied linguists, physical occupation had been accompanied by the imposition of new mental structures through English which resulted in a linguistic, cultural, and economic imperialism in the form of a relentlessly expanding multinational free enterprise system and its corporate culture (Kachru, 1993; Pennycook, 1995; Phillipson, 1992). The power of English as a dominant world language was, according to Phillipson (1992:47) ‘asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages.’

An important part of maintaining these inequalities has, according to Skutnabb-Kangas (2000:xi), been the careful cultivation of the English language’s image. She claims that:

‘English [is]…presented as better adapted to meet the needs of ‘modern’, technologically developed, democratic post-industrial information-driven societies – and this is what a substantial part of ESL ideology is about. English tends to be projected as the language of modernity, science & technology, success, national ‘unity’, democracy and other such positive features.’

This ideological projection of the English language leads to a situation which, Skutnabb-Kangas (2008) later claimed, results in a ‘crime against humanity’ whereby the prioritisation of English over other languages leads to a state of ‘linguistic genocide’. This concept of English being projected as the language of modernity, etc. corresponds with Holliday’s (2011:198) concept of ideology promoting the interests of a specific group, in this case ELT practitioners.

The events of September 11th 2001 and its aftermath focused greater attention on the ideological role of ELT worldwide, with writers such as Edge (2003b, 2006 (Ed)), Hadley (2004), Karmani (2005) Qing and Wolff (2005) and Pennycook & Makoni (2005) looking closely at the political, economic, military, cultural and even religious ideologies they perceived to underpin the global spread of English. The invasion of Iraq marked what Edge (2003b:703) described as ‘a watershed’ in which the three main providers of ELT worldwide
(the USA, the UK & Australia) became the main protagonists in an overt military imposition of will which, he claimed, threatened to fundamentally recast the role of English language teachers worldwide, resulting in their becoming a ‘second wave of imperial troopers’ following on behind the soldiers to linguistically conquer a people who had already been beaten militarily. Holborow (2006) describes this as pushing the debate over ELT ‘beyond linguistic or sociolinguistic interpretations into the broader social and political arena,’ forcing ELT practitioners ‘out of the shadows of nonalignment into the glare of war.’

However, if one follows Pennycook’s (2001) call for a ‘restive problematization’ of the givens of applied linguistics, including critical applied linguistics, it could be argued that many critical studies of ELT reflect the authors’ own political views and fail to acknowledge the agency of the, perhaps, billions of English language students around the world, an issue I discuss in more detail in Section 2.7.2. For example, Qiang and Wolff (2005:56) claim that linguistic imperialism is imposed on both a local and a global scale by ‘the Judeo-Christian religious concepts of justice and social order … [t]he EU, NAFTA, the WTO, NATO, the World Bank, the IMF, and even the UN itself, … [which] are all predicated upon Western legal concepts that have evolved from British Common Law.’ Phillipson (2001:187) links ELT to ‘aggressive casino capitalism, economic restructuring, McDonaldisation and militarisation on all continents’ while Edge (2003:703) sees English ‘facilitating multinational globalisation’. For Pennycook & Coutrand-Marin, (2003:18), ELT is part of a ‘package of English, Christianity, neoliberalism and wealth … [with] insidious implications’ while Qiang & Wolff (2005:60) describe it as ‘a modern-day Trojan Horse, filled with EFL teachers cum soldiers cum missionaries, armed with words rather than bullets, but intent nonetheless on re-colonizing the world and re-making it in the image of Western democracy’. ELT is also seen as being accompanied by the English class system which, according to Prey (2005:28), ‘serves to create a parallel world that is politically and economically transnational in orientation, serving to link up the upper-classes across borders while at the same time fundamentally reorganising social class at the national level.’

This linking of ELT with the ‘evils’ of capitalism, neo-liberalism, neo-colonialism, Western democracy, globalisation, Judeo-Christianity and Western concepts of justice may also result in the labelling of native-speaker ELT practitioners as soldiers, missionaries or, as Kabel (2009:20) describes them, a ‘Kafkaesque mélange of Imperial Troopers, Servants of the Lord and Robinson Crusoes’. Such labelling could be said not only to fail to recognize the complexity and diversity of the many individuals teaching English around the world but also
present a portrayal of English students as passive and unsuspecting pawns at the mercy of unscrupulous puppet-masters. As the findings show, the ideological implications of their work do affect the working lives of the respondents in this study, although how they choose to deal with such matters may vary greatly from individual to individual, depending upon their own beliefs.

However, an area which could be said to have an even greater impact upon the working lives of the respondents in this study is the subject of my final section on ideology and ELT: the issue of religion.

2.5.4 – Ideology, ELT & Religion

For the native-speaker ELT professional arriving in the Arabian Gulf for the first time, the presence of religion is an immediate and palpable phenomenon. As Baalawi (2009:77) points out, in Gulf education ‘Islamic influences are evident in several important ways, all of which may lead to conceptions of teaching and learning different from those prevalent in Western universities and colleges, thereby implying different educational values and practices.’ From the appearance of the students to the organisation of the day around the five daily prayers, the calls for which are broadcast over loudspeakers affixed to the minarets of the region’s mosques, and the performance of which may occur on unrolled prayer mats at the back of the classroom, there can be no doubt that one is now working in an Islamic country. Newly-arrived English teachers will probably also swiftly gain familiarity with religiously-loaded phrases and expressions from their students such as inshallah (If God wills it), mashallah (God has willed it) or hamdallah (Thank God) (Abu-Wardeh, 2003). The reorganisation of the timetable and difference in the performance of fasting students during the holy month of Ramadan, the restrictions on familiar foods and alcohol, the importance of learning appropriate cultural behaviour as well as the need to censor the materials one uses and self-censor one’s own words and actions to prevent any potential offence to local religious values could all be said to underline the impact of religion on the working lives of ELT professionals in the region.

However, the issue of religion and its impact upon ELT is one that has received very little attention in the literature, perhaps because, as Widdowson (2001:14) points out, ‘belief is fraught with problematic implications,’ implications that few academics seem willing to deal with. According to Varghase & Johnson (2007:7) ‘the Routledge Encyclopedia of Language
Teaching and Learning contains no mention whatsoever of religion’ and the few studies that cover the subject tend to be critical studies highlighting the phenomenon of English as a Missionary Language (EML). In one such study, Pennycook & Coutand-Marin (2003:29) claimed that ELT professionals’ attitudes towards the religious and moral issues associated with ELT could be divided into ‘a critical left that believes in its own political rectitude, a religious right that believes in its own god-given agenda, and a large liberal middle that erroneously believes that all of this can be kept out of the classroom’. This ‘large liberal middle’, or the ‘liberal agnostic’ (Pennycook & Makoni, 2005) position that sees no position for religion in the classroom, would seem to reflect a majority, both amongst ELT practitioners and in academia and indeed, as the findings will show, amongst the respondents in this study.

Despite this seemingly mainstream aversion to the issue of religion, it is that actions of the small minority who follow the ‘Christian Evangelical Approach’ to ELT (Pennycook & Makoni, 2005:239) – using the bait of English language education as ‘a lure to bring nonbelievers into missionary clutches’ – that has potentially serious ramifications for the profession, especially for its practitioners working in the Muslim world, as shown by the recent killings of American teachers Jeremiah Small and Joel Shrun, working in northern Iraq (Dagher & Nabber, 2012) and Yemen (Ghobari, 2012) respectively, with both murders subsequently related to allegations of Christian proselytising. As Vargese & Johnson (2007:6) point out;

‘the potential use of ELT as a platform for missionary work is a matter that should be of interest to the whole profession, raising as it does profound moral questions about the professional activities and purposes of teachers and organizations in our occupation.’

Such profound moral questions should include a consideration of how both English and ELT practitioners are perceived as a result of Christian missionary work. According to Argungu (1996:332), this has resulted in an attitude of ‘defensive suspicion towards the [English] language in the Muslim world’ with discourses that perceive the growth of English as a ‘de-Islamising agent’ (Argungu, 1996:331; Mokhtarnia, 2011:100). The historical and continuing appropriation of English as a missionary language gives it what Charise (2007:10) describes as ‘an ideological burden which cannot be dismissed as benign nor regarded as any less palpable than the explicit religiosity of Arabic in the Islamic context.’
However, despite the current small-scale continuation of Christian Evangelical ELT and the perceptions by some in the Muslim world of English and English teachers being a threat to Islam, the situation could be said to be much more complex. Just as English is seen by some writers as having severed its links to the cultures of its native speakers in the process of becoming a world language (Jenkins, 2006a), a process that has included the instrumental adoption of English as a lingua franca in the Gulf, so its assumed links to Christianity could be said to face a challenge by the growth of a new phenomenon: Islamic English, a subject I will cover in Section 3.4.2.

So, it could be said that for the non-Muslim, native-speaker ELT professionals working in HEIs in the UAE who follow the ‘liberal agnostic’ approach, there is an aversion to the discussion of religion in the classroom. However, this aversion may stem not only from the teachers’ own beliefs about the appropriacy of religious discussion in ELT classrooms, but also from their response to the desires of governments and Ministries of Education (Gray, 2000:275), management and even the students in the region (Findlow, 2001; Nazzal, 2006), from whom there tends to be an expectation that some form of censorial approach should apply to ELT, an approach to ensure the avoidance of subjects deemed ‘un-Islamic’. As will be discussed in Section 3.4, and as the findings show, even for teachers who do not follow the ‘liberal agnostic’ approach, religion remains for most a taboo subject in the English language classroom.

2.6 – Ideology: A Summary

In a study such as this, looking at the intersection of individuals from differing backgrounds, faiths and beliefs, an understanding of the actions and statements of those involved can only be improved by an understanding of the contrasting and, at times, conflicting ideologies to which those individuals are exposed. For the participants of this study, these ideologies may include what Ibn Warraq (2008:1) describes as ‘general Western concepts of rationalism, self-criticism, the disinterested search for truth, the separation of church and state, the rule of law and equality under the law, freedom of thought and expression, human rights, and liberal democracy’ yet also include an ability ‘to look at its foibles and laugh, to make fun of its fundamental principles’. Indeed, the ideologies of self-criticism and the struggle for equality, enabled by freedom of expression, are particularly apparent in the writings of critical applied linguists, involving as they do a restless problematization of the
givens of ELT. In addition, the ability to laugh and make fun of fundamental principles is highlighted in Chapter 9 which looks at the role of humour in the lives of the participants.

As native speaker ELT professionals, therefore, our lives may have been affected by the dominant ideologies of the societies where we grew up and the ideologies underpinning the educational systems where we studied and trained to be language teachers. As such, the formation of our personal and professional identities may, to a certain extent, have been informed by the dominant discourses in these native ideologies. However, unlike the native speaker ELT professionals who remain in their homelands, who may often provide the resource for studies into the ‘native speaker’ by academics also based in the Anglophone world, the majority of the participants of this study are those who, like the researcher, started their teaching profession and developed their teaching skills and identities in divergent foreign contexts, where they may have been exposed to foreign ideologies quite separate from those of their native speaking homelands. Therefore, it is suggested that any portrayal of the native speaker English teacher also takes into account the complexity and diversity of these foreign ideologies and the impact the expatriate experience may have upon the professionalism, identities and discourses of the native speaker.

2.7 – Professional Identity & the Myths of the Native-Speaker in ELT

Having discussed the extent to which various ideologies can be seen as impacting upon the practices and discourses of ELT, I now turn to a discussion of professionalism, identity and the portrayal of the native speaker English language teacher. Throughout this study I refer to the participants as ‘native-speaker’ ELT ‘professionals’ but both labels may be problematic. Although often described in the literature, native speaker ELT professionals’ own views on their identity and professionalism have not received much coverage. As Aboshiha (2007:60) points out, the paucity of research in into this area makes it appear that ‘there has been an assumption that there is little to investigate with regard to how the ‘native speaker’ teacher of the English language views his/her professional identity.’ This lack of investigation, according to Aboshiha, reinforces the native speaker as the ‘default position of ELT’ – a position which may lead to them being both imagined and implicated in essentialising discourses. In the literature, therefore, the native-speaker English teacher is often discussed, described and, at times, demonized, but seldom seems to be heard. It could be said that
alongside the ‘myth of the native speaker’ as having ‘face validity as a naturally superior language teacher’ (Alptekin, 1993:138), lie other, equally damaging myths.

Indeed, in a recent study focussing on how the professional identity of native speaker teachers may be shaped, both by their own experiences teaching overseas and by the way they are represented in the dominant discourses of TESOL, Breckenridge (2010:226) highlights the problematic nature of these unchallenged and essentialising representations:

‘Like a skip in a record, the representations keep repeating. The native speaker of English will always be found lacking: their public professional identity stagnated by lack of recognition for their informal and formal professional development and their own sense of professionalism suffering from their challenges not being recognized. Concept; Oppressor; Foreigner – as long as these representations exist so will the divisive focus on the native/non-native dichotomy that limits the potential contribution of native speakers who were educated in critical, post-colonial classrooms.’

These limitations on the contribution of native speaker ELT practitioners to the dominant discourses of TESOL is further highlighted both by Crookes (1997:96), who points out that ‘the words of teachers rarely appear in academic journals related to teaching or learning - a conspicuous silence with obvious implications’, and by Johnson & Golombek (2002:1), who claim that ‘[t]eachers have been viewed as objects of study rather than as knowing professionals or agents of change.’ Having described the participants as ELT ‘professionals’, I therefore feel it is appropriate to discuss the literature on professionalism in ELT.

2.7.1 – Professionalism in ELT

My decision to describe the participants of this study as ‘ELT professionals’ was taken because I considered that their qualifications and experience could be said to represent a commitment to their chosen profession. However, according to Oder (2008), the concept of ELT teacher professionalism is not easy to define and is constantly changing.

Leung (2009) stated that ELT professionalism can be divided into two distinct, and sometimes conflicting, forms. The first is sponsored professionalism, referring to institutionally endorsed and publically heralded definitions such as recognised qualifications and the expected knowledge and experience of teachers. The second is independent
professionalism, referring to how teachers contextualise their professionalism in light of experience. For Leung, independent professionalism entails engaging in reflexive practice, with ‘a commitment to careful and critical examination of the assumptions and practices embedded in sponsored professionalism with reference to discipline-based knowledge and wider social values’ (p53). This discipline-based knowledge stems not only from ELT practitioners’ potential exposure to research-based theoretical knowledge in their initial training and subsequent professional development, but also from the ensuing interactions of this theoretical knowledge with the reality of their own personal teaching experiences.

Leung’s conceptualisation highlights the importance of knowledge to the formation of ELT professionalism, starting with the theoretical knowledge (if any) gained during training, sometimes defined as received or propositional knowledge (Stuart et al, 2009), which could be seen as underpinning the requirements of sponsored professionalism. According to Raza (2010:28), this formal type of knowledge is produced mainly by university researchers, generally originates from academic institutions and policy makers, is mainly taught, is frequently accepted uncritically and is perceived to have higher status than the practical knowledge generated by teachers in their teaching contexts.

However, it could be argued that to conceptualise ELT professionalism primarily upon a teacher’s level of propositional knowledge ignores both the complexity of teacher knowledge and the reality of teachers’ lives. As Akbari (2008:649) points out, while ‘the academic world has the luxury of theorizing, language teachers have to deal with the day-to-day necessity of meeting deadlines and worrying about the pass/fail of their students as a measure of their teaching efficiency’ – and it is this day-to-day experience that could be said to be a major source both of ELT teacher knowledge but also of their sense of professionalism. The literature on non-propositional, or independent, forms of teacher knowledge tends to categorise it as a combination of individual knowledge, practical (experiential) and local (situational) knowledge (Raza, 2010:28).

The resultant complexity of teacher knowledge is highlighted by Aboshiha (2007:48), who points out that ‘[t]eacher knowledge, rather than something which is codified is normally that which is tacit and hard to articulate and in a dialectical relationship with the teachers’ world of practice.’ However, in the context of this study, as Baalawi (2009:77) points out, English-medium HEIs in the UAE tend to conceptualise ELT professionalism within the ‘corporate management model’, with standardised criteria in the form of probationary periods for new
hires, regular student feedback surveys on teacher performance, recurrent supervisor observations, a demand for extensive paperwork and record keeping on all courses taught and annual, or semi-annual, personal evaluation interviews. This corporate model of professionalism even extends to the dress code, with all faculty expected to wear ties (for men) and smart ‘business’ attire.

However, according to Golombek (2009:159), the focus on supposedly objective and codified criteria for evaluating professionalism inherent in the corporate model undervalues the importance of teachers’ personal practical knowledge (PPK), a major component of independent professionalism built up over years of experience in the classroom, reflecting the teacher’s prior knowledge and acknowledging its contextual nature. Indeed, as revealed in the study by Baalawi (2009:50-1), the corporate management model of HEIs in the UAE is perceived as problematic, leading to excessive managerialism which, with its focus on ‘objective’, codified accountability, can lead to increased administrative work for teachers, leading in turn to a reduction of time available for lesson preparation or marking, a lack of collegiality, an increase in teacher burnout and perceptions that the teachers’ own personal experience and knowledge is being unrecognised.

For the participants of this study, who had worked in an average of five different countries before coming to the UAE and had an average of twenty-two years in ELT, this personal experience and knowledge could be said to be quite considerable and gained in a wide variety of educational contexts. According to Leung (2009), teachers informed by independent professionalism will be receptive to alternative perspectives on routinized practice, and they will seek to update and modify their knowledge and work in ways that are consistent with their developing views. As the findings show, this ability to reflect on one’s own practice and beliefs and adapt them to suit local pedagogical conditions and wider social values is perceived as a vital component of ELT professionalism in the UAE, and failure to do so may become the source of conflict. As Leung (2009:55) concludes:

‘as ELT teachers work in very diverse social and political circumstance in all parts of the world and have to deal with potentially very different education and professional environments … they need to know how to develop both sponsored and independent professionalism.’
This need for a combination of external and internal professionalism, merging the orthodox knowledge of ELT experts with the locally, experientially and independently-informed knowledge of ELT practitioners is highlighted by Canagarajah (2006:27), who states:

‘[ELT] … needs to be conducted with multilateral participation. Teachers in different communities have to devise curricula and pedagogies that have local relevance. Teaching materials have to accommodate the values and needs of diverse settings, with sufficient complexity granted to local knowledge … Orthodoxy can’t be defined one-sidedly by experts from centres of scholarship and research, divorced from pedagogical ground conditions, but must be decided in negotiation with practitioner knowledge in actual settings.’

Therefore, any investigation into how a group of ELT professionals conceptualise their professionalism in a specific context necessitates an understanding of their personal professional knowledge which, as Golombek (2009:156) points out, is experiential, situational, dynamic and storied, coming from situations and the stories retold about them through reflection, which Connelly and Clandinin (1999:4) as stories to live by – stories which provide a narrative thread that teachers draw on to make sense of their experience and themselves. According to Beijaard et al. (2004:121), it is through this process of storytelling that ‘teachers engage in narrative ‘theorizing’ … [through which they] may further discover and shape their professional identity resulting in new or different stories.’

Given the nature of the English language classrooms of HEIs in the UAE, the stories that the respondents tell and share about how they negotiate the complexities of their working lives could be said to be an important component of how they construct their professionalism in this particular context. Therefore, the question of how the participants, faced as they are with the sometimes incompatible demands of ‘corporate-model’ sponsored professionalism, their own independent professionalism gained in a wide variety of separate contexts worldwide, and the expectations and values of local society, attempt to negotiate the complexities and possible conflicts of their working lives to construct their own professionalism is explored through the stories they tell.

However, a challenge to the concept of ELT professionalism comes from uncertainty about the definition of professionalism itself. According to Mann (2005), the term ‘professional’ carries with it the still open-to-question claim of teaching as a proper profession, and this uncertainty seems to translate into perceptions of low status among native-speaker ELT
practitioners, especially those working in their homelands. Borg (2006) states that language teachers often have lower status than teachers of other subjects and in a study by Anderson (2003) into the dominant discourses of British EFL, it was revealed that native speaker teachers working in Britain demonstrated a sense of inferiority and unease, tended to criticise their profession as a whole, and provided substantial evidence of their own low status. Furthermore, Kubota, in an e-mail interview with Holliday (2005:27), illustrates the low status of a group of native speaker English language teachers in the USA and suggests that ‘ESOL educators inside of the English-speaking West... are pretty much marginalized in their own context.’

This perceived lack of status may stem in part from the fact that, as Aboshiha (2007:70) points out, according to their portrayal in academic literature:

‘ELT teachers have poor pay, are usually and mainly a transient work-force, frequently only employed part-time, suffer from a lack of status in the public’s view, especially as they are often little or under qualified or, indeed, have no qualifications.’

So it could be said that in the literature the native-speaker English teacher, especially those working in their homelands, may be constructed as rather a pathetic and unprofessional figure: marginalized, under-qualified, underpaid, transient, ignorant of the political implications of their own work and with an elevated sense of their own inferiority. And given that the majority of academics whose voices contribute to the dominant discourses of ELT are also based in the major Anglophone nations, perhaps it is unsurprising that their depictions of the native-speaker English language teacher have produced this less-than-flattering picture. However, perhaps similar to other native-speaker teachers who work outside of their homelands, the respondents in this study could be said to be better-paid, better-qualified, less transient and more ‘professional’ than the stereotypical ‘native-speaker English teacher’ described in the literature. As such, and considering both the stringent requirements regarding qualifications and experience usually expected from those working in ELT in federal HEIs in the UAE and the financial rewards such employment may offer, the professional identities of the respondents in this study could be said to represent an aspect of the ‘native-speaker English teacher’ not often covered in the literature, and it is the subject of professional identity in ELT which I now discuss in the following section.
2.7.2 – Professional Identity in ELT

According to Holliday (2007:xi), qualitative researchers require a ‘postmodern awareness of who the people are that we are daring to research, who we are to be researchers, and on what basis we can begin to understand what is going on between us.’ Such awareness would entail an understanding of identity, yet any attempt to define identity soon reveals the complexity that lies behind the word. As Miller (2009:174) points out in her analysis of how identity is defined in the literature on ELT, identity can be viewed as ‘relational, negotiated, constructed, enacted, transformed and transitional’ and discourse is seen as playing a central role in identity processes. So, who am I, or who I think I am, could be said to depend very much on where I am, who I am talking to, what we are talking about, how I wish the other person to perceive me and what we perceive the purpose of our conversation to be. Identity is therefore a complex matter, involving as it does issues as disparate as nationality, language, region, culture, class, family, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, appearance, size, race, religious and political beliefs, values, profession, skills, interests, social affiliations and life experiences.

As Cowrie and Sakai (2012:129) point out, ‘identity, from a poststructuralist perspective, is viewed as having a large number of components and aspects—it is multiple, conflicting, ever-changing, and created both by individuals and by the society they live in.’ They also adopt Giddens’s (1991) view of identity as an on-going life narrative in which individuals constantly reconcile their self with the past, present, and future and claim that individual identity formation also takes place within social structures. This reflects the “communities of practice” approach (Lave & Wenger, 1991:98) in which teacher learning occurs through a sharing of understandings about what they do and what this means within a teaching community. Lea (2005:183) describes Lave & Wenger’s approach as focussing ‘upon the way in which knowledge is socially constructed and negotiated through participation in communities of practice’ while Richards (2011:25) describes a ‘community of practice’ as having the following characteristics:

1. It involves a group of people who have common interests and who relate and interact to achieve shared goals.

2. It focuses on exploring and resolving issues related to the workplace practices that members of the community take part in.
However, Varghese et al. (2005:29) state that learning to be a teacher involves a process of identity formation in which different teachers have ‘different ways of being and engaging’. In other words, teacher knowledge can be understood and expressed by teachers in many different ways as a result of differing identity development. Indeed, as Wenger (1998:168) points out:

‘We not only produce our identities through the practices we engage in, but we also define ourselves through the practices we do not engage in. Our identities are constituted not only by what we are but also by what we are not. To the extent that we can come in contact with other ways of being, what we are not can even become a large part of how we define ourselves.’

As the findings will show, given that the average age of the participants in this study is 47 and their average experience in ELT is 22 years in a wide variety of contexts, it is hardly surprising that they evidence a multiplicity of professional identities when encountering the specific context of HEIs in the UAE, both engaging in and resisting the ‘communities of practice’ found there. As experienced ELT professionals, their professional identities will have been influenced both by their initial and subsequent teacher training and by the varied contexts in which they had been teaching before arriving in the Gulf. This study, therefore, is concerned with the extent to which they are able to adapt their professional identities to suit a teaching environment in which, as discussed in Section 2.4, ideological forces, be they political, economic or religious, probably exert a more extreme influence on ELT than elsewhere in the world. Indeed, as the findings will show, among some ELT professionals working in HEIs in the UAE, teachers and managers alike, there may be a ‘community of practice’ much more concerned with preserving its members’ employment and lucrative salaries than with the effective education of its students.

In considering how the subject of identity relates to ELT, as Miller (2009:173) points out, in the field of TESOL for over a decade, ‘identity has been used as a concept to explore questions about the sociocultural contexts of learning and learners, pedagogy, language ideologies, and the ways in which languages and discourses work to marginalize or empower speakers.’ However, although there is a substantial body of research which has been done into the subject of learner identity, the investigation of language teacher identity remains an emerging field (ibid). Miller points to the complexity of teacher identity in the field of ELT, involving as it does complicating forces such as the internationalization of language
education and the globalization of English, and concludes that any consideration of teacher identity in TESOL needs to consider issues such as the ‘role of discourse in self-representation, the salience of sociocultural contexts, diversity and ethnicity… and beliefs about standard language (ibid).’ She also highlights that identity has been conceptualized by many contemporary researchers as a process of continual emerging and being – a process which, according to Zemblas (2003:107), can result in ‘a teacher self that is a polymeric product of experiences, a product of practices that constitute this self in response to multiple meanings, which do not need to converge upon a stable, unified identity.’ This potential multiplicity of identities is underlined by Crookes (2009:107), who states that ‘at the level of the individual, theories of personal identity have advanced the view that people are not necessarily fixed themselves; multicultural individuals … often could be thought of as having multiple identities.’ In the context of this study, where the participants teach mainly single-sex classes, for example, as discussed in Chapter 6, this development of multiple teacher identities in response to differently gendered classrooms provides one example of the complexity, multiplicity and emergent nature of teacher identity.

For Beijarad et al (2004:122-3) professional identity in ELT is seen as consisting of the following aspects:

- Professional identity is an on-going process of interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences so is dynamic, not fixed or stable
- Professional identity implies both person and context and so each teacher is different and may develop their own personal teaching culture
- Professional identity consists of sub-identities that more or less harmonize but may conflict in cases of change
- Professional identity involves both agency and power and the way that teachers explain and justify things in relation to other people and contexts expresses their professional identity

The two last points are of particular interest in this study because, as will be discussed in the findings, the potential clashes in the respondents’ sub-identities inherent in a change of context may, in the English classrooms of HEIs in the UAE, result from factors such as unfamiliar structures of power and the exertion of student agency at a level hitherto encountered.
I also think it is important to stress what I consider to be a highly significant aspect of the respondents’ identity formation: their expatriate identity. According to Maertz et al. (2009:66), the building of an expatriate identity involves a process of ‘learning and exhibiting culturally appropriate behaviours’ and dealing with the ‘cognitive dissonance that arises from adopting or condoning culturally expected behaviours that are inconsistent with the expatriate’s own values, attitudes, beliefs, or behavioural norms.’ As Duff & Uchida (1997:451) point out, ‘language teachers and students in any setting naturally represent a wide array of social and cultural roles and identities: as teachers or students, as gendered and cultured individuals, as expatriates or nationals … as individuals with political convictions, and as members of families, organisations, and society at large.’ I would therefore argue that for ELT professionals living and working overseas, their expatriate identity and how they interact with the societies in which they are living could be said to be at least as important as their original native-speaker identity formed in their homelands. However, as will be discussed in Section 3.2 in the following chapter, for academics who decide to seek employment overseas, especially in locations such as HEIs in the UAE, there may be ‘a dark side to expatriation’ (Mercer, 2007; Richardson & Zikic, 2007), leading to a climate of fear amongst native-speaker ELT professionals that is confirmed by the findings of this study (see Chapter 5).

So, identity is complex, emergent and may involve the holding of multiple and contrasting identities in response to different situations, and this process involves the negotiation of existing identities with contextual factors. As Miller (2009) points out, the negotiation of teachers’ identities is powerfully influenced by contextual factors outside of the teachers themselves and their pre-service education courses, such as workplace conditions, curriculum policy, cultural differences, racism, social demographics, institutional practices, and the implication is that the identity resources of the teacher may be tested against conditions that challenge and conflict with their backgrounds, skills, social memberships, use of language, beliefs, values, knowledge, attitudes and so on. As the findings show, the participants in this study face numerous situations which may conflict with and challenge both their professional and personal identities and the beliefs, values and knowledge which underlie them, and how they negotiate these conflicts and challenges forms part of the dynamic of their professional identity development.

So far in this section I have outlined the complexity of professionalism and professional identity formation and how both internal and external forces may impact upon the teacher’s
negotiation of their professional identity. However, as Miller (2009:174) points out, another important component of both ELT professionalism and identity is ‘the role of the ‘Other’ in negotiating and legitimizing one’s identity.’ This may involve what Pennycook (2004:333) describes as ‘an often problematic positioning of the ‘Other’ while learning to work in a complex socio-political and cultural political space,’ a positioning which will be informed by exposure to mainstream discourses around languages, teachers, and teaching, discourses which implicate them in power relations. This is especially important in the field of education because, as Vargese & Johnson (2007:6) point out, ‘teachers act as moral agents on learners … a role that in most contexts is compounded by hegemonic relations of power, race, and language.’ And in the literature on ELT these issues of power are usually conceptualised with discourses revolving around the subject of the final section of this chapter – the native speaker English language teacher.

2.7.3 – The Native Speaker English Language Teacher

The participants of this study could be said to be beneficiaries of the ‘myth of the native speaker’, which Phillipson (1992:185) referred to as the ‘native speaker fallacies’ inherent in the prevalent concepts that the ideal teacher of English was a native speaker and that there was a need to teach English without the interference of other languages. For Kubota & Lin (2006:481), the myth of the native speaker has led to ‘native speaker dominance and norm as the linguistic model for students … which influences hiring practices and the construction of students’ view of the ideal speaker of English’, and although there are English teachers working in the HEIs of the UAE whose first language is not English, the fact that the majority tend to be native speakers could be said reflect such discriminatory hiring practices.

However, Kubota & Lin’s ‘native speaker dominance’ could in itself be taking on mythical status when held up against the experiences of native speaker teachers around the world. As Breckenridge (2010:12) highlights in her study of Canadian teachers working in Korea, the native speaker teachers soon found that ‘health benefits, severance packages, annual bonuses, and job security guaranteed to local English instructors were not always extended to foreign workers,’ and this lack of job security and discriminatory practices against foreign (but native speaker) teachers has also been highlighted in other studies (Mercer, 2007; Richardson & Zikic, 2007; Baalawi, 2008). Native speaker teachers may be able to secure employment on account of their native-speaker status, but that does not seem to necessarily guarantee a
privileged status in their new lands and far from being the ‘dominant’ oppressor, they may be the ones being oppressed.

As highlighted in Section 2.5, English and its native-speaker teachers have been linked to globalisation, capitalism, colonialism, neoliberalism and imperialism. This is outlined by Tsuda (1994:274) in what he calls the Diffusion of English Paradigm which, he claims, consists of:

‘an uncritical endorsement of capitalism, its science and technology, a modernisation ideology, monolingualism as a norm, ideological globalisation and internationalisation, transnationalisation, the Americanisation and homogenisation of world culture, linguistic, culture and media imperialism.’

Tsuda’s point about the spread of English entailing both linguistic and cultural imperialism was linked directly to the native speaker English teacher by Alptekin & Alptekin (1984), who portrayed native speaker teachers as bringing with them a firm belief that the teaching of (their) culture was a vital component of language education, whilst at the same time remaining monolingual and monocultural as well as isolated and alienated from their host culture. This point was made more forcefully by Skutnabb-Kangas (2000:xxii), who highlighted ‘the anomaly that teachers monolingual in the target language, or with no knowledge of their students’ mother tongues, can continue to be seen as competent teachers of ESL or EFL,’ concluding that ‘a monolingual teacher teaching students who are to become bilingual …is by definition an incompetent teacher for those students’ (ibid:632). And Alpketin & Alpketin (1984:14) claimed that for native speaker teachers ‘foreign language teaching is seen as a pedagogical process aimed at changing the learner’s behaviour by injecting new norms and values into it’ a depiction that was echoed twenty-five years later by Alderson (2009:30), who claimed that ‘too often native speakers ignore the cultural context of their learners and seek to impose an alien learning culture.’

So, the native speaker English teacher has been linked in the literature with cultural imperialism, cultural insensitivity and ignorance as well as monolingualism, and this is furthered by the fact that ‘many existing English textbooks place a heavy emphasis on target culture materials’ (McKay, 2003:4) and that students around the world struggle to pass culturally-laden (Lanteigne, 2004:14) ‘international’ English language examinations such as TOEFL or IELTS, examinations which Kazmi (2004) identifies as part of the process whereby the gate-keepers of the dominant ‘Englishes’ (North American, British, Australian,
etc) maintain their power and control. The native speaker teacher, therefore, is portrayed as oppressor, forcing his or her culture and language onto the world to maintain dominance and control. Hadley (2004) sees much of the TESOL enterprise as serving to perpetuate Anglo-American hegemony in the world, an undertaking in which the native speaker teacher is, wittingly or unwittingly, complicit. However, he concludes his paper by stating that ‘whether language teachers serve the interests of the Anglo-American hegemony or focus on the local needs of their students hinges on the pedagogic beliefs and practices implicit in their lessons, (p20).’ As the findings show, even among the thirty-two respondents in this study, there exist a wide range of pedagogic beliefs, including, in some cases, an active hostility towards the idea that they could be spreading Anglo-American hegemony.

Despite this, there remains in the literature a critical discourse that links the native speaker teacher to the concepts of linguistic and cultural imperialism and neo-colonialism, a discourse which Breckenridge’s (2010:208) analysis of the corpus of the TESOL Quarterly and the ELT Journal shows as becoming increasingly dominant. Much of this concentrates on the ‘native/non-native dichotomy’ in ELT, illustrated by Rajagopalan (2004:114), who states that the consequences of the elevation of the ‘omniscient’ native-speaker with his or her ‘God-like infallibility’ to the status of a totem has led to profoundly deleterious consequences for the ELT business, including the breeding of ‘an extremely enervating inferiority complex among many a non-native speaker learner/teacher, and helped spawn unfair and discriminatory hiring practices.’

The idealised native speaker that emerges from the myth of the native speaker, coupled with the expansion of English to its current status as a world language, has served to emphasise the inequality stemming from the native/non-native dichotomy and narratives of non-native speaking teachers of English have been instrumental in illuminating the personal and professional implications of discriminatory hiring practices and policies whose foundation rests on ideologies of the superiority of native speakers (e.g. Braine, 1999). These ideologies, according to Holliday (2005, 2006), have also led to the rise, from within the deep fibre of TESOL professionalism, of an ideology of ‘native-speakerism’ in which the non-native speaker Other is cast as culturally deficient. Holliday illustrates the native-speakerism inherent in mainstream discourses of ELT, such as stereotypical descriptions of students and the analysis of ‘problems’ arising from the use of inappropriate materials and methodologies, and these discourses serve to represent an imagined, problematic, generalized Other to the unproblematic Self of the native-speaker. As the findings show, for ELT professionals such
as those interviewed for this study to blame their students and their ‘culture’ for problems they encounter in the classroom, especially those that stem from the failure of materials or methodologies developed in or for other contexts, is commonplace. Indeed, Holliday links native-speakerism to the wider social phenomenon of culturism, part of an even wider set of chauvinism including sexism and racism.

The chauvinism inherent in native-speakerism is also linked to racism, albeit in the form of what Kabel (2009:19) describes as ‘TESOL aversive racism’, which is characterised in ‘the racial attitudes of many whites who endorse egalitarian values and regard themselves as non-prejudiced but who nevertheless discriminate in subtle, rationalizable ways’ (Hodson et al, 2002:460). This hidden form of aversive racism within native-speakerism, often manifesting itself within an apparent celebration of cultural diversity in Western liberal multiculturalism, is also highlighted in works by Kubota & Lin (2006) and Holliday & Aboshiha (2009).

The myth of the native speaker has therefore led to the discrimination inherent in the native/non-speaker dichotomy, and studies into this dichotomy have in turn led to the exposure of the hidden prejudice and racism said to reside within the discourses of ELT professionalism. However, as Liu (1999:175) pointed out, ‘rather than being defined as native or non-native, it is teachers’ competence and professional growth that should define their professionalism’, suggesting that we need to think of English teachers as being seen along ‘a multidimensional and multilayered continuum.’ Moreover, as Breckenridge & Erling (2011:83) contest, despite the calls for an end to such dichotomization and essentialisation, the voices of native speaker English teachers and evidence of how they are affected by their idealization in the global English teaching industry are seldom heard and little mention is made of their ‘multidimensional and multilayered’ identities and experiences. It would appear that the process of rightly exposing and countering the discrimination, chauvinism and essentialising discourses that the myth of the native speaker has spawned has in itself led to essentialised discourses creating new myths of the native speaker.

The participants of this study represent a rich diversity of experiences that have led to widely differing beliefs, values and attitudes towards teaching and tell a multiplicity of stories. However, the multidimensional and multilayered nature of their identities does not appear to be recognised in the increasingly dominant discourses of the critique of the native speaker, discourses which promote essentialised notions of the native-speaker English teacher in which they could be said to be representing an imagined, problematic, generalized Other
teacher to the unproblematic Self of the academic, defined and constricted by their native-speakerhood. In Holliday’s (2005:27) description of native-speaker ELT professionals they are described as:

‘a professional group which, in order to find a status which it cannot find at home, propels itself into the professional domains of other education systems in other countries, while maintaining distance from them; and sees itself as liberally humanist even when it blatantly reduces foreign colleagues and students to a problematic generalized Other’

This description of native-speaker ELT professionals could be said to be an accurate description of some, but vitally not all, of the participants interviewed for this study. As noted in the previous section, Kubota (2005) and Aboshiha (2007) highlighted the poor pay, transient nature and low status of ELT in the UK and the USA, yet to ascribe the native-speaker teacher’s decision to live and work in other countries solely to a search for status could be said to ignore other motivations such as the financial need to provide for a family or a desire to travel. Likewise, while the findings show plenty of examples of respondents who maintain distance from their host nations, they also reveal those who oppose ‘living in a Western bubble’ and actively seek to integrate into the countries in which they are residing.

Indeed, Holliday (2005:7) states that:

‘[B]y no means all English-speaking Western colleagues are native-speakerists. Although it is harder for them to escape the ideology because of their particular professional upbringing, many of them struggle against it, often intuitively, where they do not know that it exists.’

However, while this statement concedes the complexity of native speaker identity, it still seems to imply a shared professional upbringing particular to native-speakers. Yet as Breckenridge (2010:14) points out, it is common for many native speaker ELT professionals, this researcher included, to develop their professional identities and skills as language teachers within a wide diversity of foreign contexts, a process that may involve the developing of appropriate materials and revising of inappropriate methodologies which both draws upon and reacts to their students’ and local colleagues’ knowledge and needs.

Another problematic factor that may arise out of the essentialised notions of native speakers ‘propelling’ themselves into the world’s educational systems in a bid to maintain Anglo-
American hegemony is, as Canagarajah (2002:135) points out, that while we should not ‘underestimate the on-going operation of unequal power relations … neither should we accept a dominant-dominated dualism that denies any and all agency to some individuals and cultures.’ And for Kabel (2007:137), such focus on the assumed hegemonic, neo-colonialist power of ELT serves to reduce and diminish its recipients to ‘a hopelessly passive and helpless position in stark denial of human agency and subjectivity’. The myth of the ‘native speaker English teacher as all-powerful linguistic imperialist’, as these quotes show, is itself seen as highly problematic in that it is denying agency to the (perhaps) billions of learners of English around the world. Indeed, Brutt-Griffler (2002) presents the spread of World Englishes as resulting from the agency of its non-native speakers rather than from their passivity and exploitation. The question of agency is also raised by Mokhtarnia (2011:102-3) who states that he:

‘does not regard English learners as submissive recipients of a colonial language but rather as active agents of appropriation of the language who purposefully use the colonizer's language as a functional tool not only to free themselves from global colonial burdens but also from local repressive prejudices.’

This highlights not only the active and informed agency of the world’s English language learners, but also the increasingly complex role English has assumed in the 21st century.

An essentialised notion of the native speaker English teacher and the effect its perpetuation may have on those being essentialised has also been noticed in the literature. For example, the Dutch writer Verschueren (1989:52) noted that some view the native speaker English teacher as ‘the universal villain promoted for the sake of western or, more precisely, Anglo-American cultural – if not political – imperialism.’ And this villianisation is highlighted by Rajagopolan (1999:200), who points out that it has the result of the native-speaker teacher being cast as ‘guilty of complicity in a most insidious enterprise of neo-colonialism that works by taking possession of the minds rather than the bodies of its potential subjects.’ For Rajagopalan, this villianisation of native-speaker teachers by mainly native-speaker academics represents:

‘a fashionable trend marked by a certain misguided spirit of penitential self-flagellation … [leading to] an alarmist thesis that the teaching of English to speakers of other languages is an outrageous act of aggression, wantonly carried out with a view to colonizing their minds in a most treacherous manner.’

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Thornbury (2010:1) also comments on the presence of ‘a dominant discourse troupe in a lot of current ‘critical’ theory that consists of native-speaker academics condemning the pervasiveness of native-speakerism … as if the poison and the antidote were being administered by the same hand,’ a situation that Ali (2006:xvii) describes as ‘Western secular liberals with the strange habit of blaming themselves for the ills of the world, while seeing the rest of the world as victims.’ This phenomenon as it applies to ELT was identified by Waters (2007) as the political correctness (PC)-based ELT perspective which he describes as stemming from a mainly Anglophone, Western, and ideological perspective which attempts to construct the ELT world as a whole so that it conforms to its own preconceived conceptual template, thereby imposing a powerful hegemony of its own. Waters contends that the PC-based ELT perspective characteristically sees the world as being made up of ‘oppressors’ and ‘victims’, and that individuals tend to be regarded as belonging wholesale to one category or the other, leading to essentialist discourses in which ‘oppressor’ native-speakers are constructed as uniformly hegemonic in their attitudes towards ‘victim’ non-native speakers, about whom generalizations are just as freely made.

2.8 – Conclusion: Ideology, Professionalism & the Native Speaker in ELT

To conclude, in this chapter I have attempted to highlight some of the discussions in the literature regarding ideology, professionalism and the native speaker teacher in ELT. I have also suggested that in the dominant discourses of ELT the label of native speaker has created numerous myths; both the ‘original’ myths of the superiority of the native speaker as language teacher and model, and the subsequent myths of the native speaker as universal oppressor, imperialist and native-speakerist. Studies into the development of professionalism show the complexity involved and the dangers that may stem from essentialising discourses, be they of native or non-native speakers.

The context of this study, where rich and powerful states have made the decision to introduce English-medium higher education using easily-replaced imported Western native-speaker faculty, could be said to be indicative of what Breckenridge (2010:63) describes as ‘the tension between the grand narrative of native speaker power and privilege and the lived experience of native English speaking teachers.’ As Holborow (2006:85-6) points out, as native-speaker ELT professionals:
‘we are often seen as loose standard-bearers of things North American, English, Australian, Irish, etc.. but many of us find ourselves completely at odds with our English speaking establishments … [putting us] in the crossfire of competing ideologies. We are symbolic globalisers teaching a world language, but also instinctive multiculturalists through our contacts with international students and international teaching situations.’

For those who leave their countries of origin at a young age and develop their professionalism in contexts where they are subject to ideologies that may differ greatly from those with which they were raised, the fluidity and complexity of identity formation may be accelerated by the cognitive dissonance that this expatriate experience may produce. And it could be argued that few contexts in the world offer more potential for the intersection of contrasting and, at times, conflicting cultural, social, political, economic and religious ideologies than the English classrooms of HEIs in the UAE, and these provide the subject of my next chapter.
Chapter 3 – ELT in the HEIs of the UAE

3.1 – Introduction

In the previous chapter I attempted to show the complexity of the ideological issues surrounding ELT in a rapidly globalising world, and the complexity of ELT professional identity construction, especially as it applies to individuals who develop their professionalism in expatriate contexts. I have also attempted to show how, in some of the increasingly dominant discourses of critical applied linguistics, the native speaker English teacher may be both imagined and implicated in essentialising discourses, but that a re-evaluation of the portrayal of the native speaker as a fixed, heterogeneous and hegemonic ‘concept’ is being urged by some academics in the field. In the forthcoming analysis of the data (Chapters 5-9) I will attempt to show that the professional identities constructed by the respondents in response to the diversity of ideologies and potential areas of conflict that may impact upon their working lives, show a complexity and diversity that resists easy labelling.

However, in order to provide a fuller understanding of the context of this study, this chapter presents a discussion of how ELT in the HEIs of the UAE is represented in the literature. This starts with a brief description of the GCC and the role of English in the region, followed by an analysis of English-medium HEIs in the UAE. There will then be a discussion of the potentially problematic issues highlighted in the literature surrounding ELT in the region. The chapter concludes with a discussion of recent studies investigating various aspects of the working lives of native speaker ELT professionals in the UAE. Although this chapter refers to some of the other countries of the Gulf it should be stressed that all the respondents in this study were, at the time of interview, working in the UAE and only 50% of them had had experience teaching in other countries on the Arabian Peninsula.

3.2 – The Countries of the GCC & the Role of English

The six countries of the GCC; Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, occupy the western and southern coastline of the Arabian Gulf; an area which is estimated to contain approximately two thirds of the world’s known oil reserves. Before the discovery of oil, the local economies ‘depended mainly on subsistence agriculture, nomadic husbandry, the trade in pearls, fishing and seafaring’ (Shihab, 2001:249). However, oil-wealth has
resulted in what Dahl (2010) calls a state of accelerated development, in which some of the poorest societies in the world have been transformed to some of the richest in a very short time. This transformation has occurred under what Findlow (2006:23) describes as a ‘rentier’ or distributive state paradigm, in which the governments obtain the loyalty of citizens through what they give rather than through shared endeavour and taxation. According to Dahl (2010:14), writing about the UAE, this form of government has implications in the English classrooms of the region and claims that:

‘governments, and their ministries, who in their generosity and also their need to maintain control have created welfare societies, which have led their young people into a false sense of entitlement and apathy towards work and education. These systems have served to improve the lives of citizens materially, but have slowed the progress of cognitive development and independent thought.’

As the findings will show, the attitudes of the students towards their education may often differ markedly from that expected by their native-speaker teachers. In a region where access to free education at all levels is seen as a right rather than a privilege (Baghat, 1999), where until recently there has been an expectation from (male) nationals of lucrative public sector jobs (Findlow, 2001:9) and where the majority of teachers from primary to tertiary levels are imported foreigners rather than nationals (Syed, 2003:223), perhaps it is unsurprising that lack of student motivation is often seen as a major problem in the ELT classrooms of the UAE (Dahl, 2010). Furthermore, as Davidson (2012:112) points out, this lack of motivation extends beyond the classroom as:

‘{D}espite frequent labour nationalisation initiatives, most Gulf monarchies remain unable to motivate their citizens to gain meaningful employment and contribute to the national economy given their reliance on state welfare and expectation of automatically remaining members of a wealthy national elite, courtesy of their citizenship.’

Over the past sixty years, the countries of the Arabian Peninsula could be said to have undergone a transformation unparalleled in human history, both economically and socially. From an arid, impoverished and neglected backwater, with a mostly illiterate population, the sudden influx of oil wealth has transformed the region, bringing with it a flood of immigrant workers, eager to benefit from the bonanza. These immigrant workers have, since the earliest days, included English language teachers and, according to Brumfit (2001:119), the money
flowing into ELT from the oil-rich states of the Gulf has had a major influence on many of the changes and innovations in the ELT business from the 1970s onwards.

According to AbuKhalil (2004:43), Islam and the Arabic language have been powerful cultural unifiers in the Gulf region from the seventh century onwards, although its geographical location and the importance of trade to the region is shown by the presence of Farsi, Urdu and Hindi words in the dialects of Arabic spoken in the southern Gulf (Dahl, 2010:73). The English language has been present in the UAE since the arrival of the British in the early 19th century and the start of British colonial interest in the Gulf which continued until 1971. However, according to Charise (2007:4), since the 1970s English has asserted several functions in the Gulf region, being: ‘used as a language of wider communication among the multiple nationalities and ethnic groups that reside in the region … [and] as a link language when speaking to or between the large contingents of immigrant workers in the region’. Hudson’s (2006) survey of 75 Emirati students at an English-medium college in the UAE found that English had multiple uses outside of college including:

‘the internet, when shopping, with domestic servants, when travelling, at hospitals or clinics, at sports clubs, watching TV, at the cinema, listening to songs, when talking to myself in front of the mirror, when playing games with my siblings, and when talking to my children.’

Such a variety of uses points to the complexity of language use in the region, and this complexity is also shown in Levine’s (2008:83-4) investigation into the Heavy Metal music scene in the Arab World in which he was struck by the fluidity with which the people he met moved between Arabic and English, describing it as part of a trend in which:

‘people normally using non-Latin alphabets have combined their spoken language with English – the lingua franca of the Internet – into hybrid languages that reflect their heterogeneity … in rehearsals, on the phone, in chat rooms, at the local coffee bar, the borders between what could be considered ‘Arabic’ and ‘foreign’ or ‘Western’ culture are impossible to define, which is precisely why other, more powerful groups want to define the borders for them.’

Indeed, this appropriation of English by the Arab World is highlighted by Wright (2011), who describes the role of English-language media and social networking sites to share news and information about political protests and uprisings in the ‘Arab Spring’ of 2011. She also
notices longer-term phenomena such as the increasing appropriation of supposedly ‘Western’ cultural artefacts such as reality TV shows, rap music, stand-up comedy and TV evangelism to Arabic-language use, which could be said to show not only that young Arabs are resisting essentialising voices both from without and within their communities, but also that cultural and linguistic identity is becoming much more complex to define in a rapidly globalising world. Given that the UAE has one of the highest rates of internet penetration in the Arab world (www.internetworldstats.com), it is unsurprising that the respondents of this study are interacting with young students who may have complex and, at times, potentially contradictory cultural and linguistic identities, and ones that are changing rapidly.

3.3 – English-Medium Higher Educational Institutions in the UAE

In the field of higher education, the region’s first university was King Saud University in Saudi Arabia, established in 1957, and over the next 20 years the other GCC countries all established national Higher Educational Institutes (Luomi, 2008). Like the primary and secondary educational systems, these were originally heavily influenced and staffed by faculty from Egyptian and other Arab universities (Davidson, 2008). However, since the 1980’s there has been a significant expansion both in the size and the number of federal HEIs in the region and, according to Mazawi, (2008:60), this has led to a decline in the influence of Egyptian-educated faculty as they have been ‘gradually supplanted by faculty members who are more often graduates of American, British and other Western universities’. This rapid expansion of HEIs has been accompanied by the adoption of English as a medium of instruction in many departments, as well as an increasing ‘commodification’ of higher education (Baalawi, 2008:162), perhaps reflecting global trends.

The adoption of English as a medium of instruction in tertiary education has, according to Syed (2003:338), been linked by policy-makers to the concept of development and modernization, although, this has led to a problematic marginalisation of Arabic in post-secondary education (Troudi, 2007) as well as concerns about the potential socialising effects of English-medium tertiary education (Karmani, 2011). This has occurred in a region where, as Findlow (2006) points out, there were no indigenous models for modern education, although the ‘local’ had been provided by the Egyptian dominance of primary and secondary education, in contrast to the ‘foreign’, more recently imported Western tertiary sector.
The governments of the region have invested heavily in building campuses which, due to local values, need to be gender-segregated, thus adding to cost. As Baalawi (2009:27-8) points out,

‘due to the strict Islamic and traditional customs of the Gulf people, females are rarely permitted to pursue their education abroad, which leaves private or public higher education in their country as their only option. Males, on the other hand, are freer to explore higher education options abroad. However, the September 11th events made many male students reluctant to pursue their studies abroad (especially in the United States); opting to stay put in their home soil, which further increased the demand for ‘westernised’ higher education institutions in the Gulf regions.’

This demand led to the need to import foreign faculty, administration and workers, including a large number of English language teachers to strengthen the basic skills of new tertiary students and, as Mercer (2005:276) points out, in typical federal HEIs in the UAE ‘there are no tuition fees and everything students need is provided free-of-charge.’

However, the decision of the governments to invest in English-medium tertiary education has led to what Findlow (2006:7) describes as a source of tension due to the need to keep citizens happy on two (often conflicting) fronts: firstly there is the demand to educate/train sufficient youth for self-sufficiency in a globalising world, but at the same time they need to meet the societal demand to affirm traditional Arab-Islamic credentials through their institutionalisation within the higher educational system, a process that the reliance on imported non-Arab, non-Muslim faculty makes more difficult. As Syed (2003:229) points out:

‘Although foreign teachers bring diversity into the classroom, and although some use contextually situated pedagogy, there are wide gaps in the expatriate educators’ (especially non-Arabs’) knowledge of local sociocultural communities and languages. Linguistic and cultural distance between learners and teachers is a serious factor in the Gulf EFL classroom.’

As the findings show, these gaps in native-speaker ELT professionals’ knowledge of local socio-political beliefs, norms and values may provide a potential source of conflict, but the
decision to create a mainly English-medium tertiary sector has also been linked to wider ideological issues. According to Karmani (2005c:95-6):

‘the decisions to initiate and facilitate the expansion of English were ultimately politically driven and wholly caught up in the global and regional struggle for greater control of the region’s vital energy reserves.’

This, he claims, has led to a situation where British and American political and economic forces have wrested control of the region’s lucrative tertiary education system, while leaving primary and secondary education to poorly-paid and vilified expatriate Arab teachers, leading to ‘a grotesque form of “linguistic apartheid” … in the Arabian Gulf region based almost entirely around a series of social privileges (e.g., native-speaker privilege, White privilege, American privilege, British privilege, etc.) (ibid, p93)’. Karmani (2005c:98) avers that the vital component that has enabled this situation to emerge has been ‘modernisation theory’, in which the English language is seen as imperative to political and economic development, a theory under which ‘Muslim societies have no choice but to adopt English if they are to emerge from their present state of “underdevelopment.”’ And the political/economic role of English in the region was thrown into even greater focus by the events of 9/11 and their aftermath, events which, especially in the Arab/Muslim world according to Dahbi (2004:628) ‘have made the power of English more tangible and evident.’

HEIs in the UAE, therefore, could be said to be characterised by massive government investment and expansion, the dominance of Western faculty and management and a student body which sees free tertiary education as a right. They are also prone to both local and global tensions which, in the context of this study, may impact upon the working lives of the respondents, and the nature and possible effect of these tensions is the subject of my next section.

3.4 – ELT in the HEIs of the UAE – The Issues

Having given an outline of the region, and discussed the context of the study I now turn to an analysis of the issues identified in the literature as impacting upon ELT in the HEIs of the UAE and the Gulf. This section discusses studies which have highlighted some of the tensions that have been caused by the importation of Western tertiary educational systems, manifesting themselves in what Findlow (2001:51) describes as ‘the struggle between ideals
and pragmatics’. This is the struggle in which teachers wrestle with the sometimes conflicting demands from governments for Western, English-medium tertiary education while also insisting on a censorial approach to ELT in order to prevent any potential conflict with local values, beliefs and culture.

3.4.1 – ELT & Censorship

According to Asraf (1996:360), ‘the languages of the Muslims contain the basic Islamic vocabulary which reflects their worldview … English has been determined by the Judeo-Christian worldview as well as the secular Greco-Roman worldview and the Eurocentric worldview.’ In the Gulf, parts of this Western worldview may be perceived as posing a threat to Arab/Islamic culture as illustrated in the following extract from a Saudi Arabian 10th Grade Islamic Studies course book:

The Call for Westernization

Imperialism has succeeded in creating in the Muslim world a class of people who takes upon itself to circulate the principles and trends of Western civilization which contradict the spirit of Islam. Imperialism has poisoned the mentality of this class and made it believe – out of ignorance of its own religion – that Islam is not in agreement with the developments of the modern age. The missionary schools that were established in various places of the Muslim world were the natural circle for preparing this class which is loyal to the imperialists’ goals. The call for Westernization, the features of which have already become clear… has taken various forms – all aiming at discarding Islamic spiritual and moral values.


2. Opening dance halls, amusement centers and other types of cheap entertainment.

3. Abolishing the veil and showing the unveiled [face].

4. Establishing interest-based banks, encouraging people to conduct interest [-based businesses].
5. Cramming the markets, radio and television with vulgar stories, literature and songs.

6. Emulating the Westerners in their holidays: birthdays, Mother’s Day, May Day, etc.

7. The tendency among the educated sons of the Arabic language to speak among themselves in a European or American language, instead of their own national language, in order to show off the extent of their education.

8. [The practice of] many well-off Muslim families to send their sons to local missionary schools and colleges, instead of [sending them to] national educational institutions.

9. Introducing Western political institutions such as [political] parties and parliaments into Muslim societies, which have resulted in tragedies and fragmentation among sons of the same society.


This extract from an official school textbook could be said to show that the West, and by extension the major global carrier of ‘Westernization’; the English language, is strongly linked with the forces of imperialism and missionary education in Saudi education. It also provides an indication of some of the potentially problematic areas than unknowing non-Muslim ELT professionals working in the region may encounter. Although the level of censorship in ELT in Saudi Arabia is usually higher than in the other Gulf States, even in more ‘moderate’ states such as the UAE at least some form of censorship is expected (Findlow, 2001; Charise, 2007).

Governments are clearly concerned about the potential ‘contamination’ that may accompany ELT, and although progress has been made in K-12, with locally-produced texts taking into account local beliefs and values, in the field of tertiary education there is still a heavy reliance on ‘international’ materials, mainly from the UK and the USA (Picard, 2007). These materials usually reflect the culture of these countries and, as Elyas (2011:306) points out, may contain ‘a number of topics, visual representations and even vocabulary items expressly excluded by Islamic theology.’ Whether this situation is due to a lack of suitable local
materials or the desire of Ministries to increase their students’ global awareness through interaction with foreign-produced texts, it still leaves native-speaker ELT professionals struggling with materials that could potentially be problematic in the classroom.

Censorship of textbooks is commonplace and Martin (2003:51) recalls her initial surprise at the sight of ‘support staff … diligently and attentively blacking out whole passages and dialogues from familiar ESL texts’ when working at a university in the UAE. In HEIs in the UAE most new teachers also receive initial orientation sessions where the importance of censorship is stressed and a basic outline of the socio-cultural-political-religious justifications for this censorship is given (Abu Wardeh, 2003).

However, a failure to gain a swift or deep enough understanding of the importance of constant censorship and self-censorship (Picard, 2007:302) may be problematic. As the findings show, the perceived need for censorship and the punishments that may be faced by those who fail to observe it can lead to a climate of fear and feelings of powerlessness and uncertainty amongst the respondents. And the pressure to censor comes not only from management, ministries and governments. In Hudson’s (2006) quantitative study of the attitudes of students in two colleges in the UAE towards culture, religion and English teaching, when the participants were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement ‘I think English textbooks should be censored before being taught in the Gulf’, 55% strongly agreed, 33% agreed, 12% had no opinion and 0% either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

However, in his discussion of the role of culture in ELT teaching in Morocco, Hyde (1994:297) argued against a censorial approach, claiming that students were exposed to Western cultural influences anyway. He recommended that teachers explicitly confront aspects of foreign culture in their classes, arguing that such an approach would help the students develop analytical tools such as critical language awareness which would equip them with ‘a mental construct through introspection, analysis, and investigation with which to be able to respond adequately and confidently to the pressures of the external cultures and its language’ (p302). However, although the avoidance of certain issues perceived to be ‘cultural’ in the ELT classroom has been described as ‘patronizing’ (Holliday 2010:15), for many native-speaker ELT professionals working in the HEIs of the UAE, the fear of dismissal results in an active avoidance of what Holliday calls ‘the harsh imperative of contestation’ (ibid:16).
Gaining an understanding of what needs to be censored could therefore be said to be vital for ELT teachers in the region. The Saudi researcher Elyas’s (2011:205-10) analysis of Interactions 1 (Tanaka & Most, 2008), the American English language text used in the university where he carried out his research, found that it contained the following potentially problematic issues: mixed gender groups chatting together, a girl smiling at boy in the classroom, lots of female characters, Western celebrations such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, Passover, Easter, Hanukkah and Valentine’s Day, men and women in bikinis and trunks in a Jacuzzi together and references to food such as Moo Shu Pork, issues that it was left to the Saudi teachers to either censor or explain to their students.

In Argungu’s (1996:334-5) analysis of ELT grammar books from the UK, the USA and India, he identified the following examples of what he stated were ‘unIslamic’ references: Alcoholism or Drunkenness / Sexual Perversion/Provocation, Sensuality, Pre-marital Relationships / Cigarettes and Smoking / Crime and Violence / Christian Imagery, Beliefs & Attitudes / Euro-neo-colonialism, Imperialism and Racial Superiority / Other Pro-Western social Habits (Music, Dancing, Social Parties. etc.) / Beliefs and Attitudes Relating to Individualism, Materialism and Secularism / Author/Reader Socio-cultural Distance. Argungu (1996:335) stated that these were issues that were ‘socially acceptable and, in fact, compatible with Western beliefs and values ... [but] clash[ing] with Islamic values and morality’. To investigate Argungu’s claims, Hudson (2006) conducted a quantitative study with a group of 75 college students in the UAE. Argungu’s list of ‘unIslamic’ issues was adapted and extended and the respondents were asked whether the issues should never be taught in English classes, if they could sometimes be taught or if it was OK to teach them. The results are shown in Appendix 1.

The issues considered by the respondents as most inappropriate for English classes in the Gulf consisted of those prohibited by religion (alcohol, pork, immodest clothing and pre-marital relationships) and one political issue (mention of Israel). These are all issues that are included in commonly-used English textbooks in the region, such as the Headway series (Soars & Soars, 1986 onwards) and the Cutting Edge series (Cunningham et al, 1999 onwards), which can have unfortunate ramifications for teachers and management alike. For example, in 2006 a group of Emirati students went to an Arabic language newspaper to complain about the use of an English textbook which, they claimed: ‘included Israel on its world map but ignored the UAE ... violates UAE culture and mentions relationships between
girlfriends and boyfriends as well as same-sex relationships’ (Nazzal, 2006). The book was immediately withdrawn and within a month both the Dean and the Vice Dean had been fired. In their complaint to the newspaper ‘the students stressed that censorship should be active in the UAE’ (ibid).

Gender-related issues play a major role in this censorship. Much has been written in the West on the subject of gender in the Muslim world, leading to what Malik (2012) describes as ‘the West’s reduction of Muslim women to pawns in culture wars or military campaigns.’ However, she then claims that moral relativism should not blind us to what she describes as the ‘general retardation that extends not just to women but to every aspect of personal freedom and civic rights in the Arab World.’ As discussed in Chapter 6, dealing with instances when one’s own personal beliefs on the issue of gender are in direct conflict with those espoused by students provides a source of both external and internal conflict for the respondents. In the context of this study, where a third of the respondents were working at colleges with students of the opposite sex, issues of gender, sexuality and sex were identified as the main cause of classroom conflict, which underlines the strength of the ideological forces at play.

However, as Elyas’s (2011:305) study of Saudi ELT professionals and their students showed, there are simultaneous and opposing forces at play in the language classrooms of the region, ‘reflecting the global tensions between Islamic and Western Discourses and ideologies’, as he found that when Western culture was minimized in ELT to a very low level of exposure, students sought alternative sources of Western culture. These complicated and conflicting demands for both more and less Western culture in ELT from students, governments and local society may add to the complexity for non-Muslim teachers and may result in what Picard (2007:28) describes as ‘an over-censoring of content which is not in fact offensive to the majority of learners, resulting in bland materials with little interest to learners.’ As reflected in the findings, this may lead to the paradoxical situation where overcautious teachers are teaching over-censored materials while simultaneously complaining about their students’ lack of motivation, interest and progress.

Elyas’s study also revealed the complexity of attitudes to censorship in the region, and how it may be resisted by learners. He quotes from one student who states:
‘I find it funny when my teacher avoids teaching us about culture … You know what? They think we are stupid. They think we are kids. They don’t treat us like adults. I can use the net. There is no need to hide.’ (Elyas, 2011:286)

And as the findings also show, the censorial approach may result in both the infantilisation of students by teachers and student resistance to such infantilisation, adding to the potential for conflict in the classroom.

To conclude, censorship could be said to play an important role in the working lives of the respondents in this study, but it is a complex and at times contradictory issue. An awareness of which issues may prove problematic is needed, but the students’ reactions to censorship may vary greatly. And as has been shown in this section, censorship if often linked to religious concerns, which is the subject of my next section.

3.4.2 – ELT & Islam

As discussed in Section 2.2, academic writing about Islam may often be problematic in that studies from Western, non-Muslim writers that are critical of the religion may be open to charges of Orientalism or Islamophobia, yet it would be impossible to write this study without mentioning religion. In the field of ELT, as the Saudi writer Elyas (2011:2) points out, ‘a detailed unpicking of the different cultural influences (both Islamic and Western), and how they are evidenced in policy documents, curriculum, textbooks and pedagogy, remains relatively unexplored in the literature’. However, as Karmani (2011:11) points out, writing about the UAE, the governments and inhabitants of the region generally display ‘a much stricter adherence to Islamic practices, customs and rituals … than in any other comparable Muslim-majority region in the world’ and where, he claims, most aspects of everyday life are guided by Islam in mainstream society. As the findings show, this pervasiveness of Islam also impacts upon the working lives of the respondents in this study.

The debate about ELT and its possible negative effects on Islam is said to ‘pervade the Arabic media’ (Picard, 2007:19). ELT is described by Argungu (1996:331) as ‘a catalyst in the deIslamization process … as a conveyer of knowledge and culture’ and Mokhtarnia (2011:100) claims that ‘educational authorities … believe that the teaching of English, as an exercise in linguistic imperialism and cultural politics, propagates Western (mainly American) influence and hegemony, and will, as a consequence, lead to cultural alienation;
that is, de-Islamization.’ Although the spread of English-medium HEIs in the UAE could suggest that the governments’ desire for English-speaking citizens outstrips their concerns about the language as a catalyst for ‘de-Islamization’, the fact nevertheless remains that the English language is seen by some as a threat to the religion.

This problematic linking of ELT with religion is illustrated by the attempts to introduce English language classes into primary education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 2005. De Lotbinière (2005) reported that although the plan to introduce English, which had taken 3 years to prepare, had been approved by the Saudi cabinet, it had been blocked by influential religious conservatives who feared that English classes would ‘undermine Arabic teaching and introduce unwanted foreign ideas’. Commenting on this setback, Dr. Mohammed Al Ahaydib, the supervisor of the Ministry of Education’s General English Projects, said that the plan to introduce English had been thwarted by ‘a minority with a loud voice that can influence high levels of government’ (ibid, p1). In the context of this study, it is important for native-speaker ELT professionals to realise that this religiously conservative ‘minority with a loud voice’ can also impact upon the English language classroom where, for example, ‘if only one person objects to having music played in a class or activity, all the students will concede to her request’ (Abu Wardeh, 2003:3).

Both a lack of familiarity with which aspects of the English language or Western culture may prove to be potentially offensive and the lack of adequate official dialogue and faculty training in HEIs in the UAE (Baalawi, 2008; Raza, 2010) on the issue of religion may lead to an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty among non-Muslim, native-speaker ELT professionals. As Picard, (2007:302) writing about the UAE points out, this uncertainty about religious matters may lead to:

‘over-censorship of content which may arise from their desire to comply with the laws of the country and university and thus retain their jobs, but also perhaps from a lack of understanding and dialogue about what is or is not permitted in Islam and by the country’s constitution and a desire to obscure or hide the way society operates.’

In his analysis of the debate over Islam and ELT by Muslim ELT writers, Elyas (2011) divides the debate into those, led by Karmani (2004, 2005a-d, 2011), who follow what he describes as the ‘strong Islamization’ approach and those, such as Kabel (2007, 2009), who follow a ‘weaker Islamization’ approach. The ‘strong Islamization’ approach is characterized...
by a ‘teacher-centred grammar-based methodology’ (McKay, 2002:121) and the strict censorship of any cultural content that could be perceived as ‘antiIslamic’ (Picard, 2007:27). For Elyas, this ‘strong Islamization’ approach reflects influential discourses in Gulf society which have the effect of Othering native-speakers of English, viewing both them and their language with suspicion. This he illustrates by describing:

‘a famous Hadith (Saying of the Prophet Mohammed) used as a motto by many English language centres in the region which promote language learning based on religious principles: “من تعلم لغة قوم آمن مكره” - ‘He whoever learns other people’s languages will be secured from their cunning’. (Elyas, 2011:89-90).’

These Othering discourses often employ the phraseology of conflict to describe the interaction of the English language with the Arab/Muslim world. For example, Argungu (1996:331), describes English as ‘the major weapon employed by the West when it launched its massive intellectual and cultural onslaught against the Muslims’. And for Al-Faruqi (1986:42), the language is linked to what he sees as the problematic features of Western society, describing it as introducing an ‘onslaught of materialism, utilitarianism, scepticism, relativism, secularism and hedonism that the last two hundred years have established firmly in English consciousness.’ The ‘strong Islamization’ approach sees English as having been ‘launched’ deliberately as a weapon against the Muslim World, part of a long-running, Western conspiracy, and that to be taught, the language should be stripped of all references to undesirable Western cultural practices and beliefs like those outlined by Al-Faruqi above.

The confrontational rhetoric of the ‘strong Islamization’ approach grew stronger in the aftermath of the attacks of 9/11 and the subsequent ‘War on Terror’ by the governments of the main Anglophone nations. Chughtai (2004) claimed that ‘in the battle for tongues and minds, English has been deployed as a weapon to counter the militancy allegedly fostered by Arabic-medium education’ and Karmani (2005a), claimed that the use of English as a weapon in the War on Terror was based on the following set of beliefs:

1) The belief that Muslim languages (and Arabic in particular) were inherently programmed to promote a militant Islamic mindset.

2) The belief that English was exclusively endowed to promote the values of freedom, democracy, justice, openness, tolerance, decency, and so forth.
3) The belief that English teaching can help suppress a latent radical Islamic disposition through a process of acculturation through the language. (p264-5)

These beliefs, according to Karmani, had led to a ‘resounding call’ (p263) in the West, and in the USA in particular, for ‘More English and less Islam’ in the curricula of schools in the Muslim World. As part of his evidence he cited a resolution from the US Congress in July 2002 that stated concern that some of the textbooks being used in Saudi educational curricula were fostering what it described as a ‘combination of intolerance, ignorance, anti-Semitic, anti-American, and anti-Western views’ (p262). He also noted that concerns about the education provided in the madrassas (religious schools) of Pakistan and Afghanistan had led to calls for a ‘broader, more secular based curriculum’ and the provision in 2003 of a $255m US aid package to Pakistan intended for education reform and the introduction of more ‘modern’ subjects such as English. Karmani also shows alarm at the editorial in the Western Australian (2002) entitled English as a Weapon to Fight Terrorism, reporting on the US government’s consideration of a plan to deploy English teachers as a way of combating Islamic extremism in the Philippines.

In another article entitled Islam and English in the post-9/11 Era, Karmani (2005b:86) revisited the idea of English being a powerful weapon in what he described as ‘the broader protracted struggle to defeat or pacify the formidable political force of Islam’ and what he calls the ‘project’ of teaching English in Muslim contexts has, he claims, ‘scarcely ever only been about the learning or teaching of a supposedly neutral linguistic medium.’

Indeed, if one looks into the history of English teaching in the Muslim world, one can understand the suspicion with which the language has been viewed, linked as it is to ‘colonialism and Christianity and concerns about being Westernized’ (Asraf 1996:110). Karmani (2005a:266) rightly highlights the ‘crude reductive formulas based on the overwhelming political, military and economic might of the USA’ characteristic of the Bush regime, but then goes on to describe English language teachers in the Muslim World as ‘de-Islamising agents on the linguistic front between Islam and English’ who are guilty of delivering global ideologies which, he claims, are diametrically in conflict with the worldviews of Muslim learners.

Much of the language used in the ‘strong Islamization’ view of ELT could be said to give the impression that Gulf Arabs, along with over a billion other Muslims on the planet, had no
agency when it came to the English language and were the unwitting dupes of a Western plot, staffed by battalions of native-speaker ELT professionals who all share the belief that they are bringing ‘freedom, democracy, justice, openness, tolerance, decency, and so forth’ (Karmani, 2005a:265), an attitude that could be said to essentialise both Muslim students and native-speaker ELT professionals. However, both the rapid increase in the number of native English-speaking Muslims and the worldwide spread of English-medium information technology could be said to be examples of Kramsch’s (1998:81) ‘concept of appropriation’, whereby users make a language their own by adopting and adapting it to their own needs and interests.

Indeed, studies such as Al-Salem’s (2005) investigation into female Saudi university students’ use of the internet show that English, combined with modern information technology, rather than proving a threat to Muslim identity, is perceived by the participants as giving them access to a worldwide forum in which they can share their views of the religion and counter the simplistic, essentialised stereotypes of Muslims found in Western media. As can be seen from the large number of English-language Islamic websites, such as the Guide to Islamic English on the Chicago-based Sound and Vision Islamic website (www.soundvision.com), and the fact that the company Islam Box, which has offices in London, Islamabad, the USA & Australia, offers subscribers a package including 33 Islamic TV channels, many of which are partly or wholly in English, shows that the language is indeed being appropriated for the purpose of sharing information and dawah (proselytising).

As Dahbi (2004:629) pointed out, ‘English is now the native language, or the main school language, of a very large and fast-growing Muslim population all over the world’, although whether the way the language is used by its modern Muslim speakers, both native and non-native, would meet with the approval of a ‘strong Islamizationist’ or not remains debatable.

Nevertheless, for non-Muslim, native-speaker ELT professionals working in the region, uncertainty concerning the extent to which the local community, the national management of the institution where they are working or the ministries of higher education support a ‘strong Islamization’ approach to ELT could be said to add to the complexity of their jobs and provide a potential source of fear for those who are unsure about what precisely is acceptable to do, say or introduce into the English language classroom.

Elyas (2011:90-3) also highlights the ‘weak Islamization’ approach which, he claims, is characterised by a recognition of the need to teach some elements of the cultures of English
speakers coupled with an understanding that learning or teaching about different cultural beliefs and values does not necessarily mean their acceptance. It also includes a call for the teaching of critical reading skills to students to enable them to ‘disentangle the various threads of context and meaning that exist in any text’ (Hare, 1996:374) as well as a recognition that with the large number of Muslim native-speakers of English around the world and the large number of Arabic words that have been assimilated into English, Islamic culture and the cultures of English speakers are already intrinsically linked. Hare (1996:370) also points out the value of learning other languages in that they may enable Muslims to ‘arrive at an understanding of the skills and achievements of others … [and] acquire skills that will be beneficial to the Islamic community’ as well as convey the message of Islam to others.

The ‘weak Islamization’ approach also takes a more optimistic view of the potential of English to work as a force for good in the world, illustrated by the following quote from Kabel (2007:137), in response to Karmani’s (2005a) article *English, ‘Terror’ & Islam*:

‘Drawing on what I call ‘the power potential’ inherent in any language, I argue that, instead of considering English and its putative hegemonic discourses as an inhibitive and imposed encumbrance, we need to take into account how the language is constantly and unpredictably appropriated and creatively reshaped and expropriated to give voice to emerging agencies and subjectivities … I suggest that appropriation, far from being drenched in a confrontational idiom, is a move towards new sites of collaboration and contestation, towards much wider human possibilities.’

Kabel (2007:140) also highlights the similarities between Islam and English: both are expansionist global phenomena with colonial histories, and as such it is unsurprising for writers who see themselves as being on the ‘side’ of either English or Islam to have a tendency to reduce the Other to a ‘monolithic, essentialised and reified’ (ibid p141) phenomenon. The positive, constructive, day-to-day interactions and intercultural exchanges that may occur between native-speaker English teachers and their students in the Muslim World can, when the participants are viewed by partisan writers as mere essentialised ciphers in a global conflict between two irreconcilable ideologies, become part of a corrosive discourse mired in the ‘rhetoric of blame’ (Said 1993:262).
For native-speaker ELT professionals working in Muslim world, therefore, a fuller awareness of Islam and the debates surrounding its relationship with English could be said to be invaluable in informing their classroom practices. It is important to remember that what is familiar to us may be outside the experience of our students, and as unfamiliar schema can add unnecessary stress to situations where language is already an issue, as Abu Wardeh (2005:2) points out, ‘the burden is on us to familiarize ourselves with our students’ world, not the other way around.’ However, as studies by Baalawi (2009) and Raza (2010) show, native-speaker, non-Muslim ELT professionals working in English-medium HEIs in the region tend to be selected for their qualifications and length of experience and, as their employment entails considerable financial outlay, this often results in a lack of appropriate socio-cultural training and on-going professional development that would provide a deeper understanding of the context and potentially problematic areas.

3.4.3 – ELT & Arabic

The use of language in Arabia has be described as a diglossia (Al-Khatib 2006:2), with two distinct versions of the language: the Classical Arabic of the Quran and its modernised form, Modern Standard Arabic, historically providing a common standard written form and a common medium for affairs of state, religion and education throughout the Arab world, and the local vernaculars, in this case Gulf Arabic, being used at home and amongst friends. However, the increase of satellite TV combined with high levels of internet use has caused an increase in the use of vernacular Arabic and a perceived decline in the standards of Classical Arabic, with local variations being heard more on the television and even written online. This regrettable state of affairs, in the eyes of linguistic purists, is made even worse by the fact that many governments in the region have increased the amount of time allotted to foreign languages (mainly English) in the school curriculum, often at the expense of standard Arabic (Glasser 2003, Findlow 2006).

This trend has even caught the attention of the Islamic scholar, Al-Qaradawi (2009), who strongly condemned the increased use of English as a medium of instruction, saying that this would lead to a generation ‘alienated from its Arabic and Islamic roots.’ He criticised the continued use of English as the main language of business, despite government laws stipulating that all correspondence should be in Arabic. Finally, he censured the parents of Khaliji children as, he claimed, Arab babies often get their first words from ‘a cook, a maid
or a babysitter’. Such concerns would be understandable in any society, but the Arabic language holds a unique position amongst the languages of the world, due to its strong links to religion (Ansary 2009:77).

Arabic is the language of the Quran – the words of the one and only God, according to Muslims – and the reading or reciting of these words is, many Muslims believe, a way of receiving blessings (baraka) from God (Aslan 2005:159). The belief that the Quran is the direct, eternal, uncreated word of God has led to the widespread conviction among Muslims that any translation of the Quran removes this direct link and renders it as merely an interpretation (ibid). Furthermore, not only does the Quran ‘acknowledge explicitly that it is a divine choice to use the Arabic language as the language of revelation’ (Dahbi 2004:630), but the fact that it was revealed to the Prophet Mohammed, who was neither a poet nor skilled in literary Arabic, is seen as ‘the miracle of his prophethood’ (ibid) and numerous Hadiths describe Arabic as the most perfect language existing and the Quran as a book of such perfection that no man would ever be able to write a verse to compare with it.

The history of the development of the Arabic language is therefore inextricably bound to Islam and the Quran, with, according to Abdel Haleem (2005:ix), Arabic grammar being developed to serve the Quran, the study of Arabic phonetics being pursued in order to determine the exact pronunciation of Quranic words, the science of Arabic rhetoric being developed in order to describe the features of the inimitable style of the Quran, and the art of Arabic calligraphy being cultivated through the writing down of the Quran. Unlike English, Arabic is a language in which ‘a religious view of life is axiomatic and integral to its discourse patterns’ (Hyde 1994:300) and although English does contain some religious vestiges in everyday speech (such as ‘Goodbye’ originating from ‘God Be With You’), Arabic discourse is suffused with religious terminology throughout and acts as a symbol of religious, linguistic and cultural heritage (Jendli & Troudi, 2011:43) for its speakers.

As the findings show, a misunderstanding of the religious significance of Arabic phrases commonly used by the students may lead to conflict in the classroom, for example regarding the word inshallah (God willing). Zaid (1999) points out that for Muslim students any reference to the future must be accompanied by the word inshallah, which Abu Wardeh (2005:3) states ‘is an acknowledgement of the power of the Almighty and failure to say it amounts almost to sacrilege.’ However, Abu Wardeh also reveals that for many Westerners the word inshallah may cause anger or amusement as it may be perceived as a ‘loop-hole’ for
the speaker to avoid responsibility. For Parker (1976, cited in Valdes, 1986:95), inshallah was perceived as an example of the ‘religious heritage [which] goes far to explain the Middle Eastern student’s attitude of fatalism toward events in his life and in society around him.’ Therefore, inexperienced non-Muslim teachers who react with disbelief or cynicism to students who reply ‘Tomorrow, inshallah’ when asked for their overdue assignments may be creating offense.

Concern about the threat to Arabic from other languages can be detected as far back as the 13th century, when the Islamic scholar Ibn Taymiyyah declared that:

‘Getting used to speaking a language other than Arabic, which is the symbol of Islam and the language of the Quran, so that this becomes a habit of the region and its people … undoubtedly this is makrooh (abhorrent), because it is an imitation of the foreigners which is makrooh’ (Al-Uthmaan 1999:1).

The term makhrooh describes practices which, although not forbidden (haram) under Islamic law, are to be avoided if at all possible. Few scholars today would go as far as Ibn Taymiyyah in their condemnation of the use of languages other than Arabic, and fatwas (religious pronouncements by Islamic scholars) on the learning of English usually highlight the practical advantages that English can bring, such as increasing knowledge, doing business or dawah, but these pronouncements, especially those reflecting the ‘strong Islamization’ approach to English, are often accompanied by a warning against using English instead of Arabic. For example, Al-Uthmaan (1999) states that:

‘The one thing we must avoid is using [English] instead of Arabic. We have heard some foolish people speaking English instead of Arabic, and some of the foolish people who are dazzled by the West, who I regard as lackeys, teaching their children to use the greetings of the non-Muslims and teaching them to say ‘bye-bye’ and so on … using English instead of Arabic, which is the language of the Quran … is haram. It was narrated that the salaf (the original companions of the Prophet Mohammed) forbade the speaking of the tongues of the kufr (unbelievers)” (Abdul-Rahman, 2003:139).

Worries about the threat English is perceived as posing to Arabic also occur in studies done of college students in the region: Mallalah’s (2000) survey in Kuwait found that 26% agreed that English will harm the Arabic language while Congreve’s (2005) study in Saudi found
that 21% felt the same while Hudson’s (2006) study in the UAE found 30% seeing the spread of English as a threat to Arabic.

Concerns have also been raised about the negative effect that globalisation, the increase in non-Arabic-speaking foreign workers in the region and the adoption of English-medium tertiary education is having on the Arabic language skills of young Khalijis. Al-Issa & Dahan (2011), writing about the UAE, show concern about the rapidity at which young Emiratis obtain and assimilate mostly western and English-based cultural sources, the problems they have with Modern Standard Arabic (preferring instead Khaliji Arabic and English) and call for educational authorities to do more to maintain students’ Arabic language skills. This call is echoed by Troudi & Jendli (2011:41-3), whose survey of Zayed University students in Dubai revealed that the participants ‘expressed major concerns about the constant onslaught of English and its potentially disastrous effects on Arabic as a language and a cultural symbol’, and stated that ‘the relationship between English and Arabic is not based on equity or mutual coexistence and harmony’. For Jendli & Troudi, the growth of EMI (English-medium instruction) in the region has occurred through ‘an over-reliance on received knowledge on the status of English and fashionable trends in international education’ (ibid).

An example of such trends could be that, as was shown in Section 2.7.1., HEIs in the UAE are characterised by ‘excessive managerialism’ (Picard, 2007; Baalawi, 2009), which leads to ‘neutral and pseudo-empirical discourses’ (Jendli & Troudi, 2011) taken from the world of private enterprise and applied to education which may lead to students being seen more as a commodity than individuals who are in the process of shaping their socio-cultural and linguistic identities. These ‘neutral’ discourses could be said to reflect the ‘liberal-essentialist denial of ideology’ Holliday & Aboshiha (2009) claimed were part of mainstream ELT discourses, employed to avoid any consideration of the socio-cultural, linguistic and political implications of ELT. However, some of the respondents in this study also showed concerns about the effect their work was having on their students’ Arabic language skills, showing the heterogeneity of individual identities and the perils of essentialising overgeneralisations.

To conclude, in this section I have attempted to reveal some of the ideological issues highlighted in the literature as impacting upon the lives of native-speaker ELT professionals in HEIs in the UAE, including the perceived need for censorship and the roles of Islam and Arabic. However, in the final section of this chapter I wish to turn to academic studies focussing on native-speaker ELT professionals working in the region.
3.5 – The Native-Speaker ELT Professional in the UAE

There has recently been an increase in qualitative research from the UAE into native-speaker ELT professionals’ attitudes towards appraisal, teaching ‘academic’ writing, professional development, the use (and failure) of Western teaching methodologies in the region and professional development for new teachers (Mercer, 2005; Picard, 2007; Baalawi, 2009; Dahl, 2010; Raza, 2010, respectively). In this section, I will highlight the issues these studies reveal as impacting upon the construction of professional identity as perceived by native-speaker ELT professionals themselves.

3.5.1 – The Fear Factor

Among the native-speaker ELT professionals working in the UAE interviewed in these studies, the precarious nature of their employment and the fear this generated provided a recurring theme. Mercer (2005:275), writing about faculty evaluation in a UAE university, describes her native-speaker respondents as part of the 80% of the UAE’s population who are:

‘[G]uest workers, subject to a system of sponsorship which allows their local employer to terminate their services at any time, for any reason, with virtually no legal redress. They never acquire citizenship and must return home within 30 days of leaving their job. Trade unions are banned, and all higher education staff are employed on fixed-term contracts, usually lasting three years. As a result, expatriate academics working in the public sector, despite their high salaries, have absolutely no job security.’

Mercer also links this lack of job security to perceptions of faculty appraisal schemes, revealing a fear amongst middle management of giving negative teacher appraisals as these could often lead to a teacher’s instant dismissal by higher management. Baalawi (2009), an Emirati academic whose research investigated the lack of appropriate professional development for faculty in HEIs of the UAE, links the lack of job security to the work of Richardson and McKenna (2002) and Richardson and Zikic (2007), whose research into the lives of expatriate academics reveals ‘the darker side of an international academic career’, highlighting the ‘transience and risk’ associated with academic expatriation. Baalawi
revealed that feelings of ‘outsiderness’ and of being a ‘tight rope walker’ were common amongst the academics she interviewed concluding that:

‘Their perceptions of precariousness in the institution was a real eye opener for me, and I suspect the uneasiness in their host institution caused the ‘cultural distance’ between themselves and their minority Emirati counterparts … [who] also perceived themselves as marginalised and un-catered for, not unlike the unsecured positions of their expatriate fellow academics.’

Native-speaker ELT professionals in the UAE, therefore, may become fearful due to the precarious nature of their employment and their expatriate status. However, the ‘corporate management model’ may provide another source of fear, both for managers and teachers. Mercer (2007:283) claims that the faculty appraisal system meant that:

‘Identifying any weakness in a teacher was enough to get them sacked … the more evaluative the appraisal system, and the more punitive the overall organisational culture, the greater the concentration on basic competency, the greater the lack of constructive feedback, and, paradoxically, the greater the temptation for those appraisers committed to professional development to avoid documenting poor performance.’

Although managers may avoid documenting poor teacher performance, one of the main methods of faculty evaluation used in HEIs in the UAE are student feedback forms which Raza (2010:131) identifies as ‘a major pressure pertaining to performance evaluation and bearing on the employment security of teachers.’ As the findings show, student evaluations provide a major source of fear for the respondents and may affect the way they mark attendance and grade assignments. Indeed, Baalawi (2009:75) compared her native-speaker colleagues to ‘tightrope walkers,’ fearful that:

‘Any mistake (inside or outside their work) would see them ‘plummet’ to the ground, marking the end of their careers in the host country and their departure. Many of my expatriate academic respondents mentioned this fear, and felt that they did not want to ‘rock the boat’ for fear of being told to ‘get the first flight back home’.

However, learning exactly what might ‘rock the boat’ is by no means a simple matter and, as discussed in the following section, this is not made any easier by the lack of appropriate
orientation, professional development and constructive feedback that ELT professionals in the region may face.

3.5.2 – Experienced, Qualified and Easily Replaceable

Raza’s (2010:22) study of the provision of PD (professional development) for foundations English teachers at federal colleges in the UAE, states that:

‘most EFL teachers in federal universities are mid-career professionals aged between 40-49 years, have between 10-20 years of EFL teaching experience and have lived in the UAE for up to five years … this group mostly comprises Western expatriates who lead a ‘nomadic’ lifestyle that involves residing and working in several countries for specific periods of time during their TEFL career span.’

Raza’s description matches that of the respondents in this study and she also comments that: ‘federal universities in the UAE are known for recruiting experienced and highly qualified international teachers who excel in their experience of modern teaching methods (ibid:10).’

However, Raza’s findings revealed that her respondents often saw the institutional provision of PD as inadequate and irrelevant, leading to feelings of alienation. Mercer (2005) claims that amongst senior-level native-speaker management there appeared to be a reluctance to invest in PD, as it was not seen as economically necessary, given the ease with which foreign labour can be replaced. One manager commented ‘we’re not really interested in having to develop people because we can get other people who are as good or better … it’s simple economics (Mercer, 2005:283)’, reflecting the somewhat Darwinian discourse that could be said to characterise the ‘corporate management model’. Baalawi (2009:126) also recorded similar attitudes, citing one manager who stated: ‘we pay them big fat expatriate packages, we don’t need to pay for any more development – it’s just not financially viable.’ For Baalawi, this means that ‘the current practice of hiring Western expatriate teachers in the newer HEIs in the UAE has positioned teaching development initiatives as inessential, and this move has to some extent de-legitimized academic development (p10)’ because ‘the practice of employing the perceived best removes the necessity of any developmental work (p126).’
Mercer (2005:284) shows surprise that Western teachers and academic managers accept their working conditions ‘despite the fact that, in their home countries, appraisal is intended to be much more developmental, and employees are much more protected by government legislation, industrial tribunals and trade unions.’ She suggests that this might be because of the generous salaries and perks available and, while their appeal is undeniable, I would suggest that it might also be due to the fact that many native-speaker ELT professionals working in HEIs in the UAE, like the researcher, developed their professional skills working in a variety of contexts around the world, including poorly-paid private language schools in their homelands. ELT professionals in the UAE may therefore have much less experience of working in HEIs in their homelands and be unfamiliar with contexts where government protection, industrial tribunals and trade unions are available to educationalists.

For ELT professionals in federal universities in the UAE, therefore, it appears that they are facing not only the increase in status and wealth that their employment affords them, but also an assumption that, due to their qualifications and experience, the institution has little obligation to provide them with training and development that could help them adapt to their new environment. As the findings show, both the money and the lack of clear or relevant direction from their institutions regarding the sensitive and potentially problematic ideological issues they may encounter have a significant impact upon their professional identities. The ‘big fat expatriate package’ could be said to provide ELT professionals with wealth and status unavailable in other parts of the world, especially their homelands, but this then raises the difficult question of what people are prepared to do to avoid losing this wealth and status, an issue that will be discussed in Chapter 8. As Mercer (2007:285) points out:

‘It is possible for an educational organisation to be successful, even when its teachers have virtually no job security, and endure a highly evaluative appraisal system, with very few opportunities for professional development, just so long as it compensates by offering a high salary, excellent teaching facilities, and the chance to live in a very different culture.’

3.5.3 – Maintaining the Status Quo

As discussed in section 3.2, the states of the GCC are examples of the ‘rentier’ state paradigm; ruled by monarchies that, thanks to oil wealth, have been able to rapidly develop their nations and provide free education for their citizens. However, in other parts of the
Middle East such as Egypt and Iran, HEIs have often provided the venue for anti-government movements and protests, a fact that the governments of the GCC will no doubt have noticed. In this section, therefore, I investigate how the literature describes the role of federal HEIs in the region in maintaining the political status quo.

Mercer (2005:275) states that the ‘hybridized’ nature of HEIs in the UAE, with mostly native-speaker academic staff working with Emirati students and top management, results in a system which superficially resembles that of Western academic institutions but which is heavily influenced by ‘the ‘hybridized’ internal and external culture’. In this context, Mercer raises the questions of whether:

‘student learning is compromised during the time it takes adequate teachers to become excellent … whether educational establishments have a responsibility to the teaching profession as a whole, and not just the individual learners enrolled in their classes … [and] whether certain institutions should be allowed to ‘cherry pick’ only the best teachers, because of their greater financial bargaining power, or allegedly more disadvantaged students (p283).’

In a context where the majority of academic staff comprises of easily-replaced foreign workers it is perhaps unsurprising that government priorities are with the students. However, as Baalawi (2009) and Raza (2010) point out, for Emirati academics such as themselves, a lack of professional development specific to the local socio-cultural context not only leads to potential conflict in the classroom between foreign faculty and students, but also disadvantages young local faculty, who are not afforded the possibilities to develop their skills that their older, foreign colleagues may have had.

However, this could also be a concern for governments in the region. Globally, HEIs have often acted as sites of resistance and rebellion, an example being given by the South African Picard (2007) who socialized her attitudes towards the academy during a time of political upheaval in which the academy represented, for her, the forces of tyranny and bigotry. Picard (2007:253) compares herself with her foreign colleagues who, she claims were:

‘socialized in contexts where the academy was taken for granted … either because they lived in stable democracies (in the case of the Western expatriates), where assumptions about academia have developed and ossified over generations, or because (in the case of many Arab lecturers) they were socialized within
authoritarian systems with a strong religious (Islamic) base … [which suggests they] are more likely to be politically conservative.’

Mercer (2005:283) finds her colleagues’ perceived lack of concern about the problems caused by the imposition of a Western academy in a Gulf context problematic, yet perhaps has not considered that easily-replaceable foreign academics like herself could be said to provide both a cheaper, and a less politically dangerous option for governments who wish to retain control of their student populations. The strictly-enforced censorial approach to curricula and fear-induced self-censorship by expatriate academics (Baalawi; 2009), both non-Arab and Arab, ensures that the issues discussed on campus remain tightly controlled.

In common with the rest of the Middle East, the demography of the countries of the GCC is characterised by large youth populations. As the events of January 2011 showed, protests have collapsed governments across the region, in large part organised by technology-savvy students skilfully manipulating modern technology and who are now calling for student unions free from government control (Matthews, 2012), a fate that the governments of the GCC may be seeking to avoid. So far, they have succeeded but according to Davidson (2012:1):

‘despite bloody conflicts on their doorsteps, fast-growing populations, and powerful modernising and globalising forces impacting on their largely conservative societies, they have demonstrated remarkable resilience … [and] have, at first glance, re-affirmed their status as the Middle East’s only real bastions of stability … [however], as many of the pressures that were building up in the Arab republics are now also very much present in the Gulf monarchies … it is now no longer a matter of if but when the West’s steadfast allies fall.’

So, for now, the status quo is maintained, with native-speaker ELT professionals able to earn high salaries, provided they are prepared to adhere to the constraints of local political, economic, religious and societal ideologies and exert vigilant self-censorship when discussing political or religious issues with students or colleagues.

3.5.4 – Essentialising Discourses

In Section 2.7.2, I discussed how mainstream discourses of applied linguistics could be said to both imagine and implicate native-speaker ELT professionals in essentialising discourses,
and this is reflected in the literature on native-speaker ELT professionals in the UAE. For example, Picard (2007) found the presence of essentialising discourses used to ‘pathologize’ students, non-native-speaker colleagues and Arabs/Muslims in general. However, the literature also revealed that such ‘pathologization’ of a foreign Other through discourses of deficiency was by no means limited to native-speaker ELT professionals, and that reductionist stereotyping existed at all levels of the highly-complex Gulf societies, reflecting Kumaravelu’s (2008:50) description of cultural stereotyping as ‘a fundamental trait of the human mind.’

Picard (2007) found that some of the Western native-speaker faculty, as well as some Western-educated local faculty constructed both their students and their non-Gulf Arab colleague as deficient, the former for their lack of ‘knowledge’ and motivation, the latter for their perceived adherence to ‘traditional’ practices such as rote memorization and testing, with little debate or interaction between students. And although she found that some local faculty could sympathise with the difficulties the students were facing, others saw them as ‘lazy’. Indeed, Picard found that these discourses of deficiency were even adopted by the students, whose comments about their non-Gulf Arab English teachers from school indicated to Picard that they ‘appear to have internalized a Discourse of deficit regarding their initial academic socialization at school (p279).’

Mercer (2005:284) shows that, among native-speaker ELT management one justification given for the continued dominance of native-speakers is that the students entering English-medium deserve ‘the very best, given the generally poor standard of education in government schools’. This discourse of deficiency could be said to essentialise the (predominately non-Gulf Arab) educators and administrators working in primary and secondary education in the region and uses the ‘myth of the native speaker’ to represent English-medium tertiary education as ‘progress’ and ‘modernity’. However, according to Picard (2007:230), this discourse of deficiency is not restricted to native-speakers ELT professionals as: ‘senior faculty blame English teachers for the ‘failure’ of the students to adequately socialise themselves within the academy and the teachers in their turn tend to blame the school system, which in turn blames the parents and the students’ background (p230).’ Whoever is to blame, the students generally appear to be perceived as ‘failing’.

This perception of failure can be seen in Dahl’s (2010) extensive longitudinal study into the reasons for the failure of a Western, constructivist approach to education in an HEI in the
UAE. In it she describes what are perceived to be the major barriers to student success as identified by native-speaker faculty and administration, and these are presented in detail in Appendix 2. The central factor highlighted was a perceived lack of motivation yet, as indicated by Elyas (2012:312), this may be a misconception as he found that ‘students appear to be developing autonomous identities as ‘globalized’ citizens who are able to develop cross-cultural friendships via Facebook, Twitter, etc. which gives them a further impetus to study EFL.’

However, the perpetuation of such misconceptions may serve a purpose. As the findings show, many of the perceptions of the barriers to student success highlighted by Dahl (Appendix 2) are shared by the respondents in this study and could be said to comprise a major part of the discourse of the ELT community of the UAE. It could also be argued that such a discourse provides a useful excuse for native-speaker ELT professionals to justify failings on their part, ensure their continued employment and avoid having to reflect on their own practices. In an environment where students are essentialised as ‘lazy’, ‘passive’, ‘unmotivated’, ‘unable to think critically’, ‘lacking responsibility’, whose ‘Arab/Islamic culture prevents reflective practices’ (Baalawi, 2009:77) and where institutions consider it unnecessary to provide adequate professional development for expensive, expatriate faculty whose lack of job security may make them fearful and overcautious, perhaps it is unsurprising that student failure continues to be a problem. It may also lead some to question their role in the HEIs of the UAE and the nature of ELT professionalism in such a context, which is the subject of my final section.

3.5.5 – Constructing ‘Professionalism’

Mercer (2007) discusses faculty attitudes to professional autonomy and accountability, and how these impact on their constructions of professionalism. However, like this study, her results showed the complexity of identity construction in that there were wide variations in the responses she received. Some of her respondents felt no constraints on their professional autonomy; others believed that any curtailments were part of the global rise of managerialism in HEIs; others felt constrained by the local Arab/Islamic context while there were also those who declared that faculty who ‘trumpeted autonomy’ were afraid of observations and that the term was employed as an excuse for bad teaching.
On accountability, Mercer reveals that both managers and teachers show a struggle with conflicting loyalties towards the institution, their colleagues, themselves and their students. For some teachers, who either feel a greater loyalty towards the students than the institution, or who wish to ingratiate themselves with the students in order to avoid negative feedback, this may manifest itself in the neglect of institutional regulations regarding attendance and the grading of coursework or examinations, a situation that could be said to challenge claims of ‘professionalism’. The accountability teachers feel towards their students due to the perceived power of student feedback could also manifest itself in their teaching methodology, with the pressure to perform ‘entertaining all-singing, all-dancing lessons’ (p282) in order to maintain a good rapport with their classes giving an advantage to teachers with some theatrical skills, an issue covered in Chapter 9.

In a context where students are perceived to be vested with so much power, the pressures to ‘perform’ well in class could be said to be much higher, and this may lead to the linkage of popularity with the students, performing ability and skill in training students to pass external international examinations with concepts of professionalism. Many native-speaker ELT professionals in the Gulf have teaching skills which originated in the ‘communicative approach’ to TEFL, designed mainly to educate and entertain the large number of wealthy young language students who travel to Britain, the USA or Australia every year, but which have been developed in a variety of contexts over the years. This may result in a marked difference in students’ educational experiences, not only between Arabic primary and secondary and the move to English tertiary, but also inside HEIs between English language classes and content classes delivered by faculty not trained in ‘entertaining’ TEFL methodologies.

There could therefore be said to be a serious divergence between the professional identities of ELT teachers and their non-ELT colleagues, and this may have serious implications for students. For Picard (2007), some of the responsibility for students’ problems adjusting to the hybridized culture of HEIs in the UAE are found in the teaching of formulaic and outdated notions of ‘academic writing’ by teachers who may have no experience of working in HEIs in their homelands and little concept of what ‘academic writing’ actually involves. These may allow students to pass the IELTS examination at the required level, but do little to prepare students for the content-driven writing they will need to do after completing the Foundation year. Baalawi (2009) also finds professionalism amongst Western expatriate faculty
problematic, but she links it to the lack of adequate professional development already outlined in section 3.5.2. In her conclusion she states:

‘Educational development in the UAE unarguably must be underpinned by a good understanding of what constitutes good teaching and learning from the Western research perspective. However, any sustainable teacher development initiative needs to develop a parallel knowledge base concerning Arab-Islamic influences on teaching and learning, and what constitutes a good learning environment in the Arabic sense. An understanding of Arabic-Islamic culture and values in the UAE is also essential for developing a broad framework for understanding the behaviors of students and for planning effective teaching development strategies, which go beyond the ‘dos and don’ts’ of awareness courses normally propagated during induction periods for new academics in the UAE.’ (Baalawi, 2009:159-60)

To increase professionalism, therefore, Baalawi recommends ‘going beyond the dos and don’ts’ of new faculty orientation and providing Western educators with a deeper understanding of the Arab-Islamic culture and values of the nations in which they are working. However, the current corporate management system appears to preclude any meaningful investment in such training. In addition, as the findings show, perceptions of student power and fear of causing offence to the students’ Arab-Islamic values may mean that, even amongst teachers who do have a deeper understanding of the context in which they are working, practices which contribute more to teacher survival than student success may persist.

To conclude, in section 3.5 I have attempted to highlight some of the ways in which native-speaker ELT professionals in HEIs in the UAE are represented in the literature. A picture emerges of individuals facing a complex and often contradictory environment in which they may feel both valued and well-paid for their experience and qualifications, and yet be fearful of their students and alienated by the institutions in which they work.

3.6 – Summary

In this chapter I have attempted to highlight some of contextual issues raised in the literature and although I have included some writers based in other Gulf countries the majority of the
literature discussed refers to the context of this study: the UAE. The participants of this study are working in a context where their native-speaker status, their teaching skills and their professional qualifications have secured them higher social status and better remuneration than that available to most ELT professionals elsewhere in the world. However, the transience, risk and uncertainty inherent in the expatriate academic experience (Richardson and Zikic, 2007) and the lack of any professional protection by government legislation, industrial tribunals and trade unions (Mercer, 2007) shows that, when compared to their local government employers, their local colleagues and their students, there are comparatively powerless.

In addition, the nature of the local Arab/Islamic culture linked with perceptions of the wider relationship between the Western and the Islamic worlds may result in a hyper-sensitivity amongst teachers that may prove detrimental to their students’ success. This may be compounded by a corporate style of management which uses business principles to judge HEIs, resulting in ‘frenzied attempts to prove its viability’ (Picard, 2007:39), attempts that may both alienate faculty and disadvantage students. As the majority of managers in the region are also Western expatriates, they may also feel aspects of the fear and powerlessness perceived by teachers, affecting their reactions to demands from students, senior local management and society.

The context in which the respondents in this study have chosen to work could therefore be said to have resulted in their constructing their professionalism within a complex interplay of competing and conflicting global, national, local, institutional and personal ideologies of economics, politics, religion, gender and culture. And to explain how I conducted my research in this particular context, I now turn to a discussion of the methodology that was used to conduct this study.
Chapter 4 – Research Methodology

4.1 – Introduction
In the interest of full transparency (Richards, 2003:268), and to provide a detailed accounting of the collection procedure (Holliday, 2007:54), this chapter will outline how the research methodology was developed, altered and refined over the course of the study. It gives an account of the research design of the study beginning with a description of the research questions and the participants. This is followed by a description of the research paradigm and the methodology chosen to collect the data. Subsequently, I discuss the procedures used to collect and analyse the data and consider potential threats and limitations to this study before concluding with a description of the thematic structure and the system employed to present the data.

4.2 – The Research Questions
This study aims to investigate the experiences of native-speaker ELT professionals working in HEIs in the UAE. It explores how their working lives may be impacted by the social environment of the Gulf States and the effect this may have on the construction of their professional identities. Consequently, the methodology was developed in order to answer the following research questions, as outlined in Section 1.1:

1) What are the attitudes of a group of native speaker ELT professionals working in HEIs in the UAE towards the social aspects of the environment in which they are working?

2) In what ways and to what extent do these native speaker ELT professionals consider that their teaching materials and pedagogy are affected by this environment?

3) In what ways do these native speaker ELT professionals deal with potential classroom conflicts that may stem from their interactions with the local environment?
4) How do these native speaker ELT professionals construct their professional identities with regard to the potentially conflicting ideological forces that impact upon their working lives?

4.3 – The Participants
The participants in this study consist of thirty-two native-speaker ELT professionals working at English-medium federal HEIs in the UAE. These included three teacher trainers, five managers and twenty-four English language teachers working at eleven HEIs in the UAE in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Al Ain, Fujairah and Ras Al Khaimah. Their nationalities were, in descending order, British, American, Australian, Canadian, Irish and South African and their average age was forty seven. Their combined experience working in the field of ELT was 707 years (average 22 years) in 54 separate countries. Of this experience a total of 340 years (average 10.6 years) had been spent working in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula (The UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Yemen, Kuwait, Qatar & Bahrain) and nearly half the respondents also had experience working in other Arab/Muslim nations outside Arabia.

The reason for choosing such a wide selection of participants was in order to generate a broad range of experiences, insights and perceptions. The decision to include managers was taken in order to provide a more complete picture of ELT in the HEIs of the UAE. The participants’ length of time spent working in the countries of the GCC ranged from two years to twenty seven years, which made it possible to record experiences at different stages of their careers. To reflect the gender-segregated nature of HEIs in the region, the participants consisted of females at female colleges (38%), males at male colleges (28%), females at male colleges (17%) and males at female colleges (17%) and the fact that females consist the majority (55%) of participants reflects the greater number of female students attending HEIs in the region. These choices were made in order to attempt to represent English-medium tertiary education in the region as accurately as possible. Full details of the participants are provided in Appendix 3.

4.4 – The Research Paradigm
This section describes how the research methodology that evolved over the course of the study became linked to an established theory, phenomenology, which focuses on the ‘life
world’ of the subjects and how their subjective experiences are perceived (Kvale, 1996). According to Maxwell (2005:36), ‘paradigm’ refers to a set of very general philosophical assumptions about our understanding of the world (epistemology) and about the nature of reality (ontology). In this section I first describe the epistemological basis of this study and how this informed the choice of a paradigm. I then discuss how I position myself with regard to ontology and conclude with a consideration of axiology: the philosophical investigation of ethics.

4.4.1 – Epistemology

As discussed in Chapter 3, this study was conducted in a context where the participants’ understandings of the world interact with those of their Emirati students and colleagues. As researcher, I must acknowledge that my own understandings of the world are informed by the secular humanist tradition, a tradition that argues that the rigorous self-criticism applied to claims made in the fields of arts and science should also be extended to the claims made in the field of religion. In this secular humanist tradition, Harris (2010:1-2) asserts that recent advances in the fields of neuroscience and psychology have made a scientific understanding of universal human moral truth possible. Such an understanding could be said to stem from philosophical traditions that place more emphasis on finding commonality within humanity than stressing its differences. From the social-scientific perspective, Holliday (2011:135) identifies the ‘underlying universal cultural processes’ which provide the skills and strategies through which humans ‘regardless of their background, negotiate their individuality’, again stressing the universal in humanity. However, the search for commonality is also to be found in philosophical debates within religions, with concepts of the ‘oneness of humanity’ playing an important role in most of the world’s major religions including Islam, where it is seen as an important extension of the central concept of the religion, Tawhid (the oneness of God).

My own epistemology, therefore, is one that has been informed by both my upbringing and education in England and, since the age of twenty-two, my experiences living as an expatriate. These have given me an understanding of the world that, while acknowledging the superficial differences in various cultures around the world, also sees the commonality of humanity.
4.4.2 – Choosing a paradigm

To conduct this research, therefore, I needed to conceptualise a research paradigm that would reflect this understanding of the commonality of humanity. Due to my initial training as an economist and the fact that prior to commencing this study my previous research experience had been within a quantitative research paradigm, the pragmatist, interpretivist paradigm outlined as the basis for ‘grounded theory’ (Corbin & Strauss, 2008: 11) initially seemed to offer the opportunity of using a qualitative research methodology that would produce ‘valid data that could lead to social action’. According to grounded theory, close interaction with the data would produce theory related to the issue grounded in the data itself (ibid) and this seemingly ‘pragmatist’ qualitative research paradigm appeared superficially attractive in that it appeared to offer the possibility of ‘concrete’ and ‘empirically grounded’ results that could be used to inform future teaching and training.

However, as this study is an attitudinal one, and given the subjectivity of individual attitudes and opinions, I needed to find a paradigm that could provide insight into the various interpretations of knowledge and reality that my subjects produced in their interviews, while also enabling me to reflexively consider my own biases, prejudices and presuppositions and the effect these could have on the study. This is important because I am not an ‘outsider’ studying the context from a ‘neutral’ position, but very much a member of the group under scrutiny. This study therefore uses a qualitative research approach based in the postmodern tradition and employs the discipline of striving to ‘make the familiar strange’ (Holliday, 2007) in research dealings by trying to see my own community through the eyes of an outsider. My reason for choosing qualitative research is that, as Holliday (2010:101-2) points out: ‘the purpose of qualitative research is not to prove anything, but to generate ideas which are sufficient to make us think again about what is going on in the world.’

This study investigates how a group of individuals understand and perceive the nature of their experience of a particular phenomenon: living and working in the Gulf. This therefore places this study in the phenomenological tradition (Richards, 2003:14), one of the postulates of which, according to Maykut & Morehouse (1994:12) is a recognition that any data collected in interviews is not ‘factual reality’, but a ‘socio-psychological construction’. It would therefore follow that what the interviewees tell me about their experiences is only our version of reality, one which is co-constructed with the interviewer through the interview process, reflecting our respective biases and prejudices. This approach would therefore enable what
Van Manen, (2002) describes as a questioning of the meaning of some aspect of lived experience as related by the participants through the discipline of hermeneutic reduction, which he describes as the bracketing of researcher presuppositions, biases and foreknowledge about the meaning. The role of the phenomenologist is to first understand how people within a context individually and collectively understand and interpret phenomena then aim to record, interpret and explain the meanings which these individuals make of their experiences (Raza, 2010:72).

Phenomenological research also involves, according to Van Manen (2002), the search for answers to questions that must not only be made clear by the researcher, but also understood and ‘lived’ by the researcher to the extent that he is ‘oriented towards’ and ‘influenced in’ his search for the meaning of the phenomenon by being seriously interested in it. As I am investigating individuals from the community of which I have been a member since 1994, I therefore have a serious interest in the matter. For Giles (2009:5), interest in the research phenomenon is:

‘vital in the case of phenomenological research, given its essentially reflective and constantly evolving nature due to its lack of a prescribed method, [its] call on the researcher to confront prejudices that are continually present, and [its] purpose of exploring experience in order to evoke the hidden essence of the phenomenon being investigated.’

However, recent writers have suggested that perhaps too much emphasis has been placed in the past on ‘paradigms’. For example, Dörnyei (2007:20) discusses the ‘paradigm wars’ of the last century and concludes that in the 21st century ‘the terms qualitative and quantitative are overstated binaries’ and that the former clear-cut dichotomy between the two should now be viewed more as a continuum. Consequently, although this study is based on the phenomenological approach to qualitative research, informed by critical research methodologies and a progressive postmodern awareness, due to the quantity of data generated there is also a degree of ‘quantitizing’ (conversion of qualitative data into numerical form; Dörnyei 2007:270) involved in the analysis. As Richards (2005:36) points out, ‘qualitative and quantitative data do not inhabit different worlds. They are different ways of recording observations of the same world’.
4.4.3 – Ontology

Adopting a research paradigm also means dealing with ontology – the question of reality, and how it is perceived. However, I found some discomfort with some of the claims regarding reality found in postmodernism and was worried about ‘falling into the abyss of relativism’ (Holliday 2007:xii). If the aim of my research was to generate a professional body of knowledge (Corbin & Strauss 2008:viii) that could inform future practice, I needed a paradigm that would provide me with some confidence in my own findings and the implications I drew from them. Moreover, as Silverman (2001:39) points out, the postmodernist approach has, in certain cases, led to a ‘nihilistic denial of content’, and faces accusations such as that by Koch & Smith (2006:132), who claim that postmodern research has led to ‘subjective sterility … stemming from a dubious philosophy … [which] has been used to justify ignorance and elevate emotion and opinion above reason and science.’ Clearly a way of dealing with the vexed issues of reality and reason needed to be found.

Kvale (1996:41-2) described the effect of postmodernism on our perception of reality as causing a ‘breakdown of the universal meta-narratives of legitimisation’, but claims that legitimacy can be found in the local context, which provides a ‘social and linguistic construction of perspectival reality where knowledge is validated through practice’. This would seem to suggest that ‘reality’ can be established in a local context as long as the researcher maintains an awareness of the dangers of reductionist relativism and does not attempt ambitious generalizations. In addition, Holliday (2005:x) suggests that one of the ‘central discipline[s] of the progressive paradigm of qualitative research’ is thick description, while Coffey & Atkinson (1996:16) explain that ‘thick’ analysis requires attention not only to the narrative forms, but also to the semantic and metaphorical context of the data. Thick analysis and description could therefore be said to afford the researcher the opportunity to provide a richer understanding of the ‘reality’ of social situations and attitudes than the quantitative, scientific method without losing all sense in a morass of relativity. In my presentation and analysis of the data, ‘thick’ description is provided by contextualization and interpretation, helped by my own knowledge of the context and familiarity with the discourse of the professional group being studied as well as the reflections I made upon the processes of data collection, analysis and the writing up of this study in my research diary.
4.4.4 – Axiology

Adopting a research paradigm also involves dealing with axiology – the philosophical investigation of ethics and, as Miles and Huberman (1994:288) point out, ‘any qualitative researcher who is not asleep ponders moral and ethical questions.’ Such questions about ethics and morals could be said to be augmented in research such as this, which aims to investigate the experiences of individuals working in a context where they have to address ‘the problems caused by value systems that appear to be radically incommensurable across cultures’ (Crookes, 2009:78). Indeed, this question is at the heart of this research – how native-speaker teachers brought up in a mainly ‘liberal, secular-humanist’ tradition construct their professional identities working and living amongst students, colleagues and neighbors who may follow different traditions.

One potential problem with the choice of interviews as a data collection tool may come from the interrelationship between interviewer and interviewee. As Miller and Glassner (1997:110) state, ‘the issue of how interviewees respond to us based on who we are – in their lives, as well as in the social categories to which we belong, such as age, gender, class and race – is a practical concern as well as an epistemological or theoretical one.’ Wanting to conduct the study as impartially as possible, believing that this would add to its validity, I felt that a way of dealing with the issues raised by my over-familiarity with the context was needed. I realise that, given my familiarity with the context and its importance in the formation of my own personal and professional identity, the total elimination of researcher bias would be impossible. Therefore, in the conceptualisation of the research paradigm for this study I am following what Maxwell (2005:37-9) describes as ‘critical subjectivity’, a discipline that involves recognition that:

‘although what you bring to the research from your own background and identity has [traditionally] been treated as ‘bias’, something whose influence needs to be eliminated from the design, rather than a valuable component of it … separating your research from other aspects of your life cuts you off from a major source of insights, hypotheses and validity checks … ‘critical subjectivity’ … [brings to research] a quality of awareness in which we do not suppress our primary experience; nor do we allow ourselves to be swept away and overwhelmed by it; rather we raise it to consciousness and use it as part of the inquiry process.’
The first steps towards constructing an ethical research paradigm came in the data collection stage where care was taken to ensure that ‘informed consent’ (Silverman 2001:271) was obtained from all participants – information regarding the purpose of the research being provided not only in the introductory email asking for participation but also at the beginning of each interview. This was accompanied by a guarantee of anonymity, the ‘ideal’ in qualitative research (Dörnyei 2007:66), as well as ensuring that permission was obtained from the management of all HEIs where interviews were carried out.

Ethical issues are also important in the data analysis and interpretation stage of any research project and care needs to be taken to ensure that the final outcome reflects the participants’ contributions to the data as closely as possible. To that end, steps were taken during the coding and categorisation process to ensure that the themes emerged from the data itself as much as possible, rather than being determined beforehand. However, as Richards (2003:274) points out, although the data provide the main source of themes, this has also be informed by a range of other sources including memos, notes, observations, the theoretical context, and ideas from reading.

A major concern in establishing a paradigm for this research has been the issue of partisanship. A troubling question throughout the data collection was how I could interview members of a group of which I was also a member in an impartial manner. However, as Becker (1967:239) said, when it comes to qualitative research, ‘the question is not whether we should take sides, since we invariably will, but rather whose side are we on?’ According to Silverman (2001:260), Becker’s comment caused considerable disagreement at the time, with many arguing that qualitative research should only be concerned with the pursuit of knowledge and reject all forms of political partisanship, a position that Silverman considered as elitist as that of the partisan. He divided researchers into three categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Politics</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scholar</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Knowledge for knowledge’s sake, protected by a scholar’s conscience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Counsellor</td>
<td>Bureaucratic</td>
<td>Social engineering or enlightenment for policy-makers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan</td>
<td>Left-wing / Right-wing</td>
<td>Knowledge to support both a political theory and a political practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4.4 – The Role of the Researcher: Adapted from Silverman, D (2001:260)
When considering my own role as a researcher in light of this division the problem arises that when trying to place oneself and one’s beliefs within the table, the answer that keeps occurring is ‘all of them and none of them’. There is a strong element of the ‘liberal scholar’ in my research, interested as I am in the topic merely for its own sake and the joy of knowledge, while I cannot deny that a major force behind this research is a bureaucratic one born out of my own experiences working as a teacher trainer: the enlightenment of policymakers to improve the professional conditions for, and practices of, English-language teachers in the region. And while I tend to be rather cynical and suspicious towards those holding strong political convictions and adhering to rigid dogmas, either to the ‘right’ or the ‘left’, the ‘radical’ or the ‘fundamentalist’, it has to be admitted that this in itself is a political position.

Mason (1996:29) recommends that any researcher embarking on qualitative research should start by asking themselves a series of ethical questions, the first one being to ‘decide what the purpose of your research is, e.g. self-advancement, political advocacy etc.’ and Richards (2003:267) states that ‘even the most earnest efforts can be undermined by a failure to identify personal bias in perceptions of actions or processes, or in the selection and presentation of evidence. Because research is not neutral, it is essential to establish a reflexive relationship with the process itself, constantly calling into question the assumptions that underlie the decisions we make’

4.5 – Research Methods

In order to investigate in depth the attitudes and experiences of the participants I decided to employ a research tool commonly used in qualitative research: the interview. The majority of data in this study therefore comes from a series of face-to-face semi-structured interviews conducted at eleven HEIs in the UAE between February and March, 2009. Data was also recorded in a research journal in which I reflected upon the data collection process as well as my reactions in light of my own experiences as an ELT professional in HEIs in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, thus positioning myself as ‘researcher as participant’. In this section I provide a comprehensive description and justification of my chosen research instruments.
4.5.1 – The Interview

The interview is a central research tool in qualitative research in the social sciences according to Maxwell (2005:94), offering ‘a valuable way of gaining a description of actions and events – often the only way, for events that took place in the past or ones to which you cannot gain observational access.’ In a study such as this, which explores the experiences and the attitudes of its subjects, the qualitative research interview also has the advantage of being able to investigate respondents’ views, perspectives or life-histories (Wellington, 2000) in order to gain what Kvale (1996:30) describes as ‘descriptions of the lived world of the interviewees with respect to interpretations of the meanings of the described phenomena.’ However, according to Arksey and Knight (1999:5), ‘interviews are one method by which the human world may be explored, although it is a world of beliefs and meanings, not actions that is clarified by interview research’, which highlights the constructed nature of discourse and the interpretive nature of qualitative research, in which ‘the realities of the research setting and the people in it are mysterious and can only be superficially touched by research’ (Holliday, 2007:6).

My decision to use interviews as a research tool was taken upon receiving news of my acceptance as a PhD student in May 2008 and in preparation for this I conducted initial pilot interviews in June 2008. I prepared an interview (see Appendix 4: Initial Pilot Interview), and asked four Emirati colleagues (2 female, 2 male) if they would be prepared to be interviewed and all accepted. My reason for choosing Emirati colleagues as initial interviewees was because my original proposal concentrated on the relationship between Islam and ELT in the UAE. The interviews were carried out between 17th and 19th June 2008. One of the interviews was subsequently transcribed and typed notes were made of the other three from the digital recordings (Appendix 5: Pre-PhD Interview Transcript, Notes & Biographical Details).

However, at the time of writing these initial interviews I had no idea what a qualitative research interview was and this accounts for the inclusion of questions that are leading, overly long and either too specific or too unclear. This initial process of designing, conducting and transcribing the interviews and then later, upon arrival in the UK, studying about qualitative research interviews was useful in that it helped me highlight some of the potential pitfalls of using interviews as a data gathering tool, including the resemblance of my initial interview to a ‘spoken questionnaire’ and my inclusion of too many leading questions.
With a change in the direction of my research and my decision to concentrate only on native-speaker ELT professionals, reflecting my own experience, and reflecting my research into qualitative methodology, I designed a pilot interview (Appendix 6). Then I added a selection of potential questions for each area, ensuring that they were not leading and they focused on helping the interviewees describe their experiences as fully as possible. I included an introductory statement explaining the purpose of the interview and guaranteeing the anonymity of all respondents. I also left space for the handwritten notes I would take during the interview. Although some of the literature states that qualitative interviews should only be recorded, as the process of note-taking may prove intimidating to some interviewees, I made the decision that, due to the comparatively large number of interviews I was intending to conduct, and considering that the group I was interviewing consisted of my peer group, note-taking would enable me to code and categorise the data more immediately and effectively without providing a major threat to its legitimacy.

On 17 February 2009 I conducted two pilot interviews and subsequently listened to the recordings of each in order to reflect and make notes on both the structure of the interview, and on my own performance as an interviewer. As Kvale (1996:135) points out, the ‘phenomenological ideal’ when conducting a qualitative research interview is ‘listening without prejudice; allowing the interviewees’ descriptions of their experiences to unfold without interruption from interviewer’s questions and the presuppositions these involve’. Although I would consider it impossible to keep the interviewer’s presuppositions completely out of an interview, even if it is just down to the level of the choice of subject, when conducting the interviews I did try to use interview techniques that would lessen my own influence on the flow of the conversation and let the ‘authentic’ voice of the interviewees emerge. To that end, and based on both my research into qualitative research interviews and my analysis of the initial and pilot interviews, I designed an ‘Interview Guide’ (see Appendix 7) which I laminated and read before each subsequent interview.

I also made the final interview (see Appendix 8) in which I made the following changes:

- The ‘biographical detail’ section was changed to a table, as this made it easier to quickly note down at the start of the interview and made subsequent coding and categorization more efficient.
• Most of the ‘suggested questions’ were removed as I had found them distracting during the pilot interviews and the categories were reduced to general headings and the spacing for the handwritten notes was adjusted.

• A category called ‘Religion / Culture / Traditions / 9/11 / Nationality’ was added. The aim of this was to include subjects that were sensitive and potentially contentious, but they were not framed in any set questions and could be introduced, where appropriate, during the natural flow of the interview.

These changes ensured that the final interview was of a ‘semi-structured’ nature which allowed a much freer exchange of information and left open the possibility for narratives to evolve organically over the course of the interview without too much interruption from the researcher.

4.5.2 – The Research Diary

The second method I used to gather data to add to the ‘thick’ description was a research diary. This was written throughout the research tool design stage, the data collection and analysis and the final writing up stage. I used it to; note down emerging themes during the data collection; comment on the interview process and analyse my own performance; note down observations, incidents and reflections on the interviewees; plan the research and writing process; write ‘freeform’ memos on issues in the literature / data / methodology with which I was struggling; act as a ‘pressure valve’ to deal with frustrations caused by the research process. I also used it to reflect upon my own professional experiences and how they related to the research, as well as noting the emergence of a ‘researcher voice and identity’. This enabled me to position myself as ‘researcher as participant’ as I was able to start seeing my own experiences from a different angle and reinterpret these experiences in light of this new researcher identity, thus learning what Holliday (2007:13) describes as the central discipline of qualitative research: ‘making the familiar strange’.

In the literature, research diaries are seen as vital to much qualitative research. Borg (2001) highlights their advantages in terms of processes: designing the conceptual framework, resolving fieldwork anxiety, dealing with negative feedback and the writing up process, and in terms of products: reminders of past ideas and events which guided subsequent action, all of which I found reflected in my diary. Engin (2011:303) reflects on the role of the research
diary in scaffolding her own emerging researcher identity and describes it as: ‘an integral part of the development of the researcher and the construction of research knowledge’ while Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000:6) note the importance of the research diary to the building of reflexivity in the research process which they define as ‘the interpretation of interpretation and the launching of critical self-exploration of one’s own interpretations of data.’

4.6 – Data Collection

This section contains an outline of the data collection process, covering the setting, the selection of participants, the interviews and how the data was recorded.

4.6.1 – The Setting

The thirty-two interviews were conducted in federal HEIs in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah, Al Ain and Fujairah in March 2009. The majority of the interviews (54%) were held in Ras Al Khaimah because this is the Emirate where I had worked as an English teacher and teacher trainer at a Women’s college from 2000-2008. In addition, at the time of the interviews my wife was still living in Ras Al Khaimah and working at the Men’s college there and so this provided me both with a home base and with the contacts and opportunity to access participants for my research. However, Ras Al Khaimah is one of the poorer Emirates in the country and its students tend to be less cosmopolitan than those in the larger urban areas such as Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah, so I made the decision to include interviews with ELT professionals working in other parts of the country in order to provide a ‘thicker description’ in my data. At the time of the interviews all of the HEIs I visited were gender-segregated and 55% of the interviews were conducted at Women’s colleges and 45% at Men’s. I decided to interview a greater proportion of respondents working at Women’s colleges to reflect the higher participation of women in tertiary education in the UAE (Luomi, 2008). In doing so I was again hoping to provide a ‘thick description’ of ELT in the region.

The eleven HEIs where the interviews were conducted had ELT faculty and management that mainly consisted of native-speakers. Other faculty and management came mainly from non-Gulf Arab countries with a small (but growing) number of Emiratis. Employment requirements for work in ELT in these HEIs include a minimum Master’s qualification in an ELT-related field and at least five years’ overseas experience. The respondents in this study
would have been interviewed and selected by supervisors and management from the college, again mostly native-speakers.

4.6.2 – Selecting the Participants

According to Maxwell (2005:90), when choosing the participants for qualitative research; ‘selection decisions require considerable knowledge of the settings of the study … [and] should also take into account the feasibility of access and data collection, research relationships with study participants, validity concerns and ethics.’ For this study, therefore, I used my knowledge of ELT in HEIs in the region to select an initial group of prospective respondents. However, I also practised the discipline of iteration; keeping the participant selection process open as long as possible so that after initial accounts were gathered and analysed, additional participants could be added to fill gaps in the initial description and expand or even challenge it (Dörnyei, 2007:127). This meant that as well as conducting ‘purposive’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) sampling, by choosing initial respondents on basis of factors such as their age, gender, nationality, experience etc., I also conducted what Dörnyei (2007:129) describes as ‘snowball or chain sampling’ in which initial respondents recommend further potential interviewees to the researcher.

In order to reflect the experiences of the native-speaker ELT professional as fully as possible, participants of various ages, nationalities and levels of experience were selected (see Appendix 3). Religion was also a factor and so, to reflect the range of religious beliefs, I included respondents who were atheist, agnostic, humanist, Christian (from ‘mild’ to fundamentalist ‘born-agains’), Buddhist, Western Muslim-convert and Western-born Muslim, although the majority were atheists/agnostics. On the question of race, the majority of respondents were ‘white’ (of predominantly north European heritage), reflecting hiring practices in the region, although there were also respondents of south Asian and mixed (Asian / African / Middle Eastern / European) heritage. All participants were educated to at least Master’s level and some held Doctorates, reflecting the qualifications required for those working in federal English-medium HEIs in the UAE and as such were ‘career’ ELT professionals, with experience ranging from a minimum of 9 years to a maximum of 32 years spent working in English language education. All had English as their native language (L1).
An ‘interview request email template’ (Appendix 9) was written and a list of potential interviewees was drawn up and contacted. Then, based on availability, I arranged an interview schedule (Appendix 10) and began conducting the interviews.

4.6.3 – Collecting the Data

When conducting the interviews I tried to follow the ‘best practise’ model I had designed for the interview guide (Appendix 7). Although I had laid out areas that were of special interest to me I also included a reminder that it was the respondents’ overall experiences I was interested in and that I needed to remain alert for ‘Tales of the Unexpected’ which could develop into new themes over the data collection process. In addition, I did not always stick rigidly to the format of the interview feeling that if an unexpected and interesting issue arose it was better to follow and develop that issue than close it down.

Indeed, during the course of the initial interviews, I found that this resulted in several new themes emerging which I had not previously considered but which, due to their relevance to the study, were included in subsequent interviews. For example, as I noted in my research diary, the first two interviewees raised the subjects of power (student, societal and management), fear (from teachers, of students, management and the local culture) and money (attraction of, drawbacks of) which, along with the issues of gender and humour which subsequently emerged, eventually provided the themes for the findings chapters.

The interviews were conducted in offices and meeting rooms in the HEIs where the respondents worked. The average time for each interview was 52 minutes. Of the 32 interviewees, 26 were already known to me, either professionally or personally, and the other 6 were recommended to me. As I was interviewing people with whom I shared a professional discourse, I needed to balance comprehensibility to outsiders with the natural flow of the interview, and so tried to adopt a stance of deliberate naivety (where appropriate), combined with the use of silence, to give the interviewees the opportunity to explain more fully subjects that would normally be covered (or ‘euphemised’) in the professional jargon of our mutual business. Of course, these tactics could also run the risk of my appearing somewhat dense, and with colleagues who were also personal friends they were more difficult to achieve.

Through the piloting stage I had also learned the importance of concentrated, active listening, a skill that can prove difficult when combined with note-taking. With practice, however, and
by noting in the research diary my reactions to my own performance as interviewer, I was able to improve my ability to listen carefully throughout the interviews, prompting useful expansions where necessary and politely ending irrelevant or repetitive tangents. I was trying to achieve what Richards (2003:86) describes as a good interview: one that ‘negotiate[s] between the Scylla of unfocused rambling produced by too many general or abstract questions, and the Charybdis of mere accumulated detail arising from an excess of Wh-questions requiring specific detail.’

The research diary proved a useful tool in this, as by a continuous process of self-reflection and evaluation I was able to hone my interviewing skills. Entries to the diary were aided by the space I had left at the end of the interview sheet for ‘Post-interview notes’ and I adopted the habit of spending 5 minutes at the end of each interview quickly noting down my reactions to what had happened, how I had done as an interviewer, and any interesting conversation that had occurred after the recorder had been turned off.

On the practical side, I always made sure I arrived at the interview with a back-up recording device, plenty of pencils for note-taking, dressed professionally for the context and, after an embarrassing incident during my first pilot interview, always remembered to check that my mobile phone was switched off. This had the additional advantage of acting as a ‘prompt’ for the interviewees to turn off their own mobiles, although a couple of the managers obviously considered it impossible for them to be out of contact for the length of an interview, and so continued to answer calls throughout.

4.6.4 – Ethical Considerations

On the ethical side, I ensured that all interviewees were aware that their anonymity was guaranteed and that I had obtained permission from the heads of all the institutions where the interviews were conducted beforehand. The guarantee of anonymity is one possible answer to the ‘ethical question’ posed by Mason (1996:30) for any qualitative research: ‘What are the implications for those being interviewed of framing my research topic in the way I have?’ By assuring them their names would not be used, and that the names of the towns in which they were teaching would not be attributed to their comments, I was removing a source of possible recrimination for any comments they made. The interview request email (Appendix 9) and the initial explanation of the purpose of the interview given at the beginning of each
interview were designed to provide ‘informed consent’ by making sure the participants all understood the purpose of the interview and that their participation was entirely voluntary.

Another ethical consideration was my role as researcher or as participant. Given that the majority of the interviewees were previously known to me in either a professional or a personal context it was sometimes difficult to maintain the disciplines of uncritically listening or using deliberate nativity in order to avoid professional discourse or jargon that might prove incomprehensible to those outside the research setting. This was especially so with respondents who were also personal friends. On this issue Aboshiha (2007:89 citing Baxter, 2003:51) comments that ‘in some ways I am a participant and in other ways not – and that the role fluctuates between sites, between different events in the same site and between relationships with different participants’. This issue will be dealt with further in section 4.8.

4.7 – Analysing the Data

The analysis of the data in this study followed Maxwell’s (2005:95) recommendation that ‘the experienced qualitative researcher begins data analysis immediately after finishing the first interview … and continues to analyse the data as long as he or she is working on the research.’ In this section I describe the analysis of the data, from the initial design of spreadsheets to record biographical details and use of the research diary, through the transcription of the interview notes and recordings to the coding and categorisation of the resultant data.

4.7.1 – Initial Coding & Transcription of Notes and Interviews

To prepare for the coding of the data, I designed a table with the following headings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIC-2009-06-23_10h48m11s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIC-2009-06-23_09h42m37s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIC-2009-07-12_12h35m50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIC-2009-07-12_18h14m48s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviewee details were entered daily, making it possible for me to realise that, after twenty interviews, I had spoken to fifteen women and only five men, which prompted the scheduling
of extra interviews to redress the gender imbalance. The use of Excel spread sheets enabled me to analyse the respondents’ biographical details as well as those emerging later through my ‘quantitzing’ (Dörnyei 2007:270) of some of the data. Although this is a qualitative study, as Kirk and Miller (1986:10) point out, ‘[in] our pragmatic view, qualitative research … does not imply a commitment to innumeracy’, although I should also heed Silverman’s (2001:36) warning that ‘without a theoretical rationale behind the tabulated categories, counting only gives spurious validity to research’.

After the interviews had been completed, the transcription and initial coding process began. As Richards (2003:272) points out, ‘in practical terms the best starting point … involves getting stuck into the data itself, coding it freely’ so, using the hand-written notes from the interviews while listening to the recordings, notes on the participants’ comments were typed up and each was assigned a general ‘heading’, based on what had been said. These ‘headings’ would, after sorting, provide the initial categories for the first coding. Although full transcription of all interviews is described as the ‘default position’ in qualitative research by Dörnyei (2007:246), it was decided that full transcription of 32 interviews (average length 52 minutes) not only ran the danger of producing an unmanageable amount of data leading to what Richards (2003:91) describes as ‘data dominance’, where the researcher becomes overwhelmed by too much data, but also would be too time-consuming to be practical.

During transcription, a code (T01, M01 etc) was used to preserve anonymity and, by the use of eight different colours, to indicate the interviewees’ gender, their job and whether they worked at a male college or a female college. This coloured code made subsequent interpretation of the data easier.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Analysis – Initial Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students – Fantastic sense of humour (T01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology – Humour is vital part of teaching (T01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology – Using Arabic in class – Good if used with care (T01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Culture – Initially very boring (as a mother with a young son) (M02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Culture – Initially a ‘sea of black’ with its ‘gliding slowly past’ (M02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students – Initially surprised by low level of students (M02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers – Looking for teachers with international experience and openness to multiculturalism (M02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials – Looking for culturally appropriate materials, but difficult to find (M02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials – Appropriateness not an issue with students – not bothered (M02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem – Daisie cartoon incident (M01)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data was then sorted according to the general ‘headings’ and I was able to begin categorising. By recording the data in this manner, upon completion I was able to sort it into
alphabetical order which helped quickly establish which major categories were emerging and where items needed to be moved due to mislabelling or spelling errors.

The first categories were then designed using what Richards (2003:276) describes as the essential features of an adequate category – that it be analytically useful (not too big or crude), conceptually coherent (actually linked to the subject I am discussing), empirically relevant (having enough responses to justify its own category) and practically applicable (specific enough to fit data into but not too vague). I was also aware of Richard’s warning that ‘the most dangerous trap lying in wait for novice researchers is baited with categories. The temptation to invent categories and to assign them is almost irresistible to some’ (ibid:xxiii).

4.7.2 – Coding and Categorising

The process for devising the eventual thematic headings involved the following steps. The interview consisted of the following:

1. Biographical Details
2. First Experiences
3. Was life/teaching here different to what you were expecting?
4. Friends and family back home
5. Methodology
6. Materials
7. Critical Incidents – Could you tell me about any experience you’ve had, or you have heard about, where there has been a problem in the classroom?
8. Religion / Culture / Traditions / 9/11 /Nationality
9. Reflections & Advice for new teachers
10. Post-interview Notes

It was hoped that by not including actual questions (apart from #3 and #7) the interview would progress in a ‘semi-structured’ way which would enable issues to emerge without too much direct interference from the interview. As the interview process progressed I reflected in my research diary on which issues were eliciting the most information and which new (and unexpected) issues were emerging. These new issues were then developed further during subsequent interviews, usually by a process of asking participants to expand on them
whenever they were mentioned. After the first couple of days of interviewing the following issues were noted in the research diary as emerging:

1. **The Role of Money** – The importance of the (comparatively) high salaries to working in the region – the money makes the disadvantages of the job more bearable.

2. **The Expat ‘Lifestyle’** – The attraction of the ‘lifestyle’ of in the UAE, with good weather, swimming pools, houses with servants, excellent shopping, sailing, golf, etc.

3. **Gender** – The impact of gender, especially in single sex colleges.

4. **The Role of the Spouse in Teaching Couples** – How having a partner who understands the difficulties of the job can make it a lot more bearable.

5. **The ‘Angst of the Liberal’** – ELT professionals who see themselves as liberal trying to deal with being part of a privileged, very well-paid elite in a highly stratified and unequal society.

6. **Hiding Your Atheism** – The deception of having to pretend to be ‘a Christian’ when asked about their beliefs by the students.

7. **The Importance of Rapport** – How teachers who build up a good rapport with their classes are much better able to deal with ‘sensitive’ cultural issues.

8. **The Fear Factor** – Fear often mentioned; fear of the power of the students, fear of management, fear of the local society and fear of (unwittingly) offending religious sensibilities.

9. **The Infantilisation of Students** – Interestingly the main comments on this was that it was something that the interviewees perceived to be coming from the students themselves rather than the teachers. Several comments were made about the perceived lack of maturity in the students who, although ‘adult’ in that they were all 18 or over, often seemed to be rather childlike to some of the interviewees. Indeed the teachers tried to encourage a more adult relationship with the students, but there seemed to be a demand for teachers to act more as ‘mother/father-figures’.

(Extract from Research Diary, March 12th 2009)

These emergent issues combined with the issues highlighted from the interviews helped shape the first set of categories with which I transcribed the interview notes. As the interview notes were transcribed, each statement was given a category. As the transcription progressed, common categories became apparent. By the end of the transcription process the data were sorted alphabetically and the following 13 categories emerged:
• **English** – Comments from the interviewees on the role of English and ELT, both in the Gulf and worldwide,

• **Family & Friends** – Comments from the interviewees on the reactions of their families and friends to their working in the Gulf.

• **Local Culture** – Comments from the interviewees on the local Khaliji culture and how it affects their professional lives.

• **Materials** – Comments from the interviewees on the issues surrounding teaching materials in the Gulf.

• **Methodology** – Comments from the interviewees on both their own teaching methodologies in the region and others’.

• **Money** – Comments from the interviewees on the role of money in ELT in the Gulf.

• **Post 9/11** – Comments from the interviewees on how the attacks of September 11th and the subsequent ‘War on Terror’ affected their lives in the Gulf.

• **Problems** – Comments from the interviewees on problems they had either personally encountered in the classroom or that colleagues had encountered.

• **Religion** – Comments from the interviewees on how religion, both Islam and their own religious beliefs (or lack thereof), affected their teaching and their personal lives.

• **Students** – Comments from the interviewees on their students, covering both their English language abilities and their attitudes towards studying.

• **Teachers** – Comments from the interviewees on the issues facing teachers in the region, their attitudes towards their colleagues and their advice for people considering working in the Gulf.

• **The Fear Factor** – Comments from the interviewees on how fear affects their working lives.

• **The West** – Comments from the interviewees on Western society and media and how it affects their lives in the Gulf.

Each item of data therefore consisted of a comment/comments made during the interviews transcribed from both the handwritten notes written during the interviews and subsequent listening to the audio recordings. The initial themes as a percentage of the total are shown in Table 4.7.21:
These categories were then printed and coded a second time. Using paper print-outs of the data under the initial themes meant that the coding procedure could be done away from the computer, providing a welcome break for the researcher. Again, colour codes were used to sort the data, as seen below:

The issues that arose out of the second coding were noted as follows:

**1st Coding**

**2nd Coding**

**English**

Benign English, Government Role, Negative English, World English, Gender, Culture

**Family/Friends**

Positive & Negative reactions, Money, Ignorance, Disinterest
Local Culture  Positive & Negative comments, Gender, Social stratification, Comments on locals

Materials  Developing own, Criticism of coursebooks, Appropriateness, Censorship, Methodology

Methodology  Humour, Approaches, Relationships, Censorship

Money  Positive & Negative comments, Importance

Post 9/11  Personal reactions, Student/Colleague reactions, Western reactions, Islam

Problems  Misbehaviour, Gender, Management, Student power, Culture, Advice

Religion  Fundamentalism, Agnosticism/Atheism, Avoiding Religion, Hiding Beliefs, Islam or Culture?, Views on Islam

Students  Level, Gender, Age, Motivation, Negative & Positive Comments, Rapport, Religion, Humour, Management, Role of teacher

Teachers  Gender, Criticism, Advice, Comments, Humour

Fear Factor  Fear of Students, Gender, Management, Culture, Hiding Beliefs/Religion

The West  Criticism of West, Advice, Humour, Perceived Attitudes

These issues were then reconfigured into new categories and this second coding expanded the original thirteen categories into nineteen. The new categories that emerged were noted as new headings that were written in front of the original headings as can be seen below:

- Religion Negative Family & Friends – Family appalled by her living here – Very conservative/religious S. Carolina (T12)
- Religion Negative Family & Friends – They think it’s a terrible place, with hand-chopping etc (T16)
- Gender Local Culture – (This is going to be confidential, isn’t it?) Even now when I see a totally covered woman I feel ‘How pathetic and sad!’ It really upsets me (T23)

Among the new categories were those noting both positive and negative comments as well as the issues of gender, humour, motivation, the role of management and government and comments regarding the subject of censorship. Although this process involved quite a degree of overlap and repetition, it made the emergence of new themes possible.
It was then decided to do a third coding of the data, which reduced the nineteen categories down to twelve, as shown in Table 4.7.23 below:

A major new theme that emerged during the third coding was that of ‘Politics’, a category that included comments not only about the political system in the Gulf, but also regarding the...
role of English worldwide and the relationship between the Arab world and the Anglophone countries of the West, post 9/11. In addition, the category ‘Censorship’ grew from only 0.8% of the total in the second coding to 15.8% in the third. This was because it was decided to include comments about teachers’ self-censorship of words and actions in the classroom and beyond as well as the physical censorship of course books and other teaching materials. The twelve main categories of the third coding were then sub-divided into handwritten pictorial ‘mind maps’ to provide a more easily accessible representation of the emerging themes.

Analysis and cross-referencing of these handwritten mind maps with reference to the research diary led to further mind maps linking the data together under the five final themes that emerged from the data, and around which the findings chapters are structured: fear, gender, power, money & humour, which will be further discussed in section 4.9. Due to the large quantity of data generated, decisions had to be made about what to include and what to exclude from the final study. This was done by selecting the issues relating to the five major themes and then the relevant extracts from the interviews were fully transcribed onto initial typed interview notes as shown in the screenshot below of the beginning of the interview with ‘Sheila’ (Further examples of such extracts can be found in Appendix 11):

Sheila
1. Local Culture – Initially thought it was a great show – National dress (SHEILA)
2. Friends & Family – Not really interested (SHEILA)
3. Methodology – Learnt it on the job – Masters not very useful (SHEILA)
4. Methodology – Humour very important – ‘Jovial lads’ (SHEILA) Working here I think you have to be a bit more laid back here (Laughter) I mean they don’t want someone who’s all prissy and...you’ve got to be able to have a laugh with them and take it easy and overlook a lot of things. Researcher: ‘...so how important is having a sense of humour here’ Sheila: ‘Oh, extremely, but it comes easily, it’s not difficult. You don’t have to work at (Laughter) Because they’re very, you know, jovial lads. I think it would be pretty bad here if you didn’t have a sense of humour. But you’d have to work on not having a sense of humour because they like to have a laugh with you.’ Researcher: ‘And did you find that this sense of humour was as important when you were teaching Chinese or Japanese or Russian students in Australia?’ Sheila: ‘No, but I never thought about that before. No, definitely not, but I don’t know whether it was because they were Chinese or because they were mixed cultures, et...no, no, now I come to think of it there wasn’t much humour. But also they were so...serious and diligent students. They weren’t there to have a joke.’ (Sheila 4 – MIC-2009-03-09_16h30m45s – 13:50)

As can be seen from this screenshot, only the extracts from the interviews relating to the major themes were transcribed: given the number and length of the interviews it was decided that the time needed to produce full transcriptions of all thirty-two interviews was too much.
4.7.3 – Interpreting the Data

Wolcott (1994:12) said that all successful data analysis should involve categorisation and interpretation and identified three stages in the process of working with qualitative data:

- **Description** – addresses the question ‘What is going on here?’

- **Analysis** – addresses the identification of essential features and the systematic description of interrelations among them – ‘How do things work here?’

- **Interpretation** – addresses procedural questions of meanings and contexts – ‘What is to be made of it all?’

However, as Coffey and Atkinson (1996:6) point out, there is not necessarily agreement over what the terms ‘analysis’ and ‘interpretation’ mean: ‘for some authors, analysis refers primarily to the tasks of coding, indexing, sorting, retrieving, or otherwise manipulating data … For others in the field, analysis refers primarily to the imaginative work of interpretation.’

Throughout the analysis procedure and the various codings and categorisations of the data, interpretation was also occurring, usually in the form of memos on particular aspects of the data or entries in the research diary recording my thoughts on issues arising. As Dörnyei (2007:38) points out, one of the main features of qualitative research is that it involves interpretive analysis, where the outcome of any study is the researcher’s subjective interpretation of the data and the researcher’s own values, personal history and ‘position’ on characteristics such as gender, class, culture and age become an integral part of the inquiry. This subjective interpretation is driven by my own personal experience – my ‘first voice’ (Holliday 2007:133), which combined with the ‘second’ (the data), the ‘third’ (comments on the data at the time of collection) and the ‘fourth’ (comments on the first three voices at the time of writing) will make up the ‘final overarching argument which connects and pulls together all the others’ (ibid:134). These processes of description, analysis and interpretation led to the final thematic structure of this study, which is further discussed in section 4.9.

4.8 – Potential Problems

This section deals with issues of reliability, validity and research relations in the study.
4.8.1 – Reliability

‘Reliability’ refers to the extent that the results of research could be replicated and the degree to which the ‘finding is independent of accidental circumstances of the research’ (Kirk and Miller, 1986, p69). The issue of reliability in qualitative research is one upon which there is disagreement in the literature. The notion of ‘reliability’ comes from the ‘rival’ field of quantitative research and has been dismissed as unachievable in qualitative data collection by writers such as Marshall and Rossman (1989:147) who see it as a ‘positivist notion’ based on the assumption of an unchanging social world in direct contrast to the qualitative assumption that the social world is always changing and the concept of replication is problematic. As Dörnyei (2007:57) points out, ‘replication is not something that is easy to achieve in a research paradigm where any conclusion is, in the end, jointly shaped by the respondent’s personal accounts and the researcher’s subjective interpretations of these stories.’

However, although reliability in qualitative data collection methods such as observation and interview can be problematic, due to the subjective nature of such procedures, there seems to be a growing consensus that reliability can be provided by the transparency of the data collection procedure and the consistency of its analysis. Kirk and Miller (1986:72) state that ‘for reliability to be calculated, it is incumbent upon the investigator to document his or her procedure’ while Hammersley (1992:67) states that reliability comes from the consistency of the categorisation process of the data. In Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) taxonomy of quality criteria in qualitative research the term ‘dependability’ is used as an equivalent to the quantitative notion of reliability, referring to the ‘consistency’ of the findings and Richards (2003:285) also states that reliability comes from the consistency of our representations of the data.

As this is an attitudinal study, the issue of consistency in participants’ responses is somewhat problematic as the purpose of the study was to collect individual’s opinions and experiences, rather than to prove any particular hypotheses. However, in the categorisation of the data and the presentation of the findings it is hoped that a degree of reliability has been provided by the comprehensiveness and transparency of the collection and analysis processes and the use of appropriate tabulations (Silverman 2001:240) to show the origin of the data categories and the choice of the main themes in the findings chapters (see sections 4.7 & 4.9). In the data collection procedure, the use of the semi-structure qualitative interview and the development of the interview guide (Appendix 7) meant that although there was scope for substantial
individual differences in the responses the overall structure of the interview remained consistent throughout.

Another possible threat to the reliability of the study could come from the number of interviews conducted as, at thirty-two, it is larger than normal in qualitative research yet falls far below the number usually required for quantitative research. However, as Dörnyei (2007:127) points out, ‘using computer-aided data analysis we can increase the sample size to as many as 30’, although he then states that such a number ‘would probably be pushing the limits and would be barely manageable for a single researcher such as a postgraduate student,’ and that ‘a well-designed qualitative study usually requires a relatively small number of respondents to yield the saturated and rich data that is needed to understand even subtle meanings in the phenomenon under focus.’

4.8.2 – Validity

Ensuring ‘validity’ in qualitative research is, according to Richards (2003:285), ‘a matter of making sure our reading is in line with the way things are’. However, such a simple explanation immediately encounters a problem in a postmodern research paradigm where ‘the way things are’ varies according to the perceptions of each individual. However, as Silverman (2001:xi) points out, one of the weaknesses of qualitative research can arise from ‘attempts to downplay ... validity and reliability (as inappropriate or politically incorrect) and to replace them with criteria like ‘the authenticity with which we reproduced ‘experience’. For Holliday and Aboshiha (2009:673), within a postmodern approach to qualitative research, validity cannot be claimed on the basis of objectivity, but in the manner in which researchers manage their subjective engagement with the world around them and the extent to which they ‘provide detailed justification for how their choices of research design suit the specificities of the social setting and the researcher-subject relations which they generate.’

One of the most influential works in the literature on validity in qualitative research has been the taxonomy of Lincoln & Guba (1985) which posits four criteria for validity:

1) **Credibility** – the ‘truth value’ of the research
2) **Transferability** – the ‘applicability’ of the research to other contexts
3) **Dependability** – the ‘consistency’ of the findings
4) **Confirmability** – the ‘neutrality’ of the findings
On the first issue, credibility, the ‘truth’ value of this study could be problematic given the relative nature of truth inherent in postmodernism. However, the ‘truth’ generated in this study is one that has been co-constructed by myself and my respondents through the interviews and reflect how truth is understood by the individuals concerned in a particular context, rather than claiming to represent a ‘universal’ truth. On the issue of transferability, I would consider that this research, while not being directly applicable to other contexts due to the particular ideological forces impacting upon the lives of ELT professionals in the UAE, in its methodology could certainly inform any context in which expatriate native-speaker teachers are working. On the issue of dependability, I have attempted to be consistent in my interpretation and presentation of the findings and transparent in my descriptions of the data collection and analysis procedures. On the final issue, confirmability or the ‘neutrality’ of the findings, while I feel that complete neutrality is impossible to achieve, I have tried to practice the discipline of striving for impartiality by attempting to bracket my presuppositions and develop a researcher identity to enable me to ‘make the familiar strange’ and view the research setting from an ‘outsider’ perspective.

4.8.3 – Research Relations

As discussed in Chapter 1, my motivation for this study came from my own experiences working as a native-speaker ELT professional in English medium HEIs in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE between 1994 and 2008, reflecting Holliday’s (2007:22) statement that:

‘getting into qualitative research is very often about grasping opportunities that address … a long-standing preoccupation … a concern with issues that have arisen through previous experience – some sort of problem, inconsistency or shortcoming which has led to a desire to look into the issue further.’

And, as McKay (2006:1) states, ‘for teachers, a primary reason for doing research is to become more effective teachers.’ I cannot deny that my initial motivation for starting this study came both from my long-standing preoccupation about the relationship between the English-speaking West and the Gulf Arab/Muslim world, a preoccupation only heightened by the events of September 11th 2001 and my personal connections to those events, as well as my preoccupation with what I perceived as the often ineffective ELT that occurred in the
HEIs where I worked. This second preoccupation was further strengthened after 2003 when I moved from primarily being an English language teacher to mainly working as a teacher trainer.

However, the fact that I am investigating the very community of which I have been a member for so long, and am dealing with an aspect of a potentially highly controversial subject; the intersection of the ‘Western’ and the Arab/Muslim worlds, raises concerns about researcher bias and partisanship which may pose a threat to the study’s validity. Indeed, as Maxwell (2005:37) points out, ‘traditionally, what you bring to the research from your own background and identity has been treated as ‘bias’, something whose influence needs to be eliminated from the design.’ However, in this study I have attempted to deal with the potential threats to validity caused by researcher bias in several ways.

Firstly, as discussed in Section 4.4.4, throughout this study I have tried to maintain the discipline of critical subjectivity. This has not been an easy task, and yet I found that as the study progressed, and with the creation of a new ‘researcher identity’ born out of my engagement with the literature and struggles with the issues and themes emerging from the research process, I was able to view my previous ‘teacher identity’ more dispassionately and thus able to position myself within the study as ‘researcher as participant’.

Secondly, during the data collection process I became aware that, as a fellow native-speaker ELT professional with experience working in the region, my involvement in the initial interviews could often draw me into conversations with the participants as we discussed topics of mutual interest. This was recorded in my research diary as I listened back to the interviews and started the preliminary data analysis. Therefore, as the interviews progressed, I made a conscious effort to limit my involvement and worked hard to remain as non-committal as possible by moderating the tone of my voice and avoid being drawn into such conversations. However, the extracts of data which demonstrate me engaging with the interviewees and commenting on what they were saying in a friendly and collegiate manner reflect an interviewing style that I thought was appropriate for the context and instrument in developing the argument.

Thirdly, I was aware that as my study was also informed by critical applied linguistics and thus dealt with the ideological aspects of ELT, there was also a danger of partisanship. As Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) explain, while traditional researchers cling to the ‘guard rail of neutrality’, critical researchers frequently announce their partisanship in the struggle for a
better world. However, as discussed in Section 4.4.4, I attempted to raise my own partisanship to awareness and maintain the discipline of critical subjectivity throughout the study.

4.8.4 - Summary
To conclude, this section has discussed potential problems in the study relating to reliability, validity and research relations. I have attempted to address these issues by the comprehensiveness and transparency of the descriptions of my methodology, the justifications for my choice of research design in this particular setting and by maintaining the discipline of critical subjectivity in my research relations.

4.9 – The Thematic Structure
Having provided a discussion of the methodology used to produce this study, I now turn to a description of its thematic structure. The five major themes that emerged from the data analysis, which also make up the titles of the five findings chapters were as follows:

- **Chapter 5: Fear** – In this chapter I introduce data which relate to the issue of fear, which focusses on how the local requirements for a vaguely defined censorship of ELT are viewed by the respondents and how this may result in fear, uncertainty and over-censorship.

- **Chapter 6: Gender** – In this chapter I consider the issue of gender, emerging from the data as a major source of potential conflict, not only the ‘external’ conflict that may occur in the classroom, but also the ‘internal’ conflict evidenced by the respondents as they attempted to deal with the potential differences between their own beliefs and those of their students.

- **Chapter 7: Power** – In this chapter I address the issue of power, introducing data which attempts to reveal the respondents’ attitudes to the students and the social environment in which they are living, including their perceptions of power relations in this environment and how these may affect their working lives.
• **Chapter 8: Money** – In this chapter I introduce data concerning the subject of money, considering the impact that the comparatively generous salaries available to ELT professionals in the UAE may have upon their working lives.

• **Chapter 9: Humour** – In this chapter I discuss the issue that emerged from the data as an important component of the respondents’ teaching methodology and as a potential means of coping with the complexities and uncertainties of their lives: humour.

It should be noted that in the presentation of this data, each extract is followed by the pseudonym of the respondent and a number. This number stems from the transcription process where the notes from the interviews were typed up chronologically as a numbered list and the relevant extracts from the interviews were later transcribed (see Section 4.7.2). Therefore, the lower the number, the earlier in the interview that extract occurred and vice-versa. During the data analysis, in which the sorted codings were transferred to handwritten mind maps, and the subsequent writing up of the findings, it was found that this method of recording the data provided a convenient and speedy method of locating relevant extracts.
Chapter 5 – Fear

5.1 – Introduction

This chapter introduces the research findings which appeared to indicate that fear was a major factor in shaping the professional identities of native-speaker ELT professionals working in HEIs in the UAE. This chapter begins by outlining how the expectations of local educational authorities and society that ELT be censored has resulted in a dominant ‘no politics, no religion’ mantra in the professional discourse of the native-speaker ELT community in the region. It then presents data which appear to demonstrate that the complexity, uncertainty, fear and potential for conflict surrounding the issue of religion may lead to a careful self-censorship of the teachers’ beliefs and opinions, potentially entailing dishonesty and compromises of the teachers’ principles. Next, the findings are presented showing how this fear may be linked to politics, both local and global. I conclude by considering data which explores how knowledge gained of local society may impact upon the participants’ practices and attitudes in light of ‘the fear factor’ in the discourse of native-speaker ELT professionals in the region.

5.2 – Fear and learning what to censor: The ‘No Politics, No Religion’ Mantra

As discussed in Chapter 3, most HEIs in the region use international English language course-books for their ELT courses which are commonly censored before being distributed to students. Items that may be censored include pictures of people in revealing clothing, alcohol or pork and illustrations showing mixed-gender kissing, dancing and parties. This is illustrated by ‘Betty’, an American teacher who had spent thirty years living in the Arab world, who says of her first experiences in Arabia:

‘One of my first tasks was to .. oh what was it? .. The orange one .. the Cambridge English Course, it was in 1984, I think. We had to cut the pictures out of pages .. you know, the lady in the bathing suit on the beach and so on. So we sat all day long and cut those pictures out of about two or three thousand books, and I always wondered what happened to all those little pictures, you know. They were supposed to go in the garbage, but who knows where they ended up (Laughs)’ (Betty 3)
Betty’s final comment about the possible destination of the pictures of women in bathing suits might indicate a degree of cynicism about the whole censorship process, perhaps reflecting the length of time she has spent in the region. However, this overt censoring may also have the effect of these books being rejected by teachers as too potentially ‘risky’ to consider using in class. Indeed, over 50% of the respondents in this study stated that they rarely or never used course-books, preferring instead to make their own materials, something also noticed by the Emirati academic I interviewed for the initial pilot interview (Appendix 5), reflecting on her own English classes with native-speaker teachers at her HEI. For the institutions concerned, this could be said to be a major expense: costly imported books are issued free to students, but are rejected by teachers unsure about the potential cultural ‘dangers’ that may contain. For ‘Mandy’, an Australian teacher in her fifties with five years’ experience in Kuwait and the UAE, the use of course-books is highlighted as a major area of change in her teaching since moving to the region:

‘My teaching since I came here has completely changed. Completely. For one thing I cannot bear to work with any published material any more. I haven’t opened a course-book or a supplementary book for.. um.. I’d say a year and a half now. In fact I’d almost say I’m phobic about it … I’ve felt increasingly uncomfortable foisting anodyne materials, some of which are patently unsuitable, but many of which were just outside the students’ socio-cultural schemata, hence a hindrance to learning and teaching.’ (Mandy 7)

Mandy sees the course-books as ‘patently unsuitable’ and ‘beyond the students’ socio-cultural schemata’. This could be said to highlight the complex position facing ELT professionals in the region. They are told that they need to censor ‘unsuitable’ material, but often the lack of detailed instructions from management regarding this censorship means they have to decide for themselves what they consider ‘suitable’ and within the students’ ‘socio-cultural schemata’ – a position for which they may be inadequately trained and lack the detailed knowledge to effectively implement.

However, for students the result may be classes using materials that are based upon Mandy’s assumptions about what she considers to be appropriate in this particular context rather than what the students wish to study or, indeed, the areas they need to study to pass international English examinations. The question is raised, therefore, as to the source of native-speaker teachers’ assumptions about the suitability of the ELT materials. Teachers are expected to
censor the content of their classes to reflect the socio-cultural norms of the context in which they are teaching, and yet it appears that the training they receive in this area is inadequate, as illustrated in the following two extracts. In the first, Betty continues her description of her initial experiences in Arabia:

‘In our initial training we were told very strongly not to talk about anything political. Of course (Whispers) ‘the Voldemort country’ .. (Normal voice) and, well, you know, all those topics that we’re not supposed to talk about (Laughs).’ (Betty 3)

Betty highlights the importance placed on avoiding politics, especially any mention of Israel – ‘the Voldemort country’, referring to the villain in the Harry Potter books who is usually described as ‘he who must not be named’. Her comment ‘you know, all those topics that we’re not supposed to talk about’ reveals our shared knowledge and refers to topics such as politics, alcohol, pork, music, dancing, religion and any talk of dating or sex. For ‘Al’, a British Muslim language teacher with 15 years’ experience in the UAE, censorship was seen as related to a dominant ‘No religion, no politics’ mantra:

‘What you find is that the ‘I’ word, the Islam word, which is a very big part of what goes on in this part of the world, it’s like a taboo. We’re not going to talk about Islam, that’s politics. When I turned up in this country one of the first things I was told, it was like a mantra: ‘No politics! No religion! Keep away from it’, and I was like ‘Well, what’s left if you can’t talk about that?’ It’s just absurd and I think people are fearful here not so much because of anything to do with language teaching but because of not knowing anything much about the culture, it’s the ignorance.’ (Al 8)

Al states that he found the ‘no politics, no religion’ mantra absurd, but when I asked him to talk about his first experiences in the Gulf, he revealed how his own initial desire to teach English from an ‘Islamic perspective’ had met with resistance:

Al: ‘When I turned up I had these very, sort of, extreme … er, visions of how I thought English language teaching should be … I was idealistic, and I thought that maybe they ought to look at language teaching from an Arab/Islamic perspective but I found out that, you know, people don’t really want that … erm … Yeah.’
Researcher: ‘When you say people don’t really want …’

Al: ‘I mean the masses, the main body of local society doesn’t really want to go for that.’ (Al 2)

In the case of religion and politics, which often has religious influences, Muslim ELT professionals such as Al may have an advantage over non-Muslims such as Betty or Mandy, who may feel much less confident about breaking the ‘no religion, no politics mantra’. Al seems to be confident enough to challenge the prohibition on talk of politics or religion in the classroom. However, as Al’s comment shows, although there appears to be a local desire for censorship that does not necessarily translate into a desire for the ‘strong Islamization approach’ to ELT that he initially thought was appropriate for the region.

For ‘Jennifer’, an American ELT teacher and academic with 15 years’ experience in the UAE, censorship is described using a phrase from her American background. When asked which criteria she considers when producing her own materials, she stated:

‘I look for things that aren’t going to cause controversy … you know, anything that’s related to something that’s haram, like sex and drugs and rock and roll or whatever (Jennifer 6).’

Jennifer describes the haram as ‘sex and drugs and rock and roll’, but the process of gaining an understanding of what may be considered haram may not only be a complex one but may also provide a potential source of fear.

5.3 – Fear of the word ‘Haram’

For ELT professionals working in the UAE the process of gaining a thorough understanding of what may be considered ‘haram’ by their students may often be characterised by fear. For example, in the following exchange with ‘Norman’, I ask him about his first experiences in the region:

Norman: ‘When I started here I was using Headway .. and I used it as a guide, you know; that’s the target grammar we’re doing this week .. but I did develop a lot of my own materials’
Researcher: ‘And what criteria did you take into account when you were developing your own materials?’

Norman: ‘Erm … what would interest them, a topic that would interest them and obviously if it was culturally sensitive or relevant …’

Researcher: ‘What do you mean ‘culturally sensitive’?’

Norman: ‘Well, there’s a unit in Headway that talks about dating. That for example, I would avoid ..um .. I would avoid pictures that wouldn’t be appreciated, you know, maybe people playing around in a swimming pool I probably wouldn’t use and I’ve never used a song here in class. I used to use songs quite a lot in Europe and Indonesia.’

Researcher: ‘Now, how do you know not to use these? Have you had training for this or is it just something you’ve gathered yourself over time?’

Norman: ‘Well, it’s something I’ve picked up off other teachers but it’s also learned from calamities in the classroom (Laughs) … For example, I did try and play a song once and I just got the words ‘Haram! Haram! Haram!’ thrown at me .. I was new and I thought well, if they’re going to be learning English in the English classroom in a supposedly English-speaking environment then they’ve got to learn some culture with that, and our culture, a lot of it is in songs. So I did play it and a few of the girls refused to answer the questions and wouldn’t even touch the paper. Others would. Others wouldn’t mind … so I learnt from that experience – just don’t! Just stay away from songs.’ (Norman 5)

For Norman, the process of learning what was considered haram involved not only interaction with other teachers, but also what he called ‘calamities’ in class, which reflects the negative impact of such experiences. This ‘calamity’ seems to stem from his initial belief that learning English should also involve learning some aspects of English culture; in this case, songs. For the inexperienced teacher, this negative reaction to music may come as a surprise given that music is fairly commonplace in public places such as malls and restaurants in the region. For the British Muslim convert ‘Brian’, who had been working in Saudi Arabia and the UAE for 8 years, the issue of music was much clearer than it had been for Norman:
‘I never use music in class … going to the proper practice of Islam, music is not allowed … I mean, people will argue about music, but I didn’t become a Muslim to play about with it, which a lot of people do, and without a shadow of a doubt music is not allowed. It is unequivocal. You cannot argue. Again, it’s just mankind, people, you know, in all religions there are the pure teachings and then people, you know, because they like music .. (Sighs) .. I stopped listening to music. I used to be very much into music … but without a doubt, there really is no debate about it. It’s clear … But it is quite difficult here as you find music everywhere, when you go out or when you turn on the TV.’ (Brian 8)

Brian states that, for him, the Islamic ban on music is ‘unequivocal’ yet, with the ubiquity of music in public places and on TV in the Gulf, this might not be apparent to teachers such as Norman, whose description of having the words ‘Haram! Haram! Haram!’ ‘thrown’ at him reflects the unpleasant nature of the experience, which may in turn have cause resentment, as well as a somewhat cynical attitude towards the students. Norman continues recounting his experiences in the region:

‘There was an incident once when we doing countable and uncountable nouns. You know, what’s in the fridge, and I said, as a joke, ‘There’s whisky in the fridge’, and this was to the girls .. and they didn’t like that, because it implied to them, in their mind, that their fathers drink whisky, which they probably do, but it was too .. perhaps there was too much truth in that comment and that got back to the supervisor and .. er .. I was told that it was inappropriate to say there was any form of alcohol in the fridge (Laughs) … It’s quite OK for the students to shout out ‘Whisky! Whisky! Whisky!’ in class, and the guys often do, but for me to mention it. That’s not OK. (Sighs).’ (Norman 12)

For Norman, who returned to the UK shortly after this interview, it appears that his experiences of ‘calamities’ in the classroom have left him somewhat cynical, bitter and resentful. He seems to justify being reprimanded by his supervisor for his ‘joke’ about whisky by highlighting what he perceives as the hypocrisy of the situation, claiming that ‘perhaps there was too much truth’ in his statement, rather than concluding that mentioning alcohol in class might have been genuinely offensive to his students. Moreover, as a result of this experience, Norman states that:
‘I’ve learned to be more careful about what I say. I’m more controlled in class. It’s the fear, you know, I won’t do anything to rock the boat now, I’ll always stay safe. I mean, I’ve heard stories of teachers who have been fired for, you know, really simple things … So you just learn to be really careful. At the women’s college I was particularly fearful, because I felt like you took your job into your own hands every time you walked into the classroom.’ (Norman 12)

Norman comments on the fear that he feels and how careful it has made him. He also states that the fear was worse at the women’s college, and issue that explored further Chapter 6. Later in the interview Norman states ‘when I see this censorship where they black out pictures it just annoys me and I just think, ‘How pathetic.’ You know .. closing their eyes to the real world .. it annoys me’ (Norman 21). He seems to equate the need for censorship with a failure to acknowledge the ‘real’ world, by which he appears to mean his own ‘Western’ world, rather than the world in which he is living where such pictures are not present. His reaction to these experiences is to always be ‘safe’ and ‘not rock the boat’, but his censorship does not appear to stem from a respect for, or understanding of, local cultural sensibilities, but rather from the fear of losing his job.

Although Norman could be said to represent rather an extreme case in his reactions to how local society impacted upon his working life, a general sense of fear of being perceived as having done or said something ‘haram’ emerged from the data as one of the major issues determining the extent to which the respondents exerted censorship in the classroom. Indeed, even for much more experienced teachers such as ‘Jack’, a teacher from England with twenty-five years’ experience in the Arab world, gaining a clear understanding of what is and is not appropriate for his English classes may still involve uncertainty and fear. When asked to talk about a problem he had had in the classroom in the region he immediately replied:

‘Music! I learned a long time ago to stop using music. I knew already that there was some taboo about music and some fundamentalist Muslims, I believe, don’t really favour the playing of music, but in Syria and Palestine and other Arab countries it never came up. But here there might be nineteen ladies enjoying it and if there’s one who frowns and disapproves then I get the impression that the others feel obliged to go along with it. So the word haram .. it sort of carries more weight here. I stopped using songs partly for the fear of someone saying it’s haram but partly because I’ve personally come to believe it is cultural
imperialism. I don’t like introducing Western songs into the classroom so now I’ve come to the point that even if they asked me I wouldn’t want to do it. I do still have materials and a lesson plan where I compare Um Khaltoum with Fairuz .. I wanted to be culturally appropriate and I disliked the fact that the course-book had a song by Roberta Flack and they often talk about rock musicians from the West. So I had designed these worksheets comparing Um Khaltoum with Fairuz, but ironically the students say they are boring .. and they say they want English language songs .. um .. they ask for the Beastie Boys and Beyonce and that kind of thing, and it’s rather ironic that there’s me championing really vintage classic Arab singers, but some of the students prefer American singers, so songs are quite an issue. And when I did do the Fairuz worksheet here, I played a Fairuz song and one student used the word ‘haram’, so I don’t use them anymore.’ (Jack 9)

Jack’s experience, like Norman’s, led to him censoring his use of music, but also shows the complications that face teachers attempting to understand what does and does not need to be censored. By choosing traditional Arab singers such as Fairuz and Um Khaltoum, Jack was attempting to be more culturally sensitive and avoid what he perceived to be the ‘cultural imperialism’ of using Western songs in class, but even this was problematic. Some of his students are asking him to play songs by Western singers and expressing discontent with his choice of traditional Arab singers, a situation which he finds ‘ironic’. His reaction is to avoid music altogether, citing the ‘fear of someone saying it is haram’ as one of his reasons, which could be said to indicate the strength of the fear of being seen to offend religious sensibilities among non-Muslim teachers in the region.

In the following exchange, Jack expands on the issue of fear:

Researcher: ‘Now you said you don’t use songs for fear of someone saying haram in class …’

Jack: ‘Definitely, and the fear is quite tangible here because three years ago we were summoned to a meeting and given a list of things that the students had complained about told we had to be much more careful in future.’

Researcher: ‘What were some of these?’

Jack: (Laughs) ‘I can .. do you want me to photocopy the list? .. One of them was doing this (Rocks legs side to side) .. Men shaking their legs .. and you
probably don’t even realise you’re doing it. That one was directed at male teachers teaching women. Um .. Another one was showing ankles. Another one was talking about the reading of coffee cups, which was interpreted as sorcery and someone was .. um .. he didn’t lose his job because of it but he was relocated to a Men’s College. And references to palm reading which might have been done in jest, but was interpreted by someone as sorcery .. um .. and the ironic thing is, of course, the reading of tea leaves and coffee cups is widespread in the Arab world, and they have a special word for it and they have songs about it .. um .. there was also showing photographs of family members .. I think it was showing a photo of a wife or daughter, and so on.’ (Jack 13)

After the interview, Jack gave me a photocopy of the list from his supervisor detailing student complaints and, in addition to the topics mentioned were the following:

- male teachers questioning students about their marital status
- teachers discussing their own teenage children’s relationships and asking students’ opinions about this
- discussing the morality of relationships before marriage in the context of both the UAE and the West
- teachers discussing their own relationships with their spouses
- asking students about their ‘boyfriends’
- male teachers sitting too close to students
- male teachers sitting with their legs open and bodies in a relaxed position while talking to students

(Source: Email from Jack’s supervisor dated 26/10/2004 – Photocopy provided by Jack after the interview)

Although some of these complaints relate to discussions of issues perceived as ‘sorcery’, the majority relate to issues of appropriate gender relations, which will be covered in detail in Chapter 6. However, these complaints could be said to show that even for experienced teachers such as Jack, gaining a thorough understanding of what may or may not be perceived
as haram by the students is a highly complex matter and the issue of how the respondents deal with the issue of religion is the subject of my next section.

5.4 – Fear & Religion

5.4.1 – Religion, Culture & Complexity: The Difficulty of Gaining an Understanding

For non-Muslim, native-speaker faculty working in HEIs in the UAE gaining an understanding of Islam and the aspects of their own culture that may be considered haram could be said to be an important, but highly complex facet of their working lives, and one that may be shaped by early experiences. The complexity is illustrated in the followed extract from ‘Margaret’, a senior manager with twenty-seven years’ experience working in Bahrain, Oman and the UAE:

‘I think one of the complexities of religion in this country is how intricately bound it is with the culture … you know, some students say that they are not allowed to do certain things in the name of religion, when actually one who knows anything about Islam would know that it’s more of a cultural barrier than a religious barrier … the culture and the religion are so intertwined that it can get a bit complicated.’ (Margaret 8)

Margaret highlights the complexity of the issue and the cultural aspect of practices that may be claimed as ‘Islamic’ by students. This may manifest itself in the classroom with a teacher finding that a lesson which was unproblematic with one class may cause trouble with another, depending on the students’ views of what is considered haram or, perhaps more importantly, the teacher’s relationship and rapport with the class. However, as shown by the following extract from ‘Rose’, students may also exploit an inexperienced teacher’s lack of knowledge to their own advantage:

‘I think that at the beginning students can try and take you for a bit of a ride if they think you don’t know the system. In the beginning the students would take far too long for prayer time and I think this shows a lack of respect for the teacher’ (Rose 20)

The initial problem of students taking overly-long prayer breaks is perceived by Rose as disrespectful, but could also be said to indicate the difficulties faced by inexperienced
teachers whose knowledge of the religion and the culture is inadequate. Students may exploit their inexperience to their own ends, making the process of gaining an adequate understanding of the issue a difficult one. The complexity and potential lack of clarity is also illustrated by ‘Peter’, a South African teacher with four years’ experience in the region, who discusses the conflicting opinions he has encountered in class:

‘In my classes the students bring up religion all the time … I’ve read a few books on the subject, but I wouldn’t say I’m an expert on Islam but, you know, if you live in a country, you try to find out about it … because it comes up in class, you know, students say things and then you ask about it and then you get some information but very often it seems to be conflicting, you know, some students will say something should be haram, that it is not according to Islam, and then another student will say ‘No, that’s not true’ and that’s kind of interesting in itself.’ (Peter 10)

Peter’s comments highlight the complexity of the situation: the subject of religion and the haram is often brought up in class by the students but there is usually disagreement amongst them on the issue, reflecting the lack of a single, monolithic ‘Islam’ that may be simply understood by the non-Muslim teacher. This is illustrated in the following exchange with Brian, which occurred after I had mentioned that as a non-Muslim teacher I often sought advice from national colleagues on self-produced materials:

Brian: ‘What you’ve got to remember, though, is that there is another understanding here. You’re going to have Islam, right? And then you’re going to have different people following it in different ways, due to their weaknesses, right? Some people are weaker than others and some people have more knowledge than others. So asking your colleagues, who are Emiratis, you are not necessarily going to get the answer that is right … You see in Islam you can have a lot of the culture and the traditions but once those start to encroach upon the purity of the teachings then that’s when they become impermissible, you see?’

Researcher: ‘Part of the difficulty being a non-Muslim teaching in the Muslim world is trying to work out …. well …. what exactly is Islam? Because you’re faced with so many …’
Brian: (Interrupting) ‘Well, you can find the purity in Islam. You can find the purity and it’s not going to .. er .. you know, to this group or that group. All you need to do is basically take the Quran and the books of the Sunnah which are the written .. these books, Bukhari, Muslim, which are the written narrations of the Prophet which explain the Quran. You can still find the purity. It will always be accessible … And we are supposed to take what is correct and leave what is not correct, no matter who it’s from.’ (Brian 15)

For Brian it appears clear that what is ‘correct’ and ‘pure’ in Islam can be ascertained yet he admits that there are many Muslims, including Emiratis, who are following an ‘incorrect’ path due to their ‘weaknesses’ and who thus may pass on ‘incorrect’ information to non-Muslims. When I asked Brian what advice he would give to non-Muslim teachers new to the region he replied:

‘I would say for new teachers here be careful of the culture. Learn the culture. Understand the culture. Again, that’s a difficult one really because the culture is the religion, pretty much, here. You can’t say to someone go and learn Islam (Laughs) … but just be careful what you do and try and seek advice on how your lessons go and how you teach, and generally you’ll find the students very nice to teach.’ (Brian 26)

Like Margaret, Brian highlights the interconnectedness of Gulf culture and Islam, a point made by several of the respondents. Brian advises teachers to ‘be careful’, and this is illustrated in the following exchange with ‘Alice’, a teacher trainer from England with three years’ experience working in the region:

Researcher: ‘Have the materials you use changed since you moved here?’

Alice: ‘Erm …..Yes … I mean there’s the obvious, you have to make sure that everything is ‘safe?’ (Laughs) .. You know, that there aren’t any topics in there that are going to offend … or might possibly offend … (Laughs) I had a great one the other day .. I thought ‘IELTS Papers – they’ll always be safe’, and I went through them and there was one text and it was called ‘Doggy Love’ (Laughs) and I just thought ‘Oh God!!’ (Laughs) well we won’t do that one! (Laughs) … but I think it’s just a matter of knowing what is and isn’t OK … I mean, I say that, but I think the problem is that it’s easy to overlook something,
and then it offends and then you’re in trouble and, you know, you don’t do it deliberately, but ..., well, you know, if a ‘on thin ice’ topic comes up in class, I personally won’t make any comments on it. I’ll never give my opinion or my view ... I’ll let them discuss the topic, and sometimes they get quite heated about it, but I just stay out of it’

Researcher: ‘Do you think we’re a bit oversensitive about this sometimes?’

Alice: ‘I think we probably are but (Whispers) .. you just never know what might happen .. (Normal voice) and at the end of the day it’s just not worth it .. and I think there’s a fear among teachers about that.’

Alice appears to be aware that in the Gulf dogs are generally viewed in a negative light, but also seems to find humour in the situation, referring laughingly to the IELTS paper on ‘Doggy Love’ as ‘a good one’. However, Alice’s comments could also be said to highlight a quandary faced by educators working in a system which asks its teachers to prepare the students for international English examinations while at the same time insisting that materials be censored. Faced with introducing material that might prove controversial in class, Alice could have started her lesson by explaining the cultural differences concerning dogs to her students, but chose instead to skip it and use another text. Although such an action lessened the chance of causing offense in the classroom it could be argued that it also deprived the students of a learning experience that might help them when they sit their IELTS.

Alice also states that she never gives her own opinion when dealing with an ‘on thin ice’ topic in class, stating that ‘you just never know what might happen’ and, like many respondents, appears to take an extremely cautious approach, preferring just ‘to stay out of it’ and exert strict self-censorship out of a fear of potentially offending a student. This self-censorship may even entail dishonesty, as shown in the following exchange with Betty:

Betty: ‘I really try to skirt controversial issues and play them down like if they ask ‘Oh Miss, do you eat pork?’ and I’m like ‘Oh no! It’s horrible! It’s bad!’ You know? I will deny things that I know are really offensive … Generally I just don’t think it’s my place, really, to push my cultural values on them and anyway, my cultural values have changed a lot. You know, I’m not the same person that I started out to be. So actually I’m very modest with my clothing when I’m here or even when I’m in the States. I mean even if I was in the States I
wouldn’t be walking around in shorts … You know, I don’t show my arms, I don’t wear tank tops … these things have just become part of my life.’ (Betty 13)

For Betty, lying about eating pork appears to be an easier option than risking causing offence to her students and she also states that she does not believe it is her place to ‘push her cultural values’ on the students even though it might be argued that merely by the act of teaching the students English she is imparting some foreign cultural knowledge upon them. She also comments on an issue that could be said to be quite important when describing the native-speaker English teacher, especially those who have spent a long period of their lives living overseas such as Betty – the fact that she considers that her own ‘cultural values’ have changed over the years, resulting in, for example, her adoption of more modest clothing.

To conclude, gaining an understanding of how the local culture and religion may impact upon their working lives could be said to be a complex and long-term experience. Uncertainty about the potential reaction of students to the discussion of issues that may prove to be religiously or culturally controversial may lead to the adoption of a policy of careful self-censorship or even outright denial. And this self-censorship may become even more important when it comes to the teachers’ own beliefs (or lack thereof) about religion.

5.4.2 – Religion & Self-Censorship: Hiding Your Atheism

For ‘Gerald’, a teacher from England with eight years’ experience in the region, self-censorship is maintained through the adoption of ‘faux ignorance’ when questioned by his students:

‘If the students ask me about religion I always use a ‘faux ignorant’ thing. You know, I always say ‘In your religion’ and I always use a question, like ‘Is it true that in your religion … this?’ I would never say ‘Your religion says that’ or ‘I’ve read that …’ Keep it coming from them. It’s for general protection, but it’s also an opportunity for them to tell me things that I don’t know … but when they are discussing these things and saying ‘It’s in the Quran’ ‘It’s not in the Quran’, I step out of it. I don’t say, ‘OK, now we are going to decide’ because in that case you don’t want to force an issue … besides, look .. my job isn’t to determine for them whether these things are true or not, my job is trying to develop their thinking skills and critical awareness .. and global awareness. You know, to prepare them to deal with issues that may come up in the workplace.’ (Gerald 13)
Gerald claims that his use of ‘faux ignorance’ is for ‘general protection’, perhaps to avoid any problematic situation that a revelation of his own opinions may cause. This ‘faux ignorance’ also provides an opportunity both for Gerald to learn from his students and, he believes, an opportunity for them to develop their thinking skills and their critical and global awareness. However, in the following extract Gerald highlights the importance of keeping his own atheism hidden:

Gerald: ‘I’m vehemently anti-religion. I mean, I say vehemently, I’m strongly in the Dawkins camp. I always have been … I don’t have any doubts’

Researcher: ‘OK. But how about if students ask you? What do you say?’

Gerald: ‘Well, I talk about the religion from my culture and if they ask me directly.. well, they always assume that you are of that religion. What happens is that it’s very hard for students here, for people here to understand the idea of no belief whatsoever.’ (Gerald 18)

Like Gerald, over 50% of the respondents in this study claimed to be either atheist or agnostic, a figure that could be said to reflect the lack of religious belief in the countries of the English-speaking West, with the possible exception of the USA. However, this may lead to a moral dilemma: to what extent do they need to lie to their students about their own beliefs to ensure they are ‘protected’? Gerald justifies his hiding of his atheism by claiming that the concept of atheism is hard for the people in the Gulf to understand, but an awareness of the importance of hiding a lack of belief is echoed by several of the respondents. For example ‘Dylan’, recalls his first encounter with the problematic nature of atheism in the region:

‘I remember in the mid-70s going to the Saudi Embassy and filling in the forms to get my work visa and there was a great secretary there, a Scottish lady, I remember, and after I had filled it all in she said ‘Ooh! I don’t think this will do, we have to cancel it. Religion. It’s better to put some religion down’ - and not what I had really written (Laughs) (Dylan 3)

Dylan’s experience of having to pretend to be a Christian to get his visa was also shared by Alice, who also shares Gerald’s belief that her students would find it difficult to understand the concept of not believing in God:
Alice: ‘Officially I am Church of England (laughs) .. But I’m afraid I am a total .. (whispers) non-believer.’

Researcher: ‘And if the students ask you?’

Alice: ‘Oh, I just say I’m Christian.’

Researcher: ‘Why?’

Alice: ‘Why? .. Oh, I just think for them they can’t understand the concept .. Hmm, ‘Them’. Oh dear, it’s a very generalised statement but, yes, I think that probably all of them couldn’t understand the concept of not believing in God, to be honest .. It’s quite interesting, when we applied for our visas to get the job, both [my husband] .. and I in the religion column (laughs) we put ‘none’ and [the secretary at the college] got back to us and said ‘Sorry, you can’t put ‘none’. We were like ‘Ooo .. er! .. OK.’ (laughs). And it was only then that a colleague who had worked in Saudi he was like ‘Oh God, no! Don’t put ‘none’! What are you doing?!’ (laughs) We didn’t know. So that was our first lesson in religion here (laughs).’ (Alice 13)

Like Gerald, Alice appears to believe that her students could not understand her atheism and, although she shows concern about making such a ‘generalised statement’, it could be said that this ‘first lesson in religion’ in the Gulf has given her a somewhat essentialised idea of her students’ religious beliefs. Later in the interview, Alice compares her perceptions of the role of religion in the region with her own experiences and attempts to explain how she perceives the interactions between local culture and religion:

‘I think in this part of the world religion and culture are almost the same thing .. and therefore it affects everything they do. I think for us in the West .. religion doesn’t actually play that big a part in our lives, but I think here, in a way, it has to because it’s so intertwined with their culture and the way that families are structured and the way that everything they do in their lives, you know, men and women are separated, and is that religion or is that culture? Which came first, the culture or the religion? Because Islam is such a young religion, really, that it’s hard to see whether it was a Bedouin culture that Islam influenced, or whether it was Islam that was made by the Bedouin culture.’ (Alice 17)
For Alice, religion is seen as impacting on every aspect of the students’ lives, although she also sees it as inextricably bound with the local Bedouin culture, reflecting the complexity of gaining an understanding of Islam. The degree and intensity of religiosity that Alice perceives in her students, as opposed to her own atheism, could also be said to contribute to an Othering of the students, seeing their understanding of the world as fundamentally different from her own and perhaps even deficient in comparison, and the issue of Othering is the subject of the following section.

5.4.3 – Religion, Othering and Essentialised Discourses

Alice’s sense of Otherness from the students is shown by some, but by no means all, of the respondents. In an environment characterised by a fear of offending the students’ religion, perhaps it is understandable that some of the interviewees started to view their students in such a fashion. For example, in the following extract I discuss religion with ‘James’ and he reveals how an early experience shaped his perceptions of his students:

‘Researcher: ‘Can I ask you about your own religious beliefs?’

James: ‘I’m between agnostic and atheist.’

Researcher: ‘And if the students ask you?’

James: ‘I always say I’m a Christian.’

Researcher: ‘OK .. Why?’

James: ‘Because it makes my life easier. That’s the only reason. If it was outside class I would be happy to talk about it, but inside class, just to keep things moving along.’

Researcher: ‘You say outside class, so have you had much chance to socialise with students in this part of the world?’

James: ‘Erm … with students, a little bit, but not much, not .. It’s never been socialising in the sense where I felt I was dealing with another human being on an equal level. There’s always been some kind of gap or distance there. I’m always careful about what I say and what I do so I’m never completely relaxed, unlike Spain. Again, this was an experience from the very first class that I taught
and one of the exercises was about capital punishment and I’d been getting on
very well with these students, we’d been having a good laugh, and at that point I
was very, very, very strongly against capital punishment and I was just shocked
when they all just said ‘Yup. Cut their heads off. Cut their hands off. We should
have Sharia law’ and that was a real eye-opener for me and from that point on I
was really careful about these sorts of things because they do have a completely
different mind-set.’ (James 17)

James’ early experience of his students expressing their views on capital punishment and
Sharia law appear to have also left him with a perception of Otherness towards Gulf Arabs in
general. For James, dealing with his students is ‘not like dealing with another human being
on an equal level’ and his idea of their having a ‘completely different mind-set’ results in a
constant wariness about what he says in class and an inability to completely relax and be
himself. It could be said that for James the fear of potentially contradicting or challenging the
opinions of his students, especially on religious matters, has led to his viewing them all with
suspicion and ensuring that he maintains great care with his own comments in class.

However, this sense of Otherness and apartness was not one that was universally shared by
the respondents. For example for ‘Siobhan’ the role of religion in Gulf society appears to be
very familiar:

Researcher: ‘I’d like to talk a little about religion now. Are you happy to do
that?’

Siobhan: ‘(Laughs) I’m Irish – we don’t talk about anything else! (Big
laugh) I think what struck me when I first arrived is the huge similarities between
the traditional Ireland that I grew up in, which was changing big time in the 60s
but the relics were still there, where family was really, really important and
religion was really, really important, so I see huge similarities between that
Ireland and the Arab culture and the Emirati culture. So the all-encompassing
nature of religion for our students didn’t seem strange or unusual to me, nor did
the importance of the family.’ (Siobhan 11)

Siobhan compares the Gulf with the Ireland of her childhood highlighting what she perceives
as the pervasive nature of religion in Gulf society and the rapid changes that the region is
undergoing. For Western teachers from a less religious background, however, the seeming
ubiquity of religion in Gulf society may indeed seem ‘strange and unusual’ and the potentially problematic nature of their initial reactions to manifestations of religiosity is illustrated in the following extract from ‘Wendy’, a Canadian teacher with thirteen years’ experience in Saudi Arabia and the UAE:

‘I had this incident in Saudi when I REALLY stepped in it … (Laughs) … it was my very first month and the students used to drive me crazy because they would NEVER do their homework and I was trying to get them to understand that they HAVE to do it and then one day, I remember being really frustrated with this and saying, you know, ‘You all understand you are going to be doing p63’ and they were all ‘Yes, Miss, inshallah, inshallah,’ And I remember saying’ No, not inshallah, For sure.’ And the whole room .. their faces just dropped and I thought ‘Oh, shoot, I’m going home’ And the look on their faces when I said that .. and one student, really serious, said ‘Really, Miss, I don’t think you understand inshallah’ and they explained it to me, but they were clearly insulted by me saying that and I never made that mistake again.’ (Wendy 15)

Wendy’s frustration at the failure of her students to do their homework meant that when she heard them say ‘inshallah’ she may have perceived it as more as an excuse and therefore felt it necessary to insist on them doing it ‘not inshallah, for sure’, unintentionally causing offence to the whole class. Their negative reaction to her statement caused an immediate fear in her that she might be deported, but also provided a valuable lesson to her on the students’ use of inshallah. For Wendy, her frustration may have stemmed from a belief that the completion of the homework was more dependent upon the will of the students that on the will of a God in which, as shown by the following extract, she does not believe:

‘I was born, brought up, raised as a Catholic but would now consider myself to be a pretty confirmed atheist (Laughs) .. But if the students ask I say I’m Christian. I wouldn’t say I’m an atheist because I was warned that that’s the worst thing you can say. Again, there go my principles, but I wouldn’t say it to my students because .. um .. Well, it’s bad enough if I tell them I’m a vegetarian (Both laugh). That’s like, completely weird, you know .. So, atheist vegetarian? Oh my God, I’m from another planet! .. So, no, I wouldn’t tell them I was an atheist because that is really, really out there – they would find it just too strange, they wouldn’t be able to get their heads around it.’ (Wendy 16)
Wendy appears to Other herself as well as her students, who she seems to perceive as incapable of understanding her atheism, but she recognises that in the context where she now lives and works she is the one who is strange and, as an atheist vegetarian, almost ‘from another planet.’ However, her comment ‘there goes my principles’ suggests that she finds the dishonesty of having to pretend to be a Christian problematic and the question of principles is the subject of the next section.

5.4.4 – Religion & Self-Censorship: Dishonesty and Compromising one’s Principles

Wendy’s comment about her principles could be said to provide an example of the moral dilemma facing atheist or agnostic teachers in the region. She has been warned that admitting her atheism would be ‘the worst thing she could say’ but her fear of possible repercussions could be said to override her moral uncertainty about lying to her students. Interestingly, she says ‘Again, there go my principles’ perhaps indicating that hiding her atheism is not the only moral compromise she feels she has to make. This question of the dishonesty and moral ambiguity of censorship also emerged in my interview with ‘Gene’ and in the following extract he discusses what he sees as the unique aspects of education in the Islamic world:

Gene: ‘I’ve never had any problem with religion in class. Obviously, I avoid the topic in class.’

Researcher: ‘Obviously?’

Gene: ‘Because .. because .. (Laughs) because we are instructed to and because we DO live in a very strict Islamic society and if we were to say something .. er .. even a question, you know, then it would be very imprudent .. unwise, to bring it up.’

Researcher: ‘… so how does this avoiding of subjects to do with religion jibe with our instructions to provide the students with global awareness?’

Gene: ‘It’s a contradiction. It doesn’t .. it’s dishonest. It doesn’t jibe with it at all. It’s a contradiction. You do not discuss the society that way. I mean, it’s not just religion, you don’t discuss men/women, really in the class where, in the West, the more controversial the better as it would lead to thinking and discussion that would enhance the learning task. In this environment there are
religious police. One could be in your classroom. No other place in the world that I know of has that type of environment, except in Islamic countries.’ (Gene 12)

For Gene, who had worked in Saudi Arabia before moving to the UAE, his reference to the potential presence of ‘religious police’ in the classroom would, in the case of the UAE, refer to students who take on that role unofficially for themselves, whereas in Saudi Arabia it may also refer to the *Mutta’wain* or members of *The Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and the Suppression of Vice*, a government-funded organisation that acts as a religious police force in the Kingdom. For teachers in the region the possibility of there being a ‘Mullah’ (a particularly devout student) in the class is a potential source of fear which may lead to stringent censorship and self-censorship. Gene also highlights the dishonest nature of expecting teachers to raise their students’ global awareness while simultaneously avoiding any mention of aspects of the non-Muslim world that are perceived to be offensive to Muslim students.

This issue of dishonesty, difficulty and how the individual teacher deals with such matters in their day-to-day interactions with their students is exemplified in the following extract from ‘Dudley’:

‘I don’t have deep religious beliefs to be quite frank with you… When religion comes up in class it’s not me who brings it up, it’s usually a student bringing it up so if a student brings it up, and if I’m prepared to discuss it I will, but very carefully … I won’t just go (Clicks fingers) you know, in with my opinion. But with the guys who like to stay after class to talk with me, maybe, yeah, because I feel free to talk with them as a friend. And if they then decide to do something to me on the grounds of that discussion then that’s fine, I’m not meant to be here anyway. You know, if they were to go and complain to management and get me fired then that’s a blessing because I don’t want to restrict my speech to people I perceive as friends and if that’s going to kill me then fine. You know. Yeah.’ (Dudley 13)

Dudley appears to equate the level of censorship he uses with the extent to which he perceives his students to be his ‘friends’, but also seems to feel that if he were ‘betrayed’ by one of these friends then that would be a price worth paying for being able to speak freely with them. The building of a positive rapport with the students appears to be a way of
maintaining some of his ‘freedom’, and the importance of rapport is the subject of the following section.

5.4.5 – Religion & Rapport: Avoiding Problems

For Dudley it could be said that a relaxation of the strict self-censorship he employs with the whole class is possible with students with whom he has built up a good rapport, and the importance of rapport is stressed by several respondents in this study. For example, in the following extract ‘Ned’ discusses how ‘oversights’ or ‘infractions’ by teachers need not be problematic:

‘Actually, when there’s a glass of wine visible in a picture in a course book I ask them if they, you know, if they want to call it milk or wine and it’s usually a bit of a split, but you have to cater for the most sensitive student in the class, but it also is very much a function of the rapport you have with the class. If you don’t have a good rapport, people are a lot less forgiving, and if you do have good rapport then people here are eminently forgiving in terms of an oversight or an infraction. They really have a sense of where your heart is.’ (Ned 12)

Ned’s claim that with good rapport students are apt to be more forgiving is echoed by ‘Caroline’ and in the following extract she discusses how she deals with religion in her teaching:

‘I don’t usually follow textbooks. I create my own materials. I think everybody does, but you have to be extremely sensitive here, you know, you stick to nature, weather, food, you know, very general topics of non-haramness. (laughs) … But haramness, you know, dating or something like that, you just can’t go there, though the students may bring it up but if you did deliberately, you know, you’d be in danger of your job, if your students don’t like you. If they like you they’ll probably be very uncomfortable, but not turn you in (laughs). However, we all know of people who have been turned in, and it’s been bad.’ (Caroline 4)

Caroline stresses that any discussion of haram topics such as dating must come from the students and highlights the dangers facing teachers who initiate conversations on such matters in class. However, she also emphasises the importance of the class liking the teacher, claiming that this may avert the possibility of being ‘turned in’ to management. This in itself
raises the question as to how the individual teacher ensures that he/she is liked by his/her students – through force of personality and effective teaching skills or perhaps through less ethical methods and this is an issue that I will discuss in more detail in section 7.5.

5.4.6 – Understanding Religion: Damned if you do and damned if you don’t
At the start of this section I discussed both the importance to non-Muslim ELT professionals of gaining an understanding of religion and the complexity and challenge that gaining such an understanding may entail. However, as shown by the following extract from ‘Mary’, even for those individuals who have gained a deeper understanding of the religion there still may be problems:

‘Researcher: ‘Can I ask you about your own beliefs?’

Mary: ‘(Laughs) I would describe myself as a socialist. Or a humanist, yes, a socialist humanist. I love going to churches, love the music, the pomp and circumstance, but .. Hmm. The church is too man made for me. As in ‘man’ and I’m not using that as a generic term; it’s too masculine-based. I don’t think it has ever considered women.’

Researcher: ‘And how about Islam? You’ve worked a lot in various countries in the Muslim world, so how much do you know about the religion and how has that affected your professional life?’

Mary: ‘Hmm .. that’s a very interesting question. I’m really interested in religion so I have read the Holy Quran and respect .. of course when I’m speaking to the students .. er .. I know a reasonable amount about Islam. I mean, I’m not an expert but I do know some of the hadiths and I am interested in what’s been said, you know, about women and about life and so on. I’ve read Karen Armstrong and I think she’s absolutely super, so I’m interested, but I do not want to convert to Islam. Again, I think it’s a man-made religion, and as a woman I’m like .. Och! No thank you very much … But one of the strange things is, and I think this is a GCC thing, or Emirati, but when I go into class, the students are disconcerted .. and not always best pleased that I understand and can quote bits of the Quran to them. They kind of go ‘Ooo!! You should be in that box, there!'
You’re the foreign woman and you’re getting a bit too close to understanding me for my comfort!’ (Mary 12)

Mary’s discovery that her students appear to be surprised when she demonstrates her knowledge of Islam is reflected by Betty:

‘The students are always very interested that I know a lot about the religion and I few times when I quote something or, you know, say something from out of the Quran a student will kind of gasp and go .. (Gasps) (Changes voice to impersonate students) ‘Oh Miss are you Muslim? How do you know all of this?’ (Resumes normal voice) .. you know, because they don’t really understand that you can study their religion and be interested in it. Yeah, yeah I mean it’s the idea that you can be interested and you can learn about it, but you don’t have to be it.’ (Betty 14)

For Mary, who through her reading and her experiences working in the Arab world has gained a fairly comprehensive understanding of the local culture and religion, her students’ disconcertedness whenever she demonstrates this knowledge is explained as a negative reaction to her not fitting their pre-conceived notions of what a Western woman should know. Just as James earlier Othered his students by perceiving them as all having a ‘totally different mindset’, so Mary’s students appear to Other her as a Western woman and her deviation from their stereotype causes a degree of consternation. And for Betty, her students’ reaction to her knowledge about the religion appears to demonstrate what she might perceive as a naïve inability to understand how someone is able to know about the religion but not necessarily follow it. reflecting earlier comments regarding the students’ supposed inability to comprehend atheism. When I asked Betty about her own religious beliefs she replied: ‘Well, I am very interested in religion .. but more on an intellectual level than through any real spiritual belief, you know’ (Betty 14). So in Betty’s case it could be said that over the thirty years she had spent in the Arab world she had managed to gain a fairly deep understanding of the religion which she uses to inform her professional life.

To conclude, this section has discussed the importance of an understanding of Islam to ELT professionals working in HEIs in the UAE. However, gaining such an understanding is a complex matter and necessitates a realisation both of the heterogeneity of opinions amongst individual Muslims and of the interconnectedness of Gulf culture and religion. The complexity of obtaining a clear understanding may lead to uncertainty and fear, but may also
lead to essentialised views of the students. And for some of the respondents, the perceived need for self-censorship on religious matters was problematic due to the dishonesty and hypocrisy it may entail. However, the respondents’ understanding of Islam and their attitudes towards the religion is not shaped merely by their experiences living and working in the Gulf, but may also be influenced by political incidents in the wider world and the fear these may cause, and this is the subject of my next section.

5.5 – Fear, Politics & Self-Censorship

From the data it emerged that the fear that led to self-censorship on religious matters could also apply to political issues. In the following extract ‘Gwen’ discusses why she avoids politics in her class:

‘Look, I compartmentalize – is that the right word? I am aware of what is going on in the world but I don’t bring it into the classroom .. We really don’t address these issues in class because it might be incendiary. I stay away from politics and it’s the college policy .. and the students might say something that I find very offensive and would alter my perception of them, so I would rather not deal with it. I’m always conscious that there might be some students in that class who would take great offence so I just don’t want to go there.’ (Gwen 17)

Gwen claims it is better to avoid any talk of political subjects not only because she might offend some of her students but also because she fears that knowing what her students believe may offend her and change her opinion of, and rapport with them. It could be said that such an attitude restricts teachers from providing their students with ‘global awareness’ but the penalty for those who decide to discuss politics in class may be severe, as shown in the following exchange with Jennifer, who discusses how a major international incident had an effect both upon her teaching and her subsequent attitude to her students:

Researcher: ‘You mentioned avoiding sex, drugs, rock ‘n’ roll but what about current affairs, do you ever deal with that with students?’

Jennifer: ‘Well, I try to, but a recent event here with a good friend of mine kind of makes me rethink whenever I talk about politics. I’m sure you’ve heard about the Danish cartoons?’
Researcher: ‘Oh, was this Claudia Kibutz?’

Jennifer: ‘Yes .. she’s a good friend of mine and I’m sure you know about that incident, which was very, very unfair and it affected another good friend of mine as well, who just happened to have the bad luck to be her direct supervisor, and this whole thing was instigated on the part of the students. You know, the students asked her to see the cartoons, so she wasn’t actually promoting them.’

Researcher: ‘That was not in the paper.’

Jennifer: ‘Yeah, well, no, of course it wasn’t. So, the students asked to see them and, of course, in every class most of the students are lovely but there’s always that very wicked, hidden one so I’m, you know, I’m really hesitant to talk about politics and stuff like that because you never know when you’re going to fall on that one student who’s going to take it forward and create events that can’t be stopped.’ (Jennifer 13)

The Claudia Kibutz incident (mentioned in section 1.4) appears to have made Jennifer more suspicious towards her students and more hesitant to discuss political topics in class. At the time of the interview, it had been over three years since the incident, yet Jennifer still describes it as ‘recent’, perhaps reflecting the serious impression it made on her. She states that she is now wary of what she describes as the one ‘wicked, hidden’ student in the class, reflecting Gene’s worries about ‘Mullahs’. This uncertainty about the political and religious beliefs of the students could be said to result in a fear that may perpetuate the ‘no politics, no religion’ mantra, especially in light of major international incidents such as the Danish cartoon crisis. For example, in the following comment Dylan links his self-censorship to a fear caused by events in the wider Muslim world:

‘I guess you keep away from certain topics because there’s always a kind of fear that you could be misunderstood, and we’ve all seen the articles, you know, about people being suddenly deported or, you know, creating riots just because they (Laughs) because they’ve called their Teddy Bear a name they shouldn’t have called it (Laughs).’ (Dylan 16)

In this extract, Dylan refers to the case of Gillian Gibbons; the British teacher who, in November 2007, was briefly imprisoned in Sudan after her class of primary school children named the class Teddy Bear ‘Mohammed’ leading to riots in Khartoum and demonstrations.
elsewhere in the Muslim world. Although Dylan laughs about the Teddy Bear story, he also mentions the ‘fear of being misunderstood’, a fear which may augment self-censorship. Unlike when many of the respondents first came to the Gulf, access to Western media is now much wider and its portrayal of such incidents may play a larger, although perhaps subconscious, role in shaping their attitudes towards their Muslim students.

The effect of fear and self-censorship in the light of international events is also discussed by ‘Oliver’:

‘I think teaching in this part of the world stops me being myself 100%, you know, because I’m holding back on certain opinions that I might have expressed in another country, like all the stuff that’s going on between Israel and the Palestinians. In any other country I’d be talking about that with my students but here it’s just .. you know, I can’t talk about it .. my natural inclination is to discuss these things, but here I can’t … It’s like that recent attack on Mumbai, I mean I live near the beach and you had these guys coming in on rubber boats and, you know, just going on the rampage and it did cross my mind, you know, I mean it wouldn’t be that difficult to .. I do have the odd vision of sitting at the Beach Club of .. erm .. somebody piling through all the tourists there, that kind of thing .. But, I mean, the students didn’t mention it to me, they may have been talking about it amongst themselves, I dunno, but .. (Sighs) I suppose it limits me as a teacher because it limits me as a person, I mean you walk into the teachers’ room and the first thing everybody’s talking about is Mumbai but you walk into the classroom and it’s completely off the agenda .. maybe it’s me being overcautious but I’d rather .. with all the things, you know, .. the sackings and what have you that go on because people have .. you know, the wrong thing has slipped out at the wrong time. I’d rather just avoid it completely.’ (Oliver 14)

Oliver refers to the attacks which happened in Mumbai from 26-9th November 2008 – three months before the interview – and admits that he has imagined such an attack happening in the town where he lives. Like Dylan’s reference to the Teddy Bear scandal and Jennifer’s mention of the Danish Cartoons, Oliver relates his classroom behaviour to an international incident. Although these incidents are being discussed in the teachers’ room, Oliver feels unable to ‘follow his natural inclination’ and discuss such issues in class and he sees this
leading to an overcautious attitude which he justifies with reference to the fear generated by
the ‘sackings’ of others.

Oliver also mentions how he feels that this self-censorship ‘stops me being myself 100%’ and
‘limits me as a teacher and as a person’. This could suggest that for Oliver, the restrictions
may result in him perceiving himself as a less-than-optimal teacher as well as shaping his
views of his students and their society. This reflects the view stated earlier by Gene that, in
the classrooms of the West, the more controversial the discussion ‘the better as it would lead
to thinking and discussion that would enhance the learning task’ whereas in the Gulf teachers
fearful of losing their jobs may only feel comfortable teaching ‘safe’ topics, perhaps thereby
potentially reducing their effectiveness as teachers.

However, not all of the interviewees claimed to self-censor out of fear for themselves. For
Mary, this hiding of her own opinions is justified as a way of protecting her students:

Mary: ‘Personally I do not discuss politics with the students. I worked in Syria and I knew of students who were tortured and I don’t ever put students in that situation.’

Researcher: ‘So how do you feel about that?’

Mary: ‘Fine. Look, I think it’s naïve .. I think in the West we think that everything’s free and it’s all transparent and that’s just naïve. Look, when you work here you know that you must never criticise the Sheikhs, you must not .. look, YOU know the kind of stuff, Paul. There are some things that are absolute no-nos. Never laugh at people who are patriotic. Never say that you’re not a practising Christian. All those things, that’s just the rules of the game. You learn them and then you work within them and I don’t think that it matters. I think there are no-go areas in most cultures … there are certain things I can’t, I WON’T discuss with them, and it’s mainly for their own protection. It’s not that I’m ashamed of what my thoughts are, but I don’t want them saying too much as I know they could get into trouble.’ (Mary 11)

Mary’s statement that she will not discuss political issues in class to protect her students,
based on her experiences in Syria, could be said to indicate an opinion of local society as a
place where political discussion is perceived as potentially dangerous not just for the teachers
but for their students as well, an attitude that could be said to contribute to the ‘no politics, no
religion mantra’. However, she also contrasts the attitude to censorship in the Gulf with what
she describes as the ‘naïve’ view of Westerners that Western society is ‘free and transparent’,
arguing that there are ‘no-go zones in most cultures’.

Including her twelve years in the UAE, Mary had worked for thirty years in ELT in the
Levant, Africa, South America, East Asia and Europe, and perhaps this wide experience
means that she is able to see beyond the simplistic ‘us/them’ attitudes that novice teachers
may bring with them. This is demonstrated when, at the beginning of the interview she states:
‘I don’t think you can lump Arab or Muslim countries together at all. I think each one has a
unique identity.’ (Mary 2).

Mary’s attitude towards the ‘West’ as well as her protectiveness towards her students is also
shown in the following two extracts:

‘Look, although I never discuss politics with my students, I think they probably
know where my sympathies lie. I went to the States recently on a management
training thing and I’m quite sure that I was singled out because I have a lot of
Arab stamps in my passport, you know, I’ve been to Yemen and different
countries and they ….. they …. (Sighs deeply) …. Yeah. They gave me a real
check and checked my phone for drugs and all kinds of stuff.’ (Mary 13)

Mary: ‘I’m also responsible for sending students overseas on trips and I
feel very .. I’m afraid for them. I try my best to prepare them before they go and
I’m very, very deeply angry about a lot of things and .. er .. for example, last year
I sent a group of guys to Cambridge and a group of guys to Australia, to
Queensland, and the Australian ones came back and it wasn’t just, you know …
when they came back I knew that something was wrong but it takes the guys a
while to actually get round to telling you anything negative, you know that, and
eventually they said ‘Well, you know Miss, the phrases that we heard most often
were ‘Arab bastards’ or ‘Fucking Arabs’ and I just thought, NO, we are NOT
doing it this year. They’re not going to Australia.’

Researcher: ‘Well, Queensland is quite infamous for …’

Mary: ‘Rednecks, yeah. It’s ghastly, ghastly so .. I can’t protect them all
but I feel very protective. I .. look, my image of Islam and the Arab world is so
NOT, you know, pictures of people with big beards and guns and .. the word
terrorists just doesn’t come into my mind .. I can think of a few other people who just left the White House who would much better suit that epithet.’ (Mary 14)

When it comes to politics, Mary, as a self-described ‘socialist humanist’, appears to find both the treatment of her students in Australia and the actions of the recently departed Bush administration deeply disturbing, and this attitude is shared by Caroline, who had first arrived in the Gulf in 1990. In the following extract she describes her feelings of alienation towards her own nation:

Researcher: ‘So, as an American, what are your thoughts on the political situation?’

Caroline: ‘I have Canadian thoughts (Laughs) I say ‘I’m from Canada and I say ‘eh?’ a lot (Laughs) .. Well, yeah, you know. I am embarrassed and humiliated by my country. I feel .. (Sighs deeply) .. Shame. ….. Honestly, and a hopeless powerlessness at the horrible wrongs being done and that Americans are so ignorant. They’re so brainwashed and it’s just shocking when you go back home and you have any sort of political discussion, which is a massive mistake (Sighs deeply) .. Never again, I tell you. You know, they don’t believe you, they think WE are brainwashed and that we don’t know, and that they know the reality because they’re a ‘free’ country and so … there’s a real disconnect when I go back home with a world view, so I guess I’m anti-American.’ (Caroline 9)

Caroline’s experiences on trips home to the USA could be said to further underline the complexity facing ELT professionals in HEIs in the UAE. They have been working in the Arab/Muslim world at a time when its relationship with the English-speaking countries of the West has come under increasing scrutiny in light of major international incidents. These events may shape both their attitudes towards their students but, as shown by the reactions of experienced teachers such as Mary and Caroline, may also deeply affect the way they perceive their own countries, again highlighting the complexity of individual identities and the perils of essentialised notions of the ‘native-speaker ELT professional’.
5.6 – Fear, Politics & Religion: Gaining an Understanding

So far in this chapter I have outlined some of the reasons behind and repercussions of the dominance of the ‘no religion, no politics mantra’ in the discourse of ELT in HEIs in the UAE. The fear of ‘calamities’ in class means that teachers need to rapidly gain an understanding of how the religious and political aspects of local society may impact upon their working lives. As shown in the preceding section, it is important that teachers quickly learn ‘the rules of the game’ and an example of a teacher not understanding these rules was given by ‘Matthew’:

‘There was an incident recently. It’s all very vague because there’s so many rumours, but a teacher here sent an email round asking ‘Has anybody else got health problems with all the dust from the quarries round here?’, and a few weeks later she lost her job, but we heard there were all sorts of other, of other .. look, rumours can run wild in a small town, can’t they, certainly in the expat community (Laughs).’ (Matthew 12)

Matthew tentatively links the dismissal of his colleague to her alleged involvement in a local political issue, but he also mentions his uncertainty about the exact reasons for her dismissal due to the number of rumours he has heard. This could be said to demonstrate another important factor affecting the discourse of ELT professionals in the region: the role of rumours. When teachers are dismissed it is extremely rare for management to announce the reasons for their dismissal and so, as Oliver pointed out, ‘you hear through the rumour network about why so-and-so lost his job’ (Oliver 17) and, as Matthew comments, in the expat community of a small town, these rumours can ‘run wild’. For teachers new to the region, therefore, part of their initial exposure to the issues that are perceived as impacting upon the job may come from this ‘rumour network’, a situation that, as Jennifer points out, may be less than ideal. Her advice to teachers considering working in the region was:

‘I’d basically say to them: ‘Don’t listen to other people’, because there’s a huge population, certainly in this college, of ‘doom and gloomers’ who are just like ‘the world’s gonna end’, you know, and just don’t have a really positive attitude and who, in my opinion, should not be in the classroom to begin with … So I would say judge people based on your experience with them and don’t listen to rumours.’ (Jennifer 18)
Jennifer highlights what she perceives as the high proportion of faculty with negative attitudes in her college, the ‘doom and gloomers’, and these negative attitudes and rumours could be said to contribute to the discourse of the ELT community in the region. It would appear, therefore, that a combination of fear, uncertainty and rumour make the task of knowing the extent to which one’s teaching needs to be censored highly complex. Teachers are told during initial orientation that they need to avoid the ‘obvious’ subjects like ‘sex, drugs and rock and roll’, but these warnings may then be supplemented by stories from the colleges’ ‘rumour networks’ that can build into a powerful negative discourse, as described by Jennifer.

To finish this chapter, I would like to discuss a series of extracts on the subject of fear and censorship from ‘Samantha’, a teacher trainer from England with twenty-two years’ experience in the UAE. In the first, she highlights what she perceives as oversensitivity on the part of some of her colleagues:

Samantha: ‘I used to get a lot of verbal feedback from the people sitting round me, about Headway mostly, about how rubbish it was because it had words like bacon and dating and alcohol and there was a picture of a wine glass and I could never really understand this because I’ve used that in class and I’ve never really had a problem with it because I don’t dwell on it – I don’t really make a big thing out of it. It’s there. We get on with it or I say ‘Look, you won’t order wine, but people do so you need to know this word.’ I don’t make a big deal out of it and I find that if the teacher doesn’t make a big deal out of it, the students are OK with it. You just get on with it. But one of the teachers who sits near me is one of those ‘bend-over-backwards syndrome’ people, you know .. (Speaks in mock outraged voice) ‘Oooo! This is .. shock, horror .. how dare we have this textbook?! This should be expunged from the world!’ .. (Returns to normal voice) and obviously we then have problems with it in class and I am sure it was because this person was like: ‘Ooo! I’m sorry we’ve got this word wine here and I know it’s not part of your culture!’ and I’m sure it was because he made a big deal out of it, so they made a big deal out of it. I’ve never made a big deal out of it and I’ve never had a problem with that sort of thing.’

Researcher: ‘So it sounds like you are saying that a lot of us working in this part of the world are too oversensitive about this sort of thing.’
Samantha: ‘Yes, I think we are. I think we do the ‘I’m going to be a good foreigner in this part of the world, I’m going to be really sensitive to your culture’ thing, but the girls actually are inquisitive about our culture and about our life, and I see nothing wrong with .. I wouldn’t dwell on it and I wouldn’t bring it up .. but if they ask me ‘Do you drink alcohol, Miss?’ well then my answer is ‘Yes, I do.’ I mean, it’s not illegal in this country – you can buy it in all the hotels – and then move on to the next topic. They are interested in our way of life, and how you handle it, and what you say and how much you say, depends on your rapport with your students.’ (Samantha 10)

Samantha refers to what she calls the ‘bend-over-backwards syndrome’ of one of her colleagues whose attitude to censorship she perceives as problematic, comparing her own matter-of-fact style of dealing with sensitive issues to his ‘making a big deal of it’. However, given Samantha’s experience, it could be said that she may be more confident in her classroom than less experienced teachers. For Samantha, such oversensitivity to the local culture appears counterproductive and states it is better not to dwell on such issues, but not to ignore them either, as this may be doing a disservice to the students. Samantha concludes by highlighting the importance of developing a rapport with students when dealing with sensitive matters. Later in the interview, she also comments on how, as the students’ teacher, she feels that they place her in a different category from other foreigners:

‘I’ve never felt any animosity against me from my students, either as a foreigner or as a British person and I think that that’s down to the fact that the students here compartmentalize things so much. I mean I am their ‘Miss’, as they say, and therefore I’m in a special category and they don’t see me as belonging to this group of other foreigners.’ (Samantha 13)

Although both teachers and students may hold cultural stereotypes of ‘Westerners’ and ‘Arabs/Muslims’ fed by their respective societies and media, their daily interactions and the building of rapport means that many of the assumptions of these stereotypes may be challenged. And with the challenging of stereotypes and the building of rapport fear may be reduced. Samantha appears confident in her own understanding of the region and, as shown in this final extract, fearless enough to stand up for her own principles:

‘Look, I can walk out of this job tomorrow … [my husband] has already retired and I am confident enough in myself. Look, I think I am a good teacher and I
think there are enough people out there who think I am a good teacher that if this college did something that I totally disapproved of, and I disapprove of lots and lots of things and I SAY that, I don’t hide my light under a bushel, I say what I disagree with … erm .. if it came to the point that they said ‘Fine, Samantha, you do this or you’re out’ … then yes, I would leave and that would be fine by me because I’m sure I would get a job somewhere else … I will NOT be blackmailed. I WILL NOT have fear put into me like that,’ (Samantha 20)

5.7 – Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented data which show how the participants’ professional identities may be shaped by the censorial approach manifest in the ‘no religion, no politics’ mantra in the local ELT discourse. However, the extent of censorship required may often be unclear leading to an uncertainty which, in a working environment with little job security and an active rumour network, may lead to a feeling of fear, a fear that may be augmented by media portrayals of global events. This chapter has also raised the question of how the respondents deal with their own beliefs and principles when these are seen as being in opposition to those of their students and local society, an issue that is developed further in subsequent chapters. I have also attempted to show the complexity of the context, with the various responses not only indicating the lack of clarity on the issues of censorship, religion and politics, but also highlighting the complex and varied professional and personal identities of the respondents.

However, one dominant theme emerged from the data both as a source of potential conflict in the classroom and of differences in beliefs and principles: the issue of gender, and this provides the subject of my next chapter.
Chapter 6 – Gender

6.1 – Introduction
This chapter introduces data which appear to indicate the role of gender in shaping the professional identities of native-speaker ELT professionals working in the UAE. The decision to deal with gender in a separate chapter was taken after it emerged from the data as a major source of both professional and personal conflict for the participants. This chapter begins by outlining how appearance affected the participants’ perceptions of, and attitudes towards their students. Then I discuss the extent to which the respondents perceived a difference between their own attitudes towards gender and that of local society and how this informed their working lives. Next, I turn to the issue of gender as a source of conflict in the classroom and conclude by examining the participants’ attitudes towards their students by gender.

6.2 – A Sea of Black: Appearance & Gender
When asked about their initial experiences in the Gulf, the students’ appearance seemed to have a major impact on the respondents. The data appear to indicate that this appearance affected the way the students were initially perceived. Faced with ‘monochrome’ classes, all dressed in black or white, it seemed that, initially at least, students may be perceived more as a homogenous whole than a group of individuals. For example, Gwen said the following about her initial experiences:

‘The first few weeks I was very nervous because I didn’t fully understand the nature of the students I was dealing with because they were quite different from what I was used to, so it was quite daunting to go into a classroom where everybody was covered in black and that was a bit of a culture shock … but I think very quickly I realised that they were individuals and that they were like other young ladies in many respects: they liked to laugh and they liked to have a joke with you, they were eager to please, and so it didn’t take me too long to start feeling comfortable with them.’ (Gwen 1)

Although for Gwen the physical appearance of the students initially proved somewhat intimidating, she soon realised that her teaching environment was not that different from what she had previously experienced, despite outward appearances, and it could be said that for
many teachers in the region this might be a common experience, with their initial preconceptions and stereotypes about their students soon being confounded by their interactions with them. For Gwen, the ‘strangeness’ of the students’ appearance did not last long and her realisation that her students are ‘like other young ladies in many respects’ might be said to indicate that it only requires a short exposure to the reality of Gulf Arab culture for many of the stereotypes and preconceptions that teachers may bring with them to be undermined. For Siobhan, not only the appearance but also the movement of the female students was noteworthy:

‘Of course the sea of black was strange, very strange. The slowness with which the students moved through the air seemed very strange. In fact I had a comment from a student who asked me ‘Why do you walk like a man?’ (Laughs) and I said ‘What do you mean?’ and she said ‘You must go slowly’. I had to do ‘the glide’.’ (Siobhan 2)

This strangeness, or Otherness of the students seemed to have a strong initial impression on Siobhan, whose only previous teaching experience had been in Ireland. Also, her own Otherness from the students was highlighted by the student asking her why she walked ‘like a man’. Both the students’ slower walk, which, under cover of floor-length abayas (robes) appeared more like a ‘glide’, and Siobhan’s own faster walking style, could be said to be examples of high visibility cultural behaviour which could, initially, prevent a deeper understanding of each other. For the students, Siobhan walked ‘like a man’, and this could indicate some of the strangeness that students might encounter when meeting Western teachers for the first time, whose clothing, stance, movement and overall demeanour may appear at odds with what is considered ‘normal’ in Gulf society.

For the respondents, the niqaab (face veil) was an issue that seemed to highlight a major difference between their own culture and that of the students. For ‘Peggy’, the main emotion the niqaab seemed to produce was one of sympathy:

‘I feel that the niqaab kinda prevents you from having these moments where you smile and you nod and you have a short conversation and it really takes away those opportunities for knowing people on a very superficial level. So I actually … I feel bad for them’ (Peggy 7).
Seen from the perspective of her own American upbringing, which she described as ‘folksy’, the prevention of superficial engagement that she sees the niqab causing is a source of sympathy. Her statement that she ‘feels bad’ for the students who cover their face might suggest that she believes that their decision to veil is in some way a negative experience for them, rather than a possible example of their following their religious beliefs. Her perception of veiled Muslim women as deserving of sympathy could also be said to reflect some of the mainstream opinions in Western society. However, she also states how the wearing of the niqab could also be perceived as potentially insulting:

‘I think the niqab really does form the way people view them because when you see … like my [male] colleague says ‘This niqab, I really don’t have any time for it – she obviously doesn’t want to have any interaction with me,’ and I get how, from an American perspective, it could be a bit of an affront to that folksy kinda friendliness that we think is part of human interaction (Peggy 7).’

Indeed, Peggy’s perception of the wearing of the niqab being potentially insulting to male colleagues is echoed to a much stronger degree by Norman, who had a particularly emotional reaction to what could be called the ‘file-over-the-face phenomenon’, something common for male teachers working at female colleges:

‘What would particularly annoy me, which I never got over, was walking through the corridors of the female campus and a girl would put a file over her face, and on a couple of occasions I stopped that student and confronted them and said, ‘You know, if you want to come to college you’ve got to expect there’s going to be male teachers here. I find it incredibly offensive for you to cover your face when you walk past. What do you think I’m going to do!? What do you think you’re going to do!?’ I found it very offensive ... I had a student once who was so adamant to cover her face, as quickly as she could, that she dropped her books all over the floor .. I smiled to myself ... but working in a female college, I found it was very stressful.’ (Norman 17)

Like Peggy, who appears to bring her own cultural understandings to the issue of the niqab, for Norman the frantic actions of a student wanting to cover her face are seen as a personal insult and, despite his spending three years at a women’s college, it was something he never appeared to be able to come to terms with. His telling the student that he found her actions ‘incredibly offensive’ could be said to indicate a failure on his part to understand the social
environment in which he was working and gives an example of the kind of social/cultural misunderstandings that may provide a source of conflict. At the time of interview, Norman was working at a men’s college and said that he was much happier working there, away from the ‘stresses’ of being at a female college. However, within two years he had returned to the UK.

Peggy offers a tentative explanation of why she thinks one of her students wore the niqaab:

Peggy: ‘I taught phonology last semester and all of my students took off their niqaabs but one’

Researcher: (Surprised) ‘One kept it on in front of you!?’

Peggy: ‘Mmm … until the very end of the semester. Very clearly it was a security blanket for her, I think … but for me wanting to see her lips, and it even inhibited the volume of her speech, so you struggle more to hear what she’s saying … but I can see that if that is all you ever get to see of them it prevents you from really getting to know them how they really are, which is very warm and funny and friendly so, in a way, I think it’s kinda a shame, not from any kinda religious, or Western superiority kinda perspective but just because we rely very much on smiles and laughs and facial expressions to gauge people and it actually takes that out of the equation’ (Peggy 8).

My surprised reaction to Peggy’s comment stemmed from my experiences working as a male teacher at a women’s college for eight years, and the following information is introduced in my role as ‘researcher as participant’. In the college where I worked the majority of the faculty were female and it was common for me to be the only male in the department. In the classes I shared with female colleagues, I was accustomed to usually having about three or four students out of a class of twenty remaining fully veiled, whereas the others would not veil their faces but, mostly, keep on their sheylas (headscarves). However, I knew from my female colleagues that during their classes it was common for all the students not only to remove their niqaabs, but also for many of them to uncover their hair and even remove their abbayas (robes). Consequently, it was considered important that any male always knock on the door and wait before entering a classroom to give the students enough time to properly cover themselves; a practice the neglect of which could lead to serious consequences.
However, I had never heard of a student who had kept her face covered in a class with a female teacher, hence my surprise.

For Peggy, the niqab is perceived as directly affecting her ability to teach phonology but is also described as ‘a security blanket.’ Seen from Peggy’s perspective as a female teacher who appears to have great affection for her students, she feels it is ‘a shame’ that her male colleagues never really get to ‘know’ their students who wear the niqab because it hides facial expressions. However, in my experience I found that with practise it was just as easy to see amusement, anger, sadness, worry, enthusiasm, understanding etc. in a niqabed student as it is in one who goes uncovered. But Peggy seems to see the issue only from her American perspective, ignoring the fact that she is teaching in a part of the world where many (but by no means all) would consider it unacceptable for a woman to show her face to a man to whom she is not related.

Concerns about female appearances were not limited to the students, however. For ‘Sally’, another American teacher, her own appearance appeared to be a major concern both before arriving in the region and after. When asked about what she remembered about first coming to the UAE, she replied:

‘I remember being really concerned about my clothes, what would be appropriate. That seemed to be a big concern of mine. I wanted to make sure I was dressed appropriately because I’m sure I had it in my mind that if I was wearing the wrong thing then people would think I was a whore, or something, you know (Laughs) … but around where I first lived, you never seemed to see a local. There were a lot of Westerners, a lot of Indians, a lot of people from all over. Anyway, so, if I was going out for a walk I would sometimes wear a sleeveless shirt, not really tight or anything, but after I started teaching I ran into a student once, and he was lovely and talked to me and everything, but I felt unbelievably uncomfortable being sleeveless so ... I don’t do that anymore. It certainly wasn’t that he responded in any way or that. I felt bad, you know, it was all inside me.’ (Sally 1)

It appears that Sally was experiencing a sense of duality between her working life, spent surrounded by students and locals in which certain standards of appearance applied and her home life where ‘you never seem to see a local’ and where subsequently a different set of standards for appearance may apply. This common phenomenon was described by Jack as ‘living in a Western bubble (Jack 34)’, and for Sally, the puncturing of this bubble by her
encounter with her student seemed to have an impact on her future behaviour. Even though Sally says she initially had deep concerns about her appearance, fearing that if she was dressed inappropriately, ‘people’ would consider her to be ‘a whore, or something’, the fact that she chose to wear a sleeveless shirt when out walking in her part of town seems to suggest that the ‘people’ she was worrying about were not the ‘Westerners, Indians or people from all over’ that she saw in her neighbourhood, but the ‘locals’ – the Emiratis that she encountered at work and in the classroom.

It could be that part of the fear may have come from concerns about her job and the potential threat that her ‘inappropriate’ attire could pose to her continued employment. This perception seemed to exert a strong influence upon her when she encountered her student on the street and, even though the student seemed to show no adverse reaction to her appearance, it changed how she subsequently dressed. Sally’s comment that the encounter with the student made her ‘feel bad’ but that it was ‘all inside me’ could also indicate an internal struggle between her choice of an item of clothing that she would normally wear in America with her mental construction of the student as someone who might potentially consider her to be ‘a whore’ for walking around the streets with naked arms.

Sally’s choice of the word ‘whore’ could also be said to indicate the depth of complexity that appearance plays in the perceptions of issues of gender between her American upbringing and her notions of the Arab/Muslim culture in which she is now living. Sally’s subsequent adoption of more ‘modest’ clothing, even when not at work, could possibly be seen as marking a change in her self-perception: her choice of apparel may be signalling that, as a teacher at the local college, she now considers herself more a part of the local society, and as such should no longer be seen in public wearing such ‘whorish’ clothing.

As a final point on the subject, Margaret hints at how a failure to understand the importance of gender issues can seriously affect a teacher’s working life:

‘I did a cultural training session just last week, and made the point about that [the importance of male faculty knocking on the door before entering a room] and got it home fairly strongly I thought, and yet in this male faculty’s mind, they didn’t consider it to be that important and we’ve had an incident to deal with this week where the ladies didn’t have time to put their sheylas on and they … well, YOU know, Paul … great offence! (Margaret 13)’
Most male faculty learn very quickly the importance of knocking on the door of any classroom before entering and one of the students may even come to the door and ask the male teacher to wait for a few minutes if some of the students are praying. However, as Margaret explains, not doing so can cause ‘great offence’ and may not only go on the teacher’s record, potentially affecting his chance of contract renewal or passing probation, but could also seriously affect his relationship with his class. In some cases male teachers have to be transferred to other classes or even to another college if the offence caused is deemed serious enough.

On several occasions during my time working at the women’s college I was called upon to take over classes where the previous (male) teacher has offended his students to such an extent that they refused to be taught by him anymore. Unfortunately, causing offense by inadvertently seeing the students uncovered is an easy mistake to make and one quite common for novice teachers as it takes time for it to become second nature to always knock and wait before entering a classroom. This constant need for vigilance on the part of male teachers may affect their perceptions of female students and may, as indicated by Norman’s experiences, contribute to a sense of fear or even anger. And the respondents’ attitudes towards gender are explored in my next section.

6.3 – Attitudes towards Gender

This section presents the data which highlights the attitudes of the respondents towards the subject of gender and gender roles. Different perceptions of what is perceived as appropriate and acceptable for both males and females in society could be said to be a major source of conflict for the respondents; both an ‘internal’ conflict to equate their own beliefs and values with those of the environment in which they are now living, and the ‘external’ conflicts that may occur when teachers and students with potentially different views on gender interact in the classroom.

These differences are illustrated in the following exchange with Alice in which she discusses her views on gender relations:

Researcher: ‘You talked a bit earlier about the relationship between the sexes so, how do YOU feel about the relationship between the sexes in this part of the world?’
Alice: ‘(Long pause) …… Um …… I think it’s a bit silly, myself (laughs) … I think it’s something you get used to, but at first I was really quite surprised at how divided their lives really are … really surprised … like, to hear that they live in different areas of the house. I was really quite shocked at that. I really thought that behind closed doors they’d really just get on with it, that they’d be normal, but actually they’re not.’ (Alice 23)

Alice states that she initially believed that segregation of the sexes was merely something that was done in public and that in their private lives her students would be ‘normal’. By holding a perception of local attitudes to gender as ‘abnormal’ and ‘a bit silly’, teachers such as Alice may then present their own views of gender relations as ‘normal’ and sensible, which could be problematic. This way of thinking can be linked to a Western discourse on equality, which has developed over the years to a point where equality amongst people, regardless of sex, class, colour, creed or, more recently, sexual orientation, is seen as a positive goal for society and one that has been reinforced by legislation. For teachers such as Alice, it could be said that this idea of equality of the sexes is a deeply-help cultural belief (even though in practice it is not necessarily always adhered to) but may prove problematic when taken to societies in which such beliefs are not shared. This might result in a struggle to equate their personal beliefs with the reality of the societies in which they are working, societies where equality of the sexes may be seen in a very different light and what they perceive as misogyny may be legally and religiously mandated. And this struggle may also lead to feelings of discomfort and uncertainty about how to deal with gender-related issues in the classroom, especially those in which the teachers’ opinions are at variance with those expressed by their students.

In the following extract Sally, who works at a Men’s College, describes her struggle to deal with the issue of gender and recounts an incident in which a male student had gone to the management to complain about a female colleague who, he claimed, had been standing too close to him in class, making him feel uncomfortable and had also stated that it was not right to have a female teaching males. Her reaction could be said to indicate the frustration that may occur when the respondents are faced with attitudes they find difficult to accept and the conflict that can occur between an automatic urge to disagree and a fear of offending students:

‘Look, I can be understanding. I can be everything I’m supposed to be. But I can’t stand that kind of thing. I don’t appreciate it … You know, I try to be culturally
understanding, but I don’t appreciate this .. this … you know (Laughs) .. I just …
Oh!! (Laughs in frustration)’ (Sally 21)

Interestingly, Sally equates being understanding with being everything she is ‘supposed’ to be, perhaps indicating a belief that being an educated, well-travelled, cosmopolitan educator carries with it an obligation to be understanding and non-judgemental towards other cultures, a position that can be threatened by overt sexual discrimination and perceived misogynistic attitudes. Later in the interview, Sally discusses how she attempts to deal with aspects of the host culture she finds personally objectionable:

Sally: ‘For me there’s always that conflict between what I value and believe, personally, what I value and understand and even appreciate in another culture, even though I may not have the same values and practices, and then those ones that I will never, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever believe, or even appreciate.

Researcher: ‘Could you give me an example?’

Sally: Erm …… my husband was talking to me and … (Sally describes a female expert in learning disabilities not being allowed to present a workshop at her husband’s all-male college because of her gender) … I’m never going to appreciate that kind of thinking … EVER! I don’t like it. I don’t value it, you know, but I won’t hate the people who do it, you know, I still understand that they’re only human.’ (Sally 22)

Sally’s rejection of ‘that kind of thinking’, referring the strict (and in her mind unnecessary) segregation of the sexes, reflects Alice’s comment about relationships between the sexes being ‘a bit silly’, but just as Alice said she got used to this way of thinking, Sally qualifies her outright condemnation of what she perceives as misogyny with the caveat that she ‘won’t hate’ the people who hold such attitudes. And her final comment that they are ‘only human’ could be said to be an example of how many deal with such examples of culturally different thinking: by rationalising them.

In Sally’s initial account of the ‘very devout’ male student who complained about his female teacher, she concluded that perhaps the student might change his opinions about female teachers or maybe he couldn’t because ‘that’s what he believes, you know, that’s what he’s been taught’. She appears to rationalise his misogynistic attitudes as being the result of his
upbringing rather than any malice on his part. It might be that for Sally and Alice this acceptance / rationalisation of different attitudes towards gender roles acts as a coping mechanism to deal with the cognitive dissonance that may occur when faced with the contradictions between their own deeply-held beliefs and those espoused in the society around them. In the following extract, Sally discusses her perceptions of her role as an educator in the region, and the importance she places on not contesting comments from students:

Sally: ‘Students sometimes talk about … um … women shouldn’t be able to do this or that or whatever. And I just say ‘Oh really?’ I mean, I just can’t go there because I’m too emotionally attached to it or .. um .. I have men in my classes whose sisters can’t go to college. Can you believe that? Still! Yeah, I don’t like it. But then others in the class will fight him about it, and I think that’s fine, I mean, they have their own things to work out and it’s not for me … this big, white Western woman to come in and say how it should be, but .. I’m still human, too, you know?’

Researcher: ‘So you don’t see it as your job to change anything here?’

Sally: ‘No.’

Researcher: ‘So what is your job here?’

Sally: ‘Um … I think raise awareness. Allow space for students to hear about each other’s’ ideas, to read about things and let them know who they are. Let them raise their own awareness, but once their awareness is raised I don’t necessarily think I’m the one to say ‘You do this!’ They need to make their own decisions.’ (Sally 23)

Sally admits that if the students make comments she finds sexist she will not deal with them in class as she is ‘too emotionally attached’. It is interesting that even for a successful woman such as Sally, who at the time of the interview was also serving as the president of an international English language teachers’ association, it seems important that she not directly impose her own views about gender roles on her male students, no matter how distasteful she finds their comments. And although her comment that she sees her role as being ‘to raise [the students’] awareness’ could be said to be contradicted by her self-censorship of her own opinions, such self-censorship could also be seen as prudent in a region where the issue of
gender may be politically, culturally and religiously sensitive. This extract could be said to illustrate a common quandary faced by teachers in the region – a professional desire to raise students’ awareness of the world while also ensuring that one is not perceived to be offending the local cultural, traditional and religious norms. Sally’s comments ‘I’m still human too, you know’ could be said to indicate that this is not always an easy matter.

Dealing with the issue of perceived local attitudes to gender roles is not only restricted to teachers. In the following extract Margaret discusses her struggle to deal with attitudes to women not only from the locals, but also from her management colleagues:

‘After 30 years working as a woman in the Gulf … I think that the lack of respect for women is something that takes some getting used to. I think that to survive you have to have pretty thick skin and pretty broad shoulders. I think even now as a director it is probably the hardest thing to have to deal with and I have it all the time where I am marginalised as a woman, even in a Western group. It sometimes shocks me as how I can be in a group of Western men at my level and because they are in the Arab world they seem to take on that role of protecting the male culture here. Sometimes it can be quite galling!’ (Margaret 27).

Margaret’s anger at her male colleagues, whom she describes as taking on ‘Arab’ attitudes towards women, seems to indicate that although she can excuse such attitudes from Arab colleagues, as that is part of what she says is their ‘male culture’, to be marginalised by Western males is not acceptable. However, it may also be that Margaret’s male Western colleagues in higher management are merely exhibiting behaviour normal amongst any males in positions of power, regardless of where they are from, and that there is nothing specifically ‘Arab’ about their misogyny. Perhaps they merely feel that, in the social environment of the Gulf, there is less societal pressure upon them to conceal such misogynistic attitudes. In addition, like Margaret, who was fifty-five at the time of the interview, most senior managers in HEIs in the UAE are in their mid-to-late fifties or early sixties and consequently grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, when overt sexual discrimination was much more common in Western countries than it is today.

For Siobhan, the issue of gender is also something upon which extra significance is placed, stating that:
‘This is a society that constructs the idea of male and female so strongly so it automatically highlights the differences that you might not find otherwise, so you need to keep that in the background’ (Siobhan 13).

Indeed, teachers new to the region may encounter constructions of the ideas of male and female so strong that they prove initially startling, given that in many Anglophone societies overt sexual discrimination and prejudice has not only become increasingly socially unacceptable, but has also become subject to legislation. Siobhan’s advice on the need for an awareness of such differences is made much more forcefully by Samantha, who, in reply to my question about what advice she would give to a teacher new to the region, highlights what she perceives as the need for females to modify their behaviour:

‘To females I would say that you need to be very wary of local, and by that I mean all Arab, men. And that you cannot behave, even with the most educated, and this is going to sound awfully biased and racist, but you cannot behave, even with the most educated, in the same way you would in the West. Standards ARE different, and if you want to be treated with any kind of respect you are going to have to limit your behaviour, and if you don’t limit your behaviour, you … erm … look, you might have a very good time, but your name is going to be mud! And if you are not prepared to limit your behaviour then you shouldn’t be coming out here or .. you keep it within the expat community and by that I DO mean the WESTERN expat community.’ (Samantha 16)

Samantha’s admission that her warning to females to modify their behaviour when dealing with all Arab men is ‘awfully biased and racist’ could be said to reflect the struggle mentioned by Sally when trying to reconcile her own values and beliefs with those of the society in which she is now living. Samantha’s use of the word ‘awfully’ seems to indicate a belief in the undesirability of being seen as ‘biased and racist’ by such stereotyping, but this concern appears to be in conflict with her belief that there are discernible differences in the standards regarding what is deemed acceptable behaviour for women in Western society and in Gulf/Arab society, differences it would be unwise for them to ignore. Samantha appears to realise that by warning women to modify their behaviour when interacting with Arab men she is in danger of being deemed ‘racist’, but still appears to consider it an important enough piece of advice for any female considering moving to the region that she is prepared to give it anyway.
It is also interesting that, by couching her comments as ‘awfully biased and racist’, Samantha appears to find herself in a situation where what she thinks and wants to say on the issue may be at odds with her beliefs about what is acceptable to say. A belief that it is unacceptable to make stereotypical statements about groups of people, especially those from outside the West, appears to be at odds with her belief that women such as her should not interact with local men as they would with men back home if they wish to maintain any respect. Both Samantha’s comment here and Sally’s earlier comment about being ‘everything that I’m supposed to be’ could be said to reflect a Western discourse of political correctness, a discourse quite common in the education field, where both speakers are aware of certain standards of acceptable discourse but seem to find it difficult to equate these standards with their own feelings. Some of the respondents, such as Alice and Sally, chose to deal with examples of different attitudes towards gender relations either by attempting to rationalise them or accepting them as ‘normal’ over time, and Samantha asserts the imperative of adapting ones’ public behaviour to these different standards.

However, in the following exchange Gerald exhibits what could be said to be a mild form of resistance in reaction to the cultural dissonance caused by some of his students’ attitudes towards gender roles; the use of humour:

Gerald: ‘We were discussing gender issues, gender equality, just two days ago and I had a student saying ‘Well women HAVE got smaller brains and CANNOT be in power because of this’ and this caused an argument between one student, who said ‘No, that isn’t true’ and all the others, who were saying ‘It’s in the Quran’. And it got quite .. heated, and they’re friends and they laughed at the end, but there was a heated atmosphere discussing whether or not it was OK to discuss the idea of women being equal to men, and being better than men in some ways, because they claimed the Quran directly said they can’t be .. and that’s why I’m happy. I’m happy for them to have that discussion .. you know, I’m not trying to convince them one way or the other but I want them to think about these things because I feel that that’s important for their country, their role in their country in the future …’

Researcher: ‘I’m very interested in the argument your students had over women having smaller brains because I’ve been immensely depressed at the Women’s College when I’ve had students say that. You know, ‘Oh, we can’t do
that. That’s a man’s job. We have smaller brains than men.’ And, and … you said that the rest of the class said it’s in the Quran??’

Gerald: ‘Yes, they were saying ‘It is written’ and ‘You can’t argue against it’. But what I was doing later in the day was laughing at them when they got stuff wrong, like, really badly wrong, like we were trying to do the Present Simple for the fifty-fourth time and I’m like ‘Here’s this massive brain’ … (Researcher Laughs Loudly) … Yeah, I’m like .. Be quiet everyone. Here’s Majid with his amazing big brain trying to do it for the fifteenth time, you know, it’s basic ‘I, you, he, she, it’ sort of thing. And they laughed at that, you know, they laughed and were happy to take that.’ (Gerald 11)

For Gerald, his students’ discussion on gender subsequently becomes a source of humour when juxtaposed their efforts to deal with what he considers a relatively simple area of grammar. Gerald says his use of humour was done in a light-hearted and friendly way which the students found inoffensive and, as Gerald later pointed out, the joke over ‘big brains’ became amalgamated into that particular class’s discourse and was subsequently being used by the students as well as Gerald, which could be said to be contribute to class rapport.

As will be discussed in Chapter 9, Gerald’s careful use of humour to deal indirectly with student attitudes with which he disagrees may be indicative of a common method of dealing with the frustrations and contradictions faced by those teaching in the region. Although Gerald asserts that he’s ‘not trying to convince [his students], one way or another’, perhaps the use of humour could be seen as a way of indirectly and non-confrontationally letting the students know his own feelings on the matter.

In conclusion, in this section I have attempted to show the various ways in which the respondents dealt with the potential differences between their own personal beliefs and values regarding the issue of gender and those of their students, and how these differences may be a source of anger, frustration, fear and self-censorship or even humour. However, the issue of gender also emerged from the data as providing a major source of potential conflict in the classroom and that is the subject of the next section.
6.4 – Gender as a Problem in the Classroom

The perception of ‘different standards’ between Western and Arab culture regarding gender relations also emerged from the data as a potential source of conflict in the classroom. This is illustrated in the following exchange with Mandy, in which she recounts an incident that occurred with her all-male class in Kuwait soon after she first arrived in the region:

Mandy: ‘I had problems when I first came to the Gulf because I hadn’t understood the extent to which the .. the manifestation of Islam was conservative. It wasn’t quite such an issue in Morocco and I automatically expected it to be pretty similar but .. um .. finding that the classes were segregated and that some women were wearing the niqaab was a big shock, particularly as I started teaching male military students from the outset who .. um .. were from very conservative families and I was the only female amongst two classes of forty military males and they were very nice but I had almost no understanding of their culture … I know that I made some faux pas inadvertently.’

Researcher: ‘Can you give an example?’

Mandy: ‘Um .. We decided to have a kind of open day and I suggested that they bring their wives and when they just looked at me I pressed it a bit and said ‘Well, why not? What’s wrong with that?’ and, as I now know, it would be completely unacceptable for any of their colleagues to see their wives or for their wives to come into a public place where there were males that weren’t from the family but at the time I had no idea of things like that.’ (Mandy 1)

For Mandy this incident could be said to be an introduction to the differences in gender relations between Gulf Arab society and her understanding of gender relations in a Muslim country based on her experiences working in Morocco. This may indicate the potentially problematic nature of the essentialising stereotypes of ‘Muslims’ that may be held amongst native-speaker ELT professionals, informed as they may be both by Western media and their experiences in different parts of the Muslim world. However, in this case, and, it could be argued, in most cases where a teacher inadvertently makes a ‘faux pas’ that might be offensive to local norms, the students explained the difference to her and no animosity was caused.
However, over the course of the interviews gender-related issues provided the largest percentage (about 40%) of the problems highlighted by the respondents. This is not to deny that similar incidents may occur in any ELT situation, but the emphasis on appropriate gender roles and behaviour in Gulf Arab society and the potential threat such incidents pose to teachers working in the region make these noteworthy. These gender-related incidents have been presented in Table 6.4 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A male teacher was transferred from the Women’s College to the Men’s because a student was sending him sexual emails</td>
<td>(Alice 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A female student once took a pen out of a male teacher’s pocket and he was let go for inappropriate behaviour</td>
<td>(Betty 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A listening book that showed men dressed as women as deemed offensive by the students and reported in the local press which caused the dismissal of a couple of managers</td>
<td>(Betty 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A male student slapped a female student for daring to sit at the front of a mixed class in Yemen</td>
<td>(Betty 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems in Saudi Arabia where some ‘camp’ students were constantly being insulted and attacked by other students</td>
<td>(Brian 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had to deal with incidents of ‘gay-bashing’ in class with students who wore eyeliner and effeminate clothes being attacked by other students</td>
<td>(Dudley 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A female student complained to the councillor that he was making her feel uncomfortable because he was standing too close</td>
<td>(Jack 16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A female student accused a male teacher on a student feedback form of touching her hand. He denied it vehemently and claimed she was being vindictive because of her poor grades</td>
<td>(Jack 19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A female student wrote a love letter to a male teacher which caused a huge problem with her family</td>
<td>(James 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A male teacher asked his female students how many Valentine’s cards they had received, thus insinuating they all had boyfriends, causing much offense, and he was subsequently fired</td>
<td>(Margaret 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During a class discussion on the subject of weddings a male teacher asked inappropriate questions about the wedding night, causing much offense</td>
<td>(Margaret 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A female teacher made a late student sit in the corner and he complained to the management that he had been humiliated by a woman</td>
<td>(Mary 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A (female) student once slapped him on the knee after he told a joke in class and the other students shouted ‘Haram! Haram!’ at them</td>
<td>(Matthew 10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During a celebration at the Women’s college he took photos of the students which he thought could have been a serious problem (Ned 7)

A male teacher was fired because in a class photo one of the female students had put her arm around his back (Norman 15)

He was very frustrated that as a male teacher he was not allowed to help his epileptic student when she had fits in class (Peter 9)

A colleague was arrested and imprisoned for having sex out of wedlock (Sally 27)

Table 6.4 – Gender-related problematic incidents

Of the incidents reported, 40% of them related to inappropriate touching or proximity and a third concerned matters relating to sex/dating/love. In four of these incidents teachers lost their jobs whereas in another a teacher had to be transferred to another college. When incidents such as these occur, they may add to the professional discourse of fear of the ELT community in the region.

However, as James points out a vital factor in avoiding potential gender-related trouble is the development of trust and rapport with the students.

‘Never, whatever you do, don’t touch the students. Just the other day I accidentally touched one of the students’ knees when I was going in to correct her work, and I went ‘Sorry’ and carried on. Fortunately, I think … It’s one of those things; once the class really start to trust you then you can make these sort of gaffes and it’s not taken so seriously, but if that had happened in the first week it would have been a major gaffe ’ (James 13)

As James points out, with the development of trust even an incident as potentially dangerous as a male teacher accidentally touching a female student’s knee, over time and with the development of trust, need not necessarily be job-threatening. It could be said, then, that the dangers posed to teachers from misunderstandings of local attitudes towards gender roles may diminish with time as rapport is built up with students, and as both teachers and students alike become more familiar with each other. However, although they may diminish, they never entirely disappear. In the incident recounted in Table 6.4 above, Margaret’s description of the male teacher who asked his female students about the number of Valentine’s Day cards they had received involved a teacher who, even though he had been working at the college for over 2 years, was apparently still unaware of the dangers of dealing with a subject such as Valentine’s Day in class and who was subsequently dismissed for this infringement.
In this section I have outlined how gender may be seen as the source of problematic situations in class, situations that may be serious enough to warrant the dismissal of a teacher. The regular occurrence of such incidents, combined with their retelling and possible transformation into ‘urban myths’ may contribute to a professional ‘discourse of fear’ which may inform the attitudes of the respondents towards their students. And it is the issue of the respondents’ attitudes towards their male and female students that is the subject of my final section.

6.5 – Shabab and Bainat – Attitudes towards the students

For teachers newly arrived in the region, the segregation of the sexes in HEIs may often be unfamiliar. However, for Peter the chance to work as a male teacher in a female college is seen as a unique experience:

‘I just find this environment challenging … some days you are just pulling your hair out, but it’s pretty unique, you know, when you think about it really, it’s a women’s college and then you are a man as well, thrown into the whole thing, and you’re foreign, you’re seen as a Westerner, it’s a really unique environment and it really makes you change, you know, you HAVE to adapt to it, and I tell myself every now and again ‘Just enjoy it, because you are probably never going to teach in an environment as unique as this again.’ (Laughs) (Peter 13)

Peter points out the importance of adaptability in the challenging environment of being a male teacher at a female college, and the presence of sexually-segregated colleges appears to offer distinct challenges and rewards to the participants. It was not uncommon for the respondents to have had experience teaching in both men’s and women’s colleges, or to be part of a teaching couple working at different colleges, and several of them commented on the differences they perceived between teaching males and females. Siobhan comments that:

‘Teaching both men and women I would say the guys were very funny. They made me laugh a lot. They were lazier than the women, probably more self-confident than the females, perhaps with an inflated sense of their own ability, compared to the females’ (Siobhan 14).
Her comment on laziness reflects a common perception from some of the respondents regarding male students that they exhibited a lack of motivation and seriousness towards studying compared to the females. And Matthew highlights what he sees as a lack of discipline:

‘Here the discipline at home for boys is minimal or non-existent. They are given a lot of freedom and they do what they like, basically, and I find mentally they do, too. Their minds are all over the place and wander, like one of them makes a comment and they all join in and in seconds you’ve lost the class’ (Matthew 6).

This perceived lack of discipline is in stark contrast with the female students, whose lives are seen as being controlled to a much larger degree than their brothers. For those teaching at all-male colleges, discipline, motivation and classroom control are often seen as major issues, although, as Gerald and Siobhan’s previous comments show, humour is often used as a way of dealing with this. Matthew continues his comparison of his students:

‘The women are more focussed here, I’ve found. Their motivation is higher … because study gives them a way out of the house and gets them into jobs which give them more freedom and independence, and sometimes study is also a way out of marriage. And then there’s the other thing – because they’re not let out of the college grounds, as you know, they HAVE to be there so they may as well do something while they’re at the college’ (Matthew 7).

It is interesting to note that for Matthew, the female students’ motivation must be because of a desire for ‘freedom and independence’, perhaps ascribing motivations that stem more from his own cultural upbringing than that of the students. This idea of college providing ‘freedom’ for female students is underlined by James:

‘For the female students, when they leave home and come to college, that’s freedom for them. They can come here, they can be with their friends all day and the last thing they want is to be kicked out of college because that means they’ve lost their freedom but for the guys, they just want to be out and about in their cars and for them, college is prison.’ (James 4).

James and Matthew both stress the concept of ‘freedom’ when referring to their female students and this may indicate a perception that females in Gulf society are in some way not ‘free’. This perception could stem from several sources, including the clothing worn by the
female students, the fact that comparatively few of them have their own cars and depend on busses or male family members, and the high walls and numerous security guards at women’s colleges who closely check arrivals and departures and prevent any from leaving without permission from a family member. However, this sense of a perceived lack of freedom is not limited to male respondents, as shown by the following comment from Gwen:

‘Sometimes their lack of freedom means that they don’t actually take the initiative which you would like to see more. Does that come from their religion? You know, some poor souls are dominated by their brothers and other male members of the family. They don’t have the freedom to come and go as the men do and I guess, you know, sometimes you have to adjust your expectations.’

(Gwen 15)

Gwen describes some of her female students as ‘poor souls’ dominated by male members of their families, which reflects the pity shown earlier by Sally towards the female students wearing niqababs. It may be that from Gwen’s perspective the protective attitude shown towards female family members by some males in Gulf society is seen more as ‘domination’ and a restriction on their ‘freedom’. However, for Peggy, there is a danger for teachers in looking at the female students from such a perspective:

‘You know, I do tend to keep away from talking about my culture too much, you know. We have these student evaluations every semester and one of the questions is ‘Does your teacher respect you culture?’ and I have, touch wood, nice feedback from my students on this, but one of the teachers who is new received comments from several of her students saying she does not respect the culture, and I’ve heard some of her lessons and it’s kinda this; she thinks they’re un-empowered and, you know, she’s going to introduce material that shows them women in other parts of the world but I really don’t believe in trying to change them and I don’t think that Emirati women are unhappy here for the main part, so I’m not here to change them or change their culture. I’m just here to .. you know .. make learning English as interesting as possible. It depends on who you are, but there are certainly a lot of teachers who come here thinking ‘These poor women’, and I think if you come with that attitude then it’s going to be really difficult for you to balance respect for the culture and still maintain your own integrity, without
feeling that you’ve compromised who you are and what you believe in, and I never feel that’ (Peggy 17).

Peggy mentions the student evaluations including a question on whether the students see their teachers as ‘respecting local culture’ and that the teacher who thought it appropriate to introduce materials comparing the position of local women with those elsewhere received very negative feedback from her students. As will be discussed in Section 7.4, these feedback forms may have a major impact on teachers as their passing of probation or contract renewal may depend on receiving positive feedback.

For Peggy, any attempt to try and change local perceptions towards women is seen as both inappropriate and potentially dangerous. She claims that her role is not to change the students’ culture, but merely to make learning English ‘as enjoyable as possible.’ The possibility that the students’ culture may well be changed merely by their only having the option of English-medium higher education does not appear to occur to Peggy, and she seems to take solace in the idea that she can maintain her own integrity by teaching a form of English that somehow attempts to exclude ‘cultural’ aspects of the language. She also seems to realise, based on her account of the experience of the new teacher, that any attempt to point out what could be seen from her perspective as shortcomings in local cultural attitudes to women could be perceived as disrespectful by the students.

As well as there being a perceived lack of freedom amongst female students from some of the respondents, there is also a perception of innocence and naïveté. For Norman, the female students were seen as ‘less-worldly’ than those he had taught in Europe, saying ‘they are almost cocooned here’ (Norman 4). However, such attitudes towards the students may also contribute towards their infantilisation. Although the students were usually aged between 18 and 22, some of whom would also be parents, throughout the interviews they were referred to as ‘girls’ and ‘boys’ by a majority of the respondents. In the following extract Mandy comments on this phenomenon:

“I try not to infantilise the students, as many other teachers do. They talk to them like children. They think ‘if I play Mummy or Daddy I can control them easier’ and the students play into that, perhaps because it is something lacking in their lives ... Unfortunately it can lead to rather a boring teaching environment because students are not challenged to think cognitively about anything, particularly social and cultural issues ... and the teachers complain about boredom as well, but they
are complicit in fostering this ‘child/parent’ role-play with students. It’s most unfortunate and hinders the students in their personal development.’ (Mandy 11)

Mandy highlights how the infantilisation of her female students may result in them not being challenged to think cognitively but also comments that this parental relationship may be something ‘lacking in their lives’, a point underlined by Brian who, in the following extract, discusses what he perceives as the source of problems with his male students:

‘I think the main reason for a lot of the problems is the primary and secondary educational system here. It doesn’t ..er.. it doesn’t breed a system where they get the child to think for themselves. It doesn’t breed children who have respect or take responsibility … It needs a big overhaul and it’s .. it’s deep. It runs very deep but it’s also to do with parents now they have this money You have a maid bringing the children up and not really caring what they do and .. er .. it’s sad. I even had a student telling me ‘I love you, Mr Brian. More than I love my father.’ (Laughs) and he used to hug me and they’re looking for that love. They’re looking for that guidance which just seems to have disappeared because of the wealth. Because of the money … they are very lost.’ (Brian 3)

However, although Margaret claimed that infantilisation: ‘is very much driven by the students ... I don’t think it is something that teachers would want to create,’ she later revealed that the majority of the complaints she received from female students about female faculty had been related to the subject of infantilisation – students had been very upset by female faculty members saying things like: ‘Oh, don’t be silly, Fatima’, or ‘Grow up’ or ‘You shouldn’t be behaving like this’ – They can’t bear it, they just can’t bear it.’ Interestingly over the years Margaret said that she had never received a complaint about male faculty infantilising the students, saying that ‘Maybe male teachers don’t do this, or maybe the students accept it from a man, but they will not accept it from one of their own.’ (Margaret 1)

However, for female faculty at men’s colleges the perceived maturity of the students was also seen as problematic. For example Sheila, when asked what advice she would give to potential new teachers said:

‘Generally I would recommend teaching here because the students are really nice and sweet and you rarely get a lot of the big problems that you might have back home. But don’t expect that you are going to be teaching college students like
back home. It’s more like teaching primary school, but you have to motivate them as adults.’ (Sheila 17)

This perceived lack of maturity is also commented on by Rachael, who recounted the discipline problems she had encountered in Kuwait where she taught oil workers stating: ‘I had to learn discipline with adults and I had never had to do that before’ (Rachael 2), before commenting on her experiences at a men’s college in the UAE:

‘Although the students in Kuwait could be immature, I didn’t know anything until I started teaching here ... I’ve got students now who are supposed to be college-age students and they are more like teaching children ... after my first year I had to go to my friends in the States who are elementary school teachers and ask them what they did, because I had never had to deal with this kind of thing before.’ (Rachael 3)

For teachers with experience teaching both genders, such as ‘Kevin’, teaching females was potentially more problematic than males:

‘I think teaching women you have to be more cautious, like, because of the culture … and I think the women are more emotional so you have to, sort of, nurse them around a bit more, you know.’ (Kevin 5).

The need for caution when teaching female students is ascribed by Kevin both to the local culture and to their alleged emotiveness and this caution may often take the form of a censorial approach to teaching, an approach that may be far more common when teaching female students than male. Kevin’s caution with his female students reflects that shown by Peggy, who also works at a women’s college, but it does not appear to be such an important issue when teaching males. Kevin continues: ‘The guys are very laissez-faire – you don’t see them after class as they just vanish in their cars and stuff … (Laughs)’ (Kevin 5), reflecting James’s earlier comment on his male students seeing college as ‘prison’. For teachers at male colleges, it appears that there may be less anxiety about potentially causing offence with the result that, as reflected in the following comment by Oliver, the idea of being moved to a Women’s college may be one that causes anxiety:

‘You know, I enjoy being in the classroom here more than anywhere else I’ve taught but one of the worries I always have is that one day someone is going to say to me ‘We’re sending you to the Women’s College.’ It’s not so much the
Women’s College itself that’s frightening, it’s the fact that I won’t be able to establish the same kind of contact, of closeness, with the women students as with the men students, and that’s a lot of what my teaching’s about.’ (Oliver 5)

For Oliver, teaching at a Men’s College appears to be a very rewarding experience, but he seems to view the possibility of being transferred to a Women’s College with some trepidation. The reason he gives for this is that he says he would not be able to build up the same close relationships with female students as he does with his male students, but there may also be the possibility that, as his wife (‘Alice’) teaches at a Women’s College, he has heard stories of some of the problems facing teachers there and this may add to his ‘worries’ about a potential transfer.

And indeed, in the women’s colleges teachers seem to be a lot more concerned. For Alice, the reason for this worry comes from local cultural attitudes to women and the college’s reaction to them:

‘It seems to me that in this culture where, generally, women are not given any power at all at home, they seem to exercise it whenever and wherever they can, and I think the problem with the way the college is run is that it gives them an avenue to exercise that power, and they exercise it when they don’t get the grades they want or to deal with unpopular teachers and it can get really nasty’ (Alice 9).

As will be discussed in Section 7.4, the power that students exercise often comes in the form of student feedback forms, although in more serious cases the students will go higher. Cordelia, a teacher from England also teaching at a women’s college, talked of a case where ‘a student got a D which was reported to the Sheikh and it was very worrying’ (Cordelia 8). The power that female students are perceived to wield could be said to have an effect on the way teachers act in the classroom, the materials they choose to teach and even the grades that they award for their students’ work given that the fear of negative feedback or even being reported to the Sheikh could well influence teachers faced with a piece of substandard work.

Despite these issues, several of the respondents expressed a preference for teaching the women, perhaps due to the lack of motivation and interest that was seen as more prevalent amongst males. For Jack, motivation seems to be a major factor, although even with his current female students he sees it as a problem:
‘I like teaching the women very much here. I didn’t like teaching Emirati men. That was not a pleasant experience, but teaching the women is much more interesting, but still quite a struggle to get them to be motivated. It’s quite frustrating, the lack of motivation. I’ll be blunt. I was much happier teaching Syrians and Palestinians.’ (Jack 36).

6.6 – Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to show how gender influences the respondents’ struggle to reconcile local attitudes with their own beliefs or at least the ‘politically correct’ beliefs that they believe they should hold. Those who decide to contest cultural attitudes they find unacceptable may be putting their jobs or their rapport with their students at risk, as shown by the problems highlighted, whereas those who choose to take a strict censorial approach may, by avoiding such cultural differences, be disadvantaging their students in the culturally-laden international examinations they have to pass to graduate. The participants’ attitudes towards the students could also lead to their infantilisation and essentialisation, with male students being portrayed as unmotivated and undisciplined and females being seen as naïve and overprotected. This, in turn, could lead to potentially boring, overly-censored lessons and a child/parent classroom relationship which could prove demotivating for faculty and students alike. However, a further issue that emerged from the data was the question of power and how this relates to the respondents’ lives and this is the subject of my next chapter.
Chapter 7 – Power

7.1 – Introduction

In this section I introduce data which appears to indicate how the participants’ professional identities may be affected by issues of power. Firstly, the respondents’ perceptions of their own position in Gulf society and how this may affect their working lives is explored. Secondly, I discuss how perceptions of student power may influence the participants’ working lives and the potential repercussions of student feedback and faculty assessment on professionalism. I then consider the issue of wasata (influence) and the power of the institution, exploring attitudes towards management.

7.2 – Power, Gulf Society & the Respondents

As discussed in Chapter 3, ELT professionals in HEIs in the UAE are working in a context where they may be summarily dismissed at any time. Among the more experienced respondents, there appeared to be some agreement that a realisation of one’s own position in Gulf society was important. For example, Samantha said the following when asked about what advice she would give to anyone considering working in the Gulf:

‘I think you have to be prepared to be a second-class citizen here. You shouldn’t think that the normal rules of what we expect with everybody equal and everybody treated fairly in the West – that does not apply when you come to the GCC countries .. um .. You are a second class citizen. You might be at the top of the heap of the second class citizens but you are a second class citizen and you have to be prepared to accept that and knuckle under and if you can’t do that, then your life is going to be a misery and you shouldn’t come.’ (Samantha 15)

Samantha stresses the importance of accepting the fact that what she describes as the ‘normal’ Western rules of equality and fairness do not apply in Gulf society. She highlights the division in Gulf society between the (often numerically smaller) nationals and the large number of foreign workers and also points out that, as Westerners, native-speaker ELT professionals could be considered ‘at the top of the heap of the second-class citizens’, perhaps indicating both the extent and the limitations of the power that is afforded to Western
expatriates, as opposed to expatriates from other parts of the world. As will be discussed in Chapter 8, the comparatively large, tax-free salaries, free housing and other benefits available to ELT professionals in the UAE place them near the top of non-local society and it could be argued that this is the price that they are paid to ‘knuckle under’ and accept their second-class status without complaint.

However, Samantha also states that those who are not able to ‘knuckle under’ and accept their role in society are not going to have a pleasant time and the importance of this is also made by Gwen, who has the following advice for those new to the region:

‘Be prepared to be surprised by their views but remember you are in a foreign country. You are a guest here and that should be always uppermost in your mind and you should treat this culture with respect and treat the students with respect and if there are differences that come out in discussions or in their writing then OK. I mean, isn’t that why you are here?’ (Gwen 18)

Gwen’s final comment: ‘isn’t that why you are here?’ could be said to indicate one of the roles that ELT professionals are expected to play in the region – to introduce Gulf Arab youth not only to the ‘world language’, but also to a controlled (and respectful) version of Western culture and beliefs. The issue of ‘respect’ is also important for Rose, who appears to find a certain asymmetry between the respect ELT professionals are expected to show and the level of respect she perceives herself as receiving from some (but by no means all) of the students. In the following exchange she comments on the issue of respect and how it informs her perception of the place of ELT professionals in Gulf society:

Rose: ‘The main things that stick in my mind are instances of blatant cheating in exams … I find that really difficult and, I mean, do they think I am a total idiot and won’t notice? They are always talking about respect but I think that sort of behaviour shows a total lack of respect. With my first class, who weren’t used to strict teaching, they went and complained and said I didn’t respect them but I said to them, well it works both ways. You have to show respect for me … and they seemed to be quite taken aback by that. You know, we show them respect but it doesn’t always work the other way. I often feel that we are just glorified servants in the minds of some students; not all of them, but some.’

Researcher: ‘What would make you feel that way?’
Rose: ‘Um …. that …. (Sighs) …. well, that I as a teacher, that we as teachers are expected to do things their way …. that …. yes .. (Sighs deeply) .. a lack, at times, of acceptance of the teacher’s authority which, you know, I don’t mean to be autocratic or anything, but there are certain college rules and certain things that you do as a teacher and in most environments I think that’s accepted. People understand the rules but I found here, particularly among the men that I taught, there was much more challenging of that and non-acceptance of it.’

Researcher: ‘So where do you think this comes from’

Rose: ‘Um … I don’t really have experience in the schools but possibly the fact that in the schools …. (Laughs nervously) OK, I’m going to really put myself on the line here .. and again it doesn’t apply to everyone by any means, but I think there is basically a lack of respect for foreigners here. You know, we are seen as paid employees of the country and, by extension, of them, you know, kind of like glorified housemaids. We are here to do what they want and follow their orders and if we don’t then things will be made tough for us. So I feel here more than I’ve felt anywhere else that there is this balancing act. I’ve never felt that my teacherly authority has been challenged in the way that it is here by students. There doesn’t seem to be any acknowledgement that they are getting a FREE higher education. They feel it is their due and that we’re here to make things easy for them. I think even to learn for them if that were possible. (Laughs).’ (Rose 8)

At the time of interview Rose was fifty-six and had been working in ELT for thirty-five years, with only the preceding six years spent in the Gulf. From her comments it appears that male Khaliji students in particular present a challenge to what she terms her ‘teacherly authority’ and she recounts an incident in which a class of students complained about her ‘strict’ teaching and perceived lack of respect. However, earlier in the interview, when I had asked her if she had changed her teaching methodology upon arrival in the Gulf she had replied:

‘No, I didn’t change my methodology at all. .. um ..I found that my, what I call, usual approaches were actually effective here. I don’t think that that is a .. um …
look, the methodology that I had been using in my previous career, I found it was appropriate here and it seemed to work (Laughs)’ (Rose 3).

So, although Rose perceived a lack of respect from some of her students it may be that this was merely a reaction from them to unfamiliar teaching. This perceived lack of respect Rose links to the role of foreigners in Gulf society, stating that she feels that native-speaker ELT professionals are no more than ‘glorified servants’ or ‘glorified housemaids’, hinting at the comparative lack of power that may be felt by some of the respondents in this study. Indeed, in the initial two extracts in the section from Samantha and Gwen, both of them stressed the importance of acknowledging one’s position in Gulf society; as ‘guest’, ‘foreigner’ and, in relation to the students, as a ‘second class citizen’ or, as Rose put it, ‘a glorified housemaid’. However, for those who are not prepared to control their views of local society and its cultural practices and decide instead to adopt a more confrontational stance the repercussions may be serious, as illustrated in the following exchange with Gerald:

Gerald: ‘A colleague was sacked here a couple of weeks ago and the general perception was that he had been asking for it because he was very outspoken. (Laughs) At the orientation session he asked the management ‘What are you doing about female circumcision?’ And somebody said ‘Look, we don’t really go there.’ and he said ‘Well, you are part of the problem!’ He was very unusual because he was un-fearful and I would say most people would never have asked that question, even if they had been thinking it, because there’s this general sense of ‘keep your head down and don’t rock the boat’ because there’s too much depending on it … But this guy had an anger. He had a death wish … somewhere else he might have been seen as a maverick and an annoying kind of guy but with him it’s like ‘Oh my God! He WANTS the sack!’ (Gerald 21)

Gerald’s description of the teacher as having ‘a death wish’ could be said to reflect a general perception held amongst many of the respondents regarding the inadvisability of breaking the ‘no politics, no religion’ mantra. The ‘unfearful’ teacher is also described by Gerald as ‘very unusual’ which may indicate a feeling amongst the majority of ELT professionals that, given what is at stake (especially the money), it is better to ‘keep your head down and not rock the boat’ by highlighting instances of what they perceived as injustice. However, that is not to say that all the respondents were comfortable with the injustices they perceived around them,
as illustrated in the following extract from Oliver in which he discusses what he sees as the unfairness of local society:

‘The people here .. I would say that I haven’t really met an Arab individual that I didn’t get on with … I find that on a personal level I like being here, but on an institutional level, I find it a very frustrating place. I really get wound up by the unfairness of the way that society is set up, where local people are .. well, favoured. It’s not unfair that local people are favoured, but they seem to be … Hmm … How do I put this? They don’t seem to appreciate what the other people, the unfavoured masses, have done for this country. And I don’t like the way that foreign labour gets looked down on here when, you know, the place would still be a desert without it. Look, I worked out that those security guards over there are getting about Dhs.500 (£85) a month and I’m getting thirty to forty times that, but my background is not dissimilar to them in terms of my position in society, I suppose I’m lower-middle or upper-working class, you know, and I feel uncomfortable because these guys are calling me ‘sir’ … I feel here I’m placed way above my background, really ….. (Sighs) But, I dunno, maybe this is how the real world works, you know, the larger world. In Western society we have our individualistic values and I for one am happy to stick with those and treat everybody with respect, whether he’s a cleaner or a security guard but coming here has opened my eyes to the fact that an awful lot of the world doesn’t do that, and we can’t wave a magic wand and expect everyone to respect the cleaner … I’m not saying that the people here are evil, or anything, it’s just that I realise the rest of the world works in this hierarchical way, you know, … and I guess the West does, too.’

Researcher: ‘Maybe we’re just better at hiding it? ’

Oliver: ‘Better at hiding it, yeah, yeah (Laughs).’ (Oliver 19)

Oliver appears to feel some disquiet over his own position of comparative power and privilege in Gulf society as well as with the injustices he perceives around him in the treatment of less privileged foreign workers. He finds the situation frustrating, but attempts to rationalise his position by acknowledging that not all the world shares what he describes as his ‘individualistic’ values. He also seems to equate what he sees as his own position in the British class system with that of the less well paid workers who call him ‘sir’, but then
postulates that this (in his eyes unwarranted) deference is perhaps just a reflection of how the ‘real’ (i.e. non-Western) world works, with a strict hierarchical system and no pretentions of equality. Interestingly, since this interview was conducted Oliver, along with his wife ‘Alice’, has left the Gulf and is now living in Europe.

Another respondent who makes an attempt to rationalise their position in Gulf society is Sally who, in the following extract, discusses what she perceives as the lack of rights foreign workers have in the region:

‘I have a colleague who has been arrested and .. erm .. has been charged with murder and .. erm .. having sex with a man. The murder charges were finally dropped but, still, he’s in hell! He is in utter hell and there is nothing here to support him. He has virtually no rights. They kept him in prison for, like, three days with no water, no food, it was horrible! And there’s nothing to support him … You know sometimes I feel like there’s a balance, you know, I mean I realise that when I live here I have no rights, no protection. I think, ‘Wow! Why am I living here in this society and helping people who live in this society which has this structure, so it does bother me. But then my practical, love-of-learning side comes in and I think they are wonderful people, you know, they are just as much a part of this system as anybody else, and .. whatever! You know. I like teaching! .. (Laughs).’ (Sally 27)

Sally relates her story of her colleague who has been held in prison to her perceptions of her position in Gulf society where, she claims, she has ‘no rights, no protection’. She claims this situation of powerlessness and the perceived injustice of society bothers her, but then rationalises continuing to stay in such a situation by stressing how wonderful the people are and her love of teaching. However, later in the interview, when she returns to the subject of Gulf society, another reason emerges:

Sally: ‘What I really think would be great is if you could train local teachers and they could teach their own students, especially in the K-12. That’s what they need, but they don’t want to do that. In a sense it’s like you have this kind of slave-caste society, so they are creating it themselves, in that sense.’

Researcher: ‘And where do you fit into this slave-caste society?’

Sally: ‘Well, I’m a well-paid slave! (Laughs).’ (Sally 33)
Sally describes Gulf society as being a ‘slave-caste’ society in which foreigners are brought in to do the jobs, such as teaching, which the locals are unwilling or unable to do. However, her describing herself as a ‘well-paid slave’ points to the importance that money may play in the lives of ELT professionals in the region, as discussed in the following chapter.

The respondents’ perceptions of their own position in Gulf society may lead them to see themselves as a relatively powerless part, albeit a well-paid part, of the large pool of foreign labour that does much of the work. However, this sense of powerlessness was not shared by all. In the following extract from Al, he comments upon his arrival in the region and his surprise at the structure of power he perceived in HEIs:

‘It was a bit of a culture shock coming here from London … I had certain expectations about how this part of the world would be. I had this idea that it would be pretty conservative, that Islam would be a major guiding force in everyday life, and that Muslims and Arabs would be pretty much in control of their affairs. So it was rather a shock when I turned up at the college … with this rather rosy image of the Arab World and what I saw was appalling. I noticed that the major gatekeepers were not locals or people who knew about the culture, they were people much like myself who had lived in the West all their lives, from Canada, the States, Britain, and they were making key decisions. … and I started thinking this is not just education, but there is a broader dynamic here; it’s to do with the role of the Middle East in geo-political affairs’ (Al 1)

Al compares the situation he perceives at HEIs in the Gulf, with expatriates as the ‘major gatekeepers’, with the role of the Middle East in geo-political affairs, a situation he describes as ‘rather appalling’. However, as the data has shown, few of the respondents saw themselves as being in a position of power and, as I will discuss in the following section, this sense of powerlessness could be said to be augmented by the respondents’ perceptions of student power.

7.3 – Power, Gulf Society & the Students

In this section I introduce data which appears to indicate the respondents’ views of the power of the students. As nationals, the students were often perceived as having a privileged and somewhat pampered lifestyle which had its own ramifications in the classroom. In the
following extract, Gene comments on what he sees as the students’ lack of self-sufficiency which he blames on what he calls their ‘servant culture’:

‘There is the question here of how do you maintain your self-sufficiency in a servant environment. Where, for example, you just beep your horn and someone comes to your car to serve you and … students here do look to the teacher for a lot of help. Now, that’s a generalisation, that’s not true across the board, but some students will say ‘teacher, teacher, help me, help me’ which can be ‘help me with the exam, help me with the marking, help me by making it easy.’”(Gene 11)

Gene comments on the overreliance on the teacher shown by the students, although he admits that he is making a generalisation, but this could also reflect the comments made in the previous section by Rose, who claimed that she saw herself and other teachers as ‘glorified housemaids’ whose job was to ‘make life as easy as possible’ for the students. The effect of the ‘servant environment’ on the students was also commented upon by Wendy, who, in the following extract, talks about her first experiences in the region:

‘To tell you the truth I was amazed by how physically lazy they were .. um .. because they were training to be nurses and they had to go up … I think it was three levels at the most and if we had a class downstairs on the ground floor and they had to go upstairs it was (Changes voice to impersonate students) ‘Oh, Miss!! Miss!! Very far this. Stairs upstairs. Why upstairs??!’ (Normal voice) Kind of, this complaining all the time and that always amazed me. For somebody who is training to be a nurse, you know. Because I was wondering what were they thinking they were going to be doing once they were actually employed as nurses …. Probably sitting and drinking coffee and letting the Filipina do their job which is what my impression of Saudi was. I don’t know if it was the same for you but it seemed like there was always an Asian hired to do the job, to actually do the job while the locals just sat there and drank coffee. Oh my God, I’m doing some terrible generalising, but this is my experience!’ (Wendy 1)

Like Gene, Wendy admits she is making some ‘terrible generalising’. However, her description of a Gulf society in which there is ‘always an Asian’ to do the job could be said to reflect the common perception of the Gulf having a ‘servant environment’ among the respondents. The effect that expatriate labour may have upon the attitudes of the students was
also commented upon by Brian, who, in the following exchange, talks about his first experiences:

Brian: ‘When I first arrived in Saudi the living was fine. As my wife and I are both Muslims we found the life fine, unlike some of my colleagues who, like, could only manage six months of their contracts before going back to the UK, so the life was fine but the teaching was the shock. It was the shock.’

Researcher: ‘Why was it shocking?’

Brian: ‘Because all the training I’d had didn’t prepare me for the kind of problems you face.’

Researcher: ‘What kind of problems?’

Brian: ‘Social problems, you know, they are being raised .. now, we’re talking about Riyadh and I don’t know how it is in other cities, but in Riyadh there is a big arrogance amongst the students that, you know, the teacher is inferior. They’ve been used to a whole line of education of .. um .. authoritarian teaching, you know, where the teacher’s there and he uses his presence, his stature, his force to completely control the class and they are not used to anything else and if the teacher isn’t using this then they’re not going to listen and it took me a long while to devise techniques to make them listen.’ (Brian 2)

Brian links what he sees as the students’ arrogance and their view of the teacher as ‘inferior’ to the mismatch between the authoritarian nature of (mainly expatriate Arab) teachers in primary and secondary schools and the less authoritarian nature of Western English language teachers, but his comment about the perceived inferiority of teachers reflects a comment made by Matthew who said ‘my students tell me that their school teachers don’t really have any authority, because they are Egyptians or Syrians and so are ranked lower than the Emiratis in the hierarchy’ (Matthew 8). For inexperienced ELT professionals coming from parts of the world where teachers are accorded more respect, such arrogance and being treated as an inferior ‘servant’ may prove to be problematic and adapting to the new balance of power may not be easy.

However, although some of the respondents appeared to perceive themselves as relatively powerless in Gulf society, there were also comments on the students’ own position in Gulf
society. For Sheila, her young, male students appeared somewhat apathetic and content to be told what to do by their elders:

‘The students here don’t vote, they have no part to play in the political structure and they seem to think that’s fine. The people who know best are ruling. Most of them seem to think that, and if they don’t think that they keep quiet. Just the same as their parents who know best choose their wives for them.’ (Sheila 16)

For Sheila, it could be said that the hierarchical structure of local society and the privileged lifestyle that oil wealth has afforded Gulf nationals appears to render the students politically inactive and seemingly powerless. For the female students, however, the opportunity to exert power which the structure of HEIs in the region appears to afford them was perceived to be a source of potential conflict, as shown by the following extract from Alice which, although already quoted in Section 6.5, I think merits repeating here:

‘It seems to me that in this culture where, generally, women are not given any power at all at home so they seem to exercise it whenever and wherever they can, and I think the problem with the way the college is run is that it gives them an avenue to actually exercise that power, and they exercise it when they don’t get the grades they want or to deal with unpopular teachers and it can get really nasty.’ (Alice 9)

This ‘avenue to exercise power’ is also mentioned in the following exchange with James, who comments on his mixed feelings regarding his position in Gulf society and the power he perceives the students as wielding:

James: ‘There are two sides to living here. One side I think there is a bit of respect; Westerner, white face, bit of respect, you know. Around the college they call me sir, whatever .. um .. but at the same time there is always this nagging feeling that I’m just another worker and I’m completely disposable. So there is a kind of double-edged thing there. And I suppose at the level of the students it’s this feeling of respect, but from a higher up level, I don’t know whether it comes from the Sheikhs via the management downwards, there’s this feeling that I’m disposable. And you have to be careful … if students don’t like you they are very vocal about it and they will try and change you for another teacher. For example, the students came up with a petition the other day against
one of the teachers who co-teaches with me. They all signed this, saying we don’t like this teacher. We want him changed.’

Researcher: ‘Did they give a reason?’

James: ‘The reasons are we don’t understand him. We don’t like him. They come up with these reasons, I don’t know if they could actually articulate why they don’t like him but basically .. if students like you .. that’s what it boils down to. If they like you, you can get away with a lot.’ (James 19)

James highlights the complexity facing ELT professionals in HEIs in the UAE where they may simultaneously receive respect from their colleagues and students while also feeling powerless and ‘disposable’ and in fear of the power of their students and it is this issue which I address in the following section.

7.4 – The Fear of Student Power

There appeared to be a perception amongst the some of the respondents that their students held a considerable amount of power and this fear of student power is articulated in the following exchange with Wendy, which occurred after she had described working in the region as a ‘risky situation’ compared to other parts of the world:

‘Researcher: ‘You say ‘risky situation’ so do you think there is a fear about working in this part of the world?’

Wendy: ‘Hmmm. Not a fear about coming here but a fear about being sacked. There’s a fear about how quickly your job could just disappear. Given the circumstances like … er .erm … well, maybe I don’t want to get into that one. Maybe you should ask Caroline about somebody here who’s losing their job .. erm .. (Whispers) This place can be really unfair sometimes. .. (Normal voice) You know, all it takes is making just one student angry about something, not even necessarily an academic issue, just if they feel insulted, you know, that’s all it takes.’

Researcher: ‘So it seems like the students have a lot of power here.’
Wendy: ‘Yeah, they do. They really do. I mean all it takes is for them to write to a newspaper, say, and everybody jumps’ (Wendy 12)

In this exchange Wendy comments on the fear that teachers may have about the power of the students and alludes to a teacher who was about to lose their job, suggesting I speak to Caroline about this. Unlike Caroline, who was an ex-colleague of mine, Wendy was not personally known to me before the interview, which may explain her reluctance to discuss the teacher who was losing their job, but Wendy’s comments on the perceived power of the students and how easy she saw it for an insulted student to have a teacher fired could be said to reflect a common perception amongst many of the respondents. Wendy also mentions students writing to newspapers which, as already discussed, may lead to the dismissal of teachers and managers.

However, one of the main tools that students were perceived as using to exert power over their teachers was the student feedback forms (SFTLs), which were collected electronically every semester for each class and used as a part of each faculty member’s annual review. In the following extract, Jack recounts a problematic incident involving a feedback form:

‘One of my colleagues was very upset when the students .. you know the students comment on the teachers on the student feedback forms. One of them said he touched her hand and he was horrified that she had written such a thing because he said absolutely, categorically that he wouldn’t have done it or couldn’t have done it. He told me that she was probably being very vindictive. That is one fear .. that is a fear here, with men teaching women students, that they could be vindictive … It’s not something that I dwell on very much, but I have heard it talked about.’ (Jack 19)

Although nothing came of the students’ allegation in this particular instance, as discussed in the previous chapter, allegations of inappropriate touching by a male member of staff working at a women’s college could have serious consequences for the teacher involved. Jack mentions the fear amongst his colleagues that the students could be vindictive and use the feedback forms as a means of getting rid of unpopular teachers. When I interviewed Margaret I asked her about student feedback and the potential fear it may cause amongst teachers. In the following reply she not only describes the effect they may have upon teachers, especially those new to the region, but also appears to confirm Jack’s comment that they may be used by students to exact revenge upon a teacher who has in some way upset them:
‘I’ve had two very upset new faculty in my office yesterday and today where they’ve been marking as they have for many years and the reaction from the students was very negative and their SFTLs are appalling; they’re down in the 40-50% approval range, and they’re distraught! And it’s very difficult to keep their motivation up. They feel their integrity has been questioned and they are looking for support and I tell them it takes time to get used to the environment. And naturally they reply ‘Look, I am not prepared to lower my standards so I don’t think this is ever going to improve’ … But look, at a management level, the SFTLs are not the only indicator, but they are considered an indicator of the bigger picture in terms of the teaching and learning environment going on in the classroom. You can’t just ignore them but at the same time there is no doubt that the students use them as a way of getting back at faculty.’ (Margaret 20)

As can be seen, for new faculty who mark student assignments as they had in other contexts, student reaction may be extremely negative and the two teachers appear to view the situation as a threat to their professional integrity and find it demotivating. However, as can be seen from the following extract from Alice, students at tertiary level in the Gulf may bring with them expectations of grades and marks which, when seen from an external perspective, may appear unrealistic but which may also have resulted from the fact that throughout their educational careers they are mainly taught by ‘disposable’ foreigners who may fear the reaction to lower grades:

‘I had an incident with a student over grades just over a year ago … I gave her a B+ for one of projects at the end of the first semester of her final year and .. er .. and she texted me to tell me that I had ruined her life because .. um .. she was going to get married during that holiday, and I had ruined her life because I had ruined her wedding and her marriage because I had given her a B not an A and that I was .. um .. I don’t remember the words but they were quite strong and that basically I had destroyed her whole marriage because I had upset her before her wedding and that it was going to be a disaster and all these kind of things. I was actually a lot more upset about it than I thought I would be, to be honest. At first I just couldn’t believe that she had said that, but when it sunk in I was really quite offended.’ (Alice 12)
For teachers coming from contexts which award lower grades, negative reactions from students via the feedback forms or even by personal text may have a demoralising effect as described by Margaret and Alice. It also raises the question of how teachers may react to the situation: by explaining individually to their students why the assignment received the grade it did or by just giving the whole class ‘A’s’?

As well as feedback forms, students may also use the ‘weapon of culture’ against unpopular teachers, as described by Al:

‘You hear about students who absolutely despise a certain teacher ….. um .. and I think it’s because this teacher hasn’t been able to build a rapport. There isn’t that sense of trust or respect, mutual respect there. And then what happens is teachers might say something which isn’t quite right in this culture and then it gets blown out of all proportions. And I think this is down to rapport. And we all make mistakes and I don’t think this is a culture that is any different from any other. I think people are forgiving here, just as they are everywhere, but what I think happens is that the mutual respect isn’t there, and it could be the case in any part of the world. I think the cultural thing is just used as a pretext. I don’t think it’s really deep. ‘Oh you don’t like our culture, you hate our people’… I don’t think it’s the cause, I think it’s the pretext. You know, it’s something that’s easy for students to use against teachers.’ (Al 23)

For Al, the issue of teachers being accused of allegedly disrespecting the students’ culture is seen more often than not a pretext for a deeper failure to establish a rapport with the class. However, he acknowledges that the ‘weapon’ of culture is an easy one for students, and it could be argued that the student feedback forms are powerful weapons that may have a marked effect on the shaping of professional identity in the region. In the extract from Margaret above, it was shown how two new teachers were rendered tearful, distraught and demotivated and felt that their professional integrity had been challenged by negative feedback. And it could be argued that for experienced teachers who receive negative feedback, the shock may be even greater, as illustrated in the following extract from Jennifer, who had been working in the region for fifteen years at the time of interview:

‘Generally I get good evaluations and students want to be in my class but last semester I was very surprised to see there were a couple of wicked comments that I thought were very, very unfair and ONE comment questioned why I was
actually a teacher .. Yes! And it was very hurtful. Part of my identity is my profession and I was hurt and insulted at the same time. If a criticism is fair, I don’t mind hearing it. That’s what the SFTLs are for, but I really couldn’t separate this class from this comment and I basically .... well, I later found out that what they did to me was nice compared to how they slammed the rest of their teachers, but I said to the class ‘My evaluations are very important to me and that’s part of my permanent record and I feel that this comment’ .. and I shared it with them .. ‘is unfair and untrue, and because of this I am going to ask my supervisor to change my schedule so that I am no longer your teacher because I’m not going to take the chance that you’re going to slam me again’, and they were all very upset and I said ‘Well, you know, I’m sorry, most of you, thank you for being my students, but the rest of you, you have to learn that your actions have consequences.’ … And I don’t know if I handled that rightly. Now I think back and maybe I shouldn’t have given up on the twenty-two students that were there .. I don’t know, but it was one of those things where I had to consider myself as well … It was one of those things where you begin to question yourself, you know, ‘Have I lost my abilities as a teacher?’ (Jennifer 7)

For Jennifer, who, as well as being an experienced teacher was also a much-published academic, the negative feedback could be said to have been a great shock. For an individual as professionally successful as Jennifer, this feedback may have been perceived as a threat to her professional identity, leading as it did to her questioning her own abilities as a teacher. It also serves to illustrate the power that students may hold over the lives of all ELT professionals in the region, even ones who have, like Jennifer, achieved great success.

In this chapter I have attempted to show how the respondents’ perceptions of the power of the students are formed, both at a societal level and at an institutional one. The uncertainty and potential transience of the expatriate experience, combined with the perceived lack of rights and the privileging of the nationals over the various layers of the expatriate population could be said to lead to a feeling of relative powerlessness amongst the respondents which contributes to the fear discussed in Chapter 5. At an institutional level, through the use of the feedback forms the students are perceived as holding a level of power over their teachers which, for many of the respondents, may go far beyond anything they have previously experienced.
And the issue of power also emerged from the data in relation to the concept of wasṭa (influence) and management, which is the subject of my next section.

7.5 – *Wasta, Management & Colluding with the Students*

Wasta refers to the influence that individuals from powerful families in Gulf society may have and this emerged from the data as also impacting upon the shaping of the participants’ professional identities. An example of wasṭa is provided in the following extract from Alice in which she describes a serious incident which occurred with one of her classes and comments on how it contributed to her perceptions of the uncertainty and precariousness of the life of expatriate workers in the region. I have used pseudonyms for the characters involved:

‘Our department had some serious problems with the third year students after a student was dismissed for plagiarism. And that’s probably one of those incidents that make you realise that actually anything could happen at any time and you might end up (Whistles) out! The rest of the class were very, very upset and ‘Bob’ [the supervisor] spoke to the class. One student got so upset she left and went outside to cry and Bob walked out of the room and down the corridor and said ‘Are you all right?’ and she ran off into the toilet. Apparently she then came back and told the other girls that Bob had followed her INTO the toilet and they phoned the Sheikh who said ‘Right, well, that’s it. We can’t stand for this. Bob is out and he has to leave the country right now.’ So the phone call went to ‘Harold’ [the dean of the college] who said to Bob ‘That’s it. You’re out.’ Luckily Bob later went back into the classroom and talked to the students and managed to convince them that his neck was about to be .. er .. (Laughs) .. chopped and they then phoned the Sheikh and said ‘Sorry, it was a mistake.’ That was in the middle of the plagiarism incident and the class were really out for blood and some of them were trying to get me and the other teacher sacked through their SFTLs which they did that same week and they just, kind of, gave us zero for almost everything. So it was quite a nasty period that I won’t forget.’ (Alice 8)

Alice describes how the upset class were able to phone the Sheikh (also the Minister of Higher Education) in Abu Dhabi and have Bob instantly dismissed and deported just on their
word. This could be said to illustrate the potential power that students have over expatriate ELT professionals in the region, using their wasata (connections) with influential leaders to ‘deal with’ educationalists who they perceive as having caused offence. The allegation that a male foreigner had entered the female toilet at a women’s college, even though it later proved to be false and was withdrawn, was enough to elicit instant dismissal and indeed, the supervisor involved left the college at the end of that year. For Alice, this is described as ‘one of’ those incidents that made her realise the uncertainty and precariousness of her job, hinting that there were others.

The issue of wasata was also often linked to the respondents’ perceptions of management in the region. For example James, after discussing problems he and his colleagues had encountered in class, concluded with the words: ‘One thing that you can really rely on here is that the management will back down when there is vociferous complaints from parents, especially when they pull wasata’ (James 11). Most HEIs in the UAE have a strict attendance policy and teachers are expected to note down all absences and late arrivals for every class. However, the actual enforcement of this policy proved to be potentially problematic for some of the respondents, as shown in the following exchange with Dudley:

Dudley: ‘When you get into the higher wasata-ish classes, I’ve heard that the students actually walk up to the teachers’ log and erase their lates or absences, with their own pen, they actually go through the teacher’s file against the teacher’s will and there’s not much they can do about it (Laughs) …. so that’s quite obtrusive.’

Researcher: ‘So how do you deal with absents and lates?’

Dudley: ‘How do I deal with them? … Hmm .. (Laughs)’

Researcher: ‘Now remember this is completely confidential.’

Dudley: ‘I don’t deal with them much. I make sure that students are not over 10%. Because what happens is when you mark that student more than 10%, you have to get documents signed, right? And what I found is that there’s so much bad rapport. They think you are an idiot. You’re the one who is taking them to the police and then management won’t do anything … I’ve had students at 28% who still are sitting there in the final week. So what happens is the management ask you to take attendance but they never back it up so I avoid bad
rapport ... I mean, how does it affect me except to give a very bad vibe in the class? Because if you get students against you it brings the whole class down so it’s not worth it for the learning environment so I try to ensure that most of them don’t get over 10%.’ (Dudley 11)

Dudley highlights what he sees as the problematic nature of the attendance policy. Firstly, teachers may come under pressure from ‘high was’ students to erase their absences and may feel powerless to do anything about it. Secondly, according to Dudley, marking the students late or absent may cause bad rapport in the class and, as already discussed, a failure to achieve a good rapport with the students may be the cause of serious problems and may even pose a threat to a teacher’s continued employment. As a result, it could be said that Dudley, for his own ‘safety’ and the maintenance of ‘good rapport’, colludes with the students to keep their attendance level below 10% even if that does not accurately reflect the time they spent in class. However, Dudley’s decision not to record his students’ attendance may also be a reflection of perceived inconsistencies at a management level, which is illustrated in the following exchange with Oliver:

Oliver: ‘Last semester, there was a student repeating semester one because he’d failed his English, and he was a bit of a Jack-the-Lad and he wasn’t coming to class very often and he didn’t come to his mid-semester exam which is, you know, a terrible crime, and the Dean decided to give him a chance so he was allowed to sit his exam but then he missed more lessons and he missed his end of semester exam and myself, the other teacher and the Chair all said ‘That’s it. He’s out.’ And he had handed in some ridiculously plagiarised, copied-from-the-internet rubbish as coursework, but .. (Sighs) … his father came in. He has a father who comes in and chats to the management here quite frequently and pleads on his behalf and well, in the end he was allowed to pass.’

Researcher: ‘And how did that make you feel?’

Oliver: ‘It was .. I .. I liked the student, and I didn’t want to see him fail, but I felt, and colleagues felt, that that was ridiculous, that he was allowed to .. I mean, missing one exam is, should be, unforgivable. Missing two and getting away with it! I don’t think that sends a very good message to the other students. Now luckily in that particular class they are pretty sensible lads, but I don’t think it’s fair for him to behave like that for the whole semester and then at the end of
it, pass. And I felt that he was let through because it was easier for the management. But then that happens to a greater or lesser extent with a lot of students, I mean, at the end of the semester it is amazing how many students are over 10% and still at college. We are required to give them a lecture at the beginning of the semester, you know, 5% you get a warning, 10% you’re out the door and it’s, well, you know it’s not true and they know it’s not true.’ (Oliver 8)

Oliver highlights what he sees as the ‘unfairness’ of the management allowing the student to pass, but seems to see this as symptomatic of management who appear to only selectively apply the college rules depending on what the situation is. This perceived inconsistency on the part of management may lead to uncertainty amongst teachers and might, as in the case of Dudley, lead to them ignoring the college’s policies altogether, policies which, as Oliver claims, both teachers and students know are not enforced.

For teachers new to the region students arriving late to class may be perceived as disrespectful and this may also provide a source of potential conflict. For example, Mary tells of a recent conflict she had to deal with in which a teacher’s reaction to a student’s lateness became a major incident:

‘You have to be very careful of the students’ pride here … I had a guy just yesterday come to me from his class and he was very upset because the teacher had been annoyed with him for coming late. He’s a habitual late-comer, and the teacher had said, you know, ‘Oh go on! Sit in the corner!’ And I understand the teacher. He was pissed off, his class was interrupted, this guy does it all the time and he’s always got a string of excuses .. er .. but I then had to speak to the teacher and say ‘Look. I understand it from your point of view but you must also understand that this young guy is very upset. You’ve offended him. You’ve embarrassed him in front of his colleagues.’ And we discussed it. I discussed it with the student, with the teacher and then they discussed it together and it’s OK … for now. I suspect that that particular teacher, who had problems ….. hadn’t worked in the first place to establish trust with the students because they would take someone being even very rough with them if he had just worked with them to establish trust.’ (Mary 10)

Mary’s suspicions that it may have been the teacher’s failure to ‘establish trust’ with the students that may have caused the incident to become so serious again highlights the
importance of rapport. Mary’s comment about being very careful about the students’ ‘pride’ and avoiding any direct confrontation that may cause them to feel humiliated and lose face in front of their classmates is also made by the senior manager Gene who, in the following exchange, discusses the issues of lateness and attendance:

Gene: ‘Something that I’ve continued to deal with in this culture is you’ll get a student who’ll come in late and maybe draw attention to himself and the effective teachers will, I think, ignore it and ask Mohammed politely to sit down and let’s get on with the lesson. Other teachers unwisely confront the student, which I find inflames the situation and then it steamrolls and gets even worse and I’ve advised teachers that I prefer the first response rather than the second.. um.. And there was one incident where I think the teacher inflamed the situation to the point that the student reacted very, very negatively and shouted obscenities, which led to the student being dismissed. Now I would have thought that that might have been avoided if handled in a different way. Here it is more problematic because here I think you get more.. er.. the sense of time is different.. er.. you have a tendency of getting more students coming in late at different hours whereas back home, you know, the professor closes the door and the students don’t come in once the door is closed.’

Researcher: ‘So what do you think would happen if, hypothetically, the colleges abolished their lateness and attendance policies?’

Gene: ‘I think you would have more absenteeism and at the men’s college you might have more students academically in trouble. They would not achieve as much as we are trying to achieve with an enforced attendance policy … I think culturally it makes sense because there are so many reasons.. erm.. cultural reasons, family reasons that the guys, the males are absent. But at the end of the day, when they fail.. ah.. attendance and time on task will have a major impact on their success.’ (Gene 6)

Gene comments on how unwise he believes it is for teachers to directly confront students in the classroom about attendance or lateness, yet at the same time he defends the need for an attendance policy, stating that its removal may have a major impact upon the students’ success. He also highlights what he sees as the difference in ‘the sense of time’ between the students and back home in his native USA where, he claims, late-coming students are not
permitted to enter. And the incident of the humiliated student dismissed for shouting obscenities may have had a negative effect on class morale and rapport which may also have had serious consequences for that teacher’s subsequent teaching. For teachers, therefore, their perceived inability to effectively deal with disruptive late-coming students may contribute to the feelings of powerlessness already described in this chapter.

For Gene, the issues of absenteeism and lateness were highlighted as particular problems for male students, stating that there were many ‘cultural’ and ‘family’ reasons that contributed to their attendance problems. However, the link he makes between attendance and academic achievement is also made by Margaret who, in the following exchange, stresses the importance of teachers accurately marking their students’ attendance as well as commenting on the inconsistencies in the colleges’ attendance policies across the system:

Margaret: ‘There are huge discrepancies in the way [the attendance policy] is actually delivered between the male colleges and the female colleges .. Um .. I don’t feel we should put so much emphasis on attending. However, I can tell you that there is a very strong relationship between students who fail, or who don’t get good grades, and attendance and it’s really how you reach the balance between the two .. um .. and I’ve had so many discussions with parents and students who have failed and are either a) not accepting the failure or b) not understanding why they can’t come back .. er .. and my trying to get through to them, you know, how could you have possibly expected to pass when you only attended 40%? And that’s harder to get through than where you’re talking to a student at 10% and saying to them ‘OK, I want you to sign this document to say that you understand that if you fail this course it was because you were absent.’ And if the teachers don’t mark absence, how are we to know when they reach 10%? … Look, when there is failure we have to involve the parents and invariably the parent will say ‘Why didn’t we know? Why didn’t you tell us? We were dropping her off!’ And she was just not coming into class, you know. So, it’s trying to find the balance – we actually have [the attendance policy] because we are trying to help them, in a way. ’

Researcher: ‘I mean, hypothetically, if the colleges did drop their attendance policy …’
Margaret: ‘I don’t think it would stop the students coming, no, not at all .. um .. but it does seem to be a difficult concept. This is actually a very good cultural example, you know, because you don’t have an attendance policy in a college in the UK and the students completely understand that if they fail to turn up it’s going to impact on whether they get through the course or not. It seems to be a very difficult concept to get through to students here. It’s almost as if they don’t understand that they, you know, that they have to contribute to the process.’ (Margaret 22)

Margaret’s comments could be said to highlight the mixed message that teachers may receive on the subject of attendance and lateness. She stresses the importance of teachers’ recording their students’ attendance, yet at the same time states that she believes that there should not be so much emphasis on attendance. Margaret also mentions what she describes as a ‘cultural’ issue, comparing the responsibility she perceives students in the UK taking for their own education with what she sees as an inability amongst Emirati students to do the same. This could be said to reflect Gene’s earlier comments on the overreliance on the teacher he perceived amongst students which he related to the ‘servant culture’ in the Gulf. For ELT professionals in HEIs in the UAE, therefore, both managers and teachers alike, it could be said that their perceptions of the power of local society may have the effect of causing them to adopt practices that, educationally, may be against the interests of the students but allow them to avoid potential conflict.

In the following exchange with Dudley the issues of a lack of student responsibility for their own education, the inconsistency of the application of rules by management and the lack of clarity facing teachers in the region are raised again:

Dudley: ‘I have an IELTS class and they refused to take the books because they don’t want to carry the damn things. I mean, it’s like ‘Come on! You have a test coming up and your ability is really not that hot, you know.’ I mean, free books just handed out! Jeez!! (Laughs)’

Researcher: ‘So when they fail the IELTS?’

Dudley: ‘Oh, it’s my ass.’

Researcher: ‘It’s your fault?’
Dudley: ‘Oh, yeah, sure. (Laughs) Of course it is!’

Researcher: ‘So how does that make you feel?’

Dudley: ‘Well it’s a bad system because they accept students without that base level of proficiency … so a lot of them fail and then you have discussions with management, and they’re like ‘Oh, they have 58, now could we get 3% from somewhere?’ and you’re like ‘OK. OK, we’ll let them pass’ and you get half of the class passing who shouldn’t because they’re like ‘My gosh! Bad community relations – that would be awful!’ But you know, then they all fail the IELTS .. It’s not good but I guess student feedback affects everything in this whole building. I mean, it’s like the students are ‘OK. OK, I want to go home now’ and if you fight that too much then the students are just going to ream you.’

Researcher: ‘So the student feedback give the students power …’

Dudley: ‘Absolutely. They can remove your position, you know, and they have. I’ve seen it. You know, you get these clever, brilliant people coming over, PhDs, and in one semester they’re finished, you know, they were too serious for the students. Too serious for the students!! Oh my God! I mean, why? Why!? .. They don’t mentor well here. OK.’  (Dudley 19)

Dudley comment on the lack of adequate mentoring reflects the issue highlighted as symptomatic of HEIs in the region in section 3.5.2. He also claims that the student feedback forms ‘affect everything in this building’, perhaps revealing the extent to which the shaping of the participants’ professional identities are controlled by the issue of student power. He also highlights the problem that may occur when HEIs accept students whose ‘base level of proficiency’ is too low for them to be able to pass the first year English exams and teachers and managers collude to falsify the students’ results to avoid the ‘bad community relations’ that may occur if a representative number of students were dismissed. This only passes the problem on to the second year teachers who then need to prepare their students for the external IELTS examination.

Although such collusion may have a long-term detrimental effect on the students’ education, in the short term it may avoid potential conflict and may help teachers and managers remain in employment. This is highlighted in the following exchange with Ned:
Ned: ‘Some teachers obviously collude with their students for an easy life, and they get fantastic SFTLs, and the students all get ‘A’s and if there are external examinations then the teachers have long flown for the summer holiday or they’re on the next course and there are other teachers who are much less popular because they’re much more exacting in their standards and it’s interesting to see how much support these teachers get from different bosses (Laughs). As one boss said, I’m here to support you: I can help you stay or I can help you leave (Both Laugh). Yeah, and there are quite a few people who have been ‘helped’ all the way to the airport (Laughs).’

Researcher: ‘And these people have …’

Ned: ‘Yeah. Exacting too high a standard from the class …

Researcher: ‘And that’s the main …?’

Ned: ‘Classes who’ve been spoilt because they’ve been with teachers who colluded for an easy life. That’s my impression, anyway.’ (Ned 9)

Ned claims that the collusion of some teachers with students may lead to unrealistic expectations on the part of classes that may prove problematic for subsequent teachers. However, not all of the respondents showed willingness to collude with the students and, as this final comment from Samantha shows, it is possible to resist the pressure from students to be ‘lax’ on issues such as grades and attendance:

‘There’s a lot of onus put on grades, by the students and the college system. And there’s a lot of onus put on the SFTLs. Now, if you want to keep your job, and most teachers DO want to keep their job ..erm .. there’s a lot of pressure to do what the students want. They’re like ‘If I want a high SFTL I have to give the students what they want, regardless of whether this is actually good for them or not, so yes, I will be lax on attendance, yes, I will let them watch a video, yes, I will give them high grades’ and I can understand that, especially from people who’ve got families to support or maybe, you know, they’re early on in their careers and they can’t really afford to lose the job. I, fortunately, am not in that situation and I’ve got high standards for myself and I set them for other people and I’ve always said I will NOT be held to ransom for whatever reason. If they don’t like what I do, fine, you don’t like what I do, but this is how I do it! So if
I’m told to take attendance, I will take attendance. If I have a paper that I think is a C+ I will give it a C+. There is no way I would give it anything higher … Look, if you have a course where everybody is getting As then I think there is something wrong with that course and there is something wrong with that assessment.’ (Samantha 19)

Samantha’s comment that she ‘will NOT be held to ransom’ indicates the pressures that ELT professionals, both managers and teachers, may face in their working lives. The potentially conflicting demands of the students, the parents, the local community, the government and the HEIs themselves could be said to create a complex and contradictory environment which the respondents have to navigate, making decisions which may be informed not only by their professional identities as educators, but by their own need for self-preservation in such a potentially hostile environment. The concepts of ‘standards’ or ‘principles’ that they have developed as educators in other parts of the world may prove to be problematic when faced with the social environment of the UAE. However, for Samantha, maintaining her standards appears to be very important and, as shown in the extract in section 5.6, she claims to be someone who ‘will NOT be blackmailed! Will NOT have fear put into me like that!’ (Samantha 20).

7.6 – Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to show how the issue of power may impact upon the participants’ lives. I have explored their conceptualisations of Gulf society and how they see themselves fitting into its ‘servant culture’ as well as the effect such a culture is perceived as having upon students who may have grown up in a position of privilege in which they are catered to by a large population of expatriate labour, including teachers. The picture emerging from the data is of a complex and difficult working environment in which the native-speaker ELT professional may face ethical decisions about how they respond to the demands and expectations of students who themselves may have been ‘locked into a cycle of failure’ by their inadequate preparation for the English-medium tertiary education that they are undertaking.

Accurate marking of attendance, honest grading of assignments, exam results that actually reflect the performance of the students and effective classroom management could all be said
to be important indicators of ‘best practice’ in teaching, yet, as I have attempted to show in these first three findings chapters, in this particular environment these may be affected by considerations of fear, gender and power. This may lead the reader to wonder why anyone would consider working in such a potentially difficult and uncertain working environment, yet the answer may be found in the next chapter in which I discuss the subject of money.
Chapter 8 – Money

8.1 – Introduction
This chapter introduces data which appear to indicate the role of money in shaping the professional identities of native-speaker ELT professionals working in the UAE. In it I first introduce data which indicates the participants’ attitudes towards money and global ELT then discuss how they perceive money influencing their lives in the UAE before concluding with a consideration of the non-financial attractions of the region.

8.2 – Making a Living as an English Language Teacher
A desire to travel and see the world could be said to be one of the major motivating factors behind those who choose to pursue a career in ELT, and the glamour, excitement and adventure that the expatriate life may bring could be seen as one of the main attractions of the job. Indeed, out of the 32 individuals interviewed for this study, only two (Caroline & Siobhan) had moved to the Gulf directly from their homelands without having worked elsewhere in the world, whereas the others had extensive experience working in a total of 55 different countries in the Middle East, Europe, Africa, Asia, North and South America and even the Pacific Islands.

However, it appears that with age this desire for travel may be tempered by a desire for stability, both financial and in terms of employment, and a job in the Gulf is perceived by many of the respondents as a means of providing that stability. As Oliver states, his decision to take a job in the Gulf was strongly influenced by a desire ‘not to go back to living in a pokey flat in Europe earning £5 an hour’ (Oliver 18), and for many of the respondents the decision to work in the region seems to have been driven mainly by financial reasons. For Cordelia, who had previously been working at a university in England:

‘the money certainly played a big part in my decision to come here. I was 38 and I didn’t have a house and I didn’t even have a credit card … and my job situation in England wasn’t exactly stable at the university, it was kind of on-again, off-again, so the 3-year contract here is real stability.’ (Cordelia 14).
Cordelia’s situation of financial and employment instability reflects the portrayal of the native-speaker teacher in their homelands discussed in Section 2.7.1 and it appears that this instability becomes less bearable with age and the demands of family. For Matthew, financial considerations played a major role both in his initial arrival in the region and his subsequent return after failing to make an adequate living back home in his native Australia:

Researcher: ‘Why did you come here?’

Matthew: ‘Er ….. for a change in my life and, of course, for the money as well. The money in Australia is terrible.’

Researcher: ‘So how important is the money?’

Matthew: ‘Very important, actually, if we had stayed in Australia I think we would have been on the street by now. Here I am supporting my son at college in Australia and, well, we’re certainly not rich but we’re surviving … ’

Researcher: ‘So you left here and went back to Australia and now you’re back again .. Was that a plan?’

Matthew: ‘No, but it just didn’t work out in Australia. The wages had gone down and the cost of living was way too high and with two teenagers to look after we just couldn’t afford it. I left with my last ten dollars in my pocket. I’d lost all of my savings from here just to pay bills. So, I’m back here and I didn’t plan it but I’m happy to be here because I really like it.’ (Matthew 18)

Matthew’s comments about his fears that he and his family would have been ‘out on the street’ if he had continued working as an English teacher in Australia and that he had returned to the Gulf with his ‘final $10 in his pocket’ could be said to indicate the financial difficulties that may face EFL teachers working in their homelands. For Matthew, his need to work in the Gulf appears to be tied to family demands, but even for single respondents such as Cordelia the perceived lack of financial rewards available for English teachers, especially as they got older, could be said to play a major role in the decisions of those choosing to work in the Gulf. In the following exchange, Dylan, who had first come to the region in the 1970s, talks about his experiences in Europe and his decision to return to the Gulf:

Dylan: ‘After working in Saudi Arabia I worked in Europe for four years but then I got this hankering to stop paying taxes, come back to places where the
weather was nice. I got sick of commuting and being poor in London and not going to the theatre because I was too tired at the end of a long day and I recalled all the good things from living in Riyadh and none of the bad things I suppose.’

Researcher: ‘So how important is the money?’

Dylan: ‘If it was the only important thing I would have left a long time ago. I mean, over the years I’ve learned how to appreciate a lifestyle which only has a bit to do with money, which has a lot to do with other things, you know? So it’s a factor, of course … Straight after Saudi Arabia I went to Germany, in 1991 and I went from the deprivation capital of the world, basically, in Riyadh, to the beer capital of the world in Munich, but then I realised that I was paying a huge amount of tax, a huge amount of rent, couldn’t even afford a holiday and it made me realise it was a great place to be, but not long-term, you know, because I was living like a poor student again, and working very hard, at BMW actually, teaching ESP.’ (Dylan 4)

The year Dylan spent in Germany he would have been thirty-six with fifteen years’ teaching experience so perhaps it is unsurprising that he found his lack of finances and ‘poor student’ lifestyle problematic. The financial stability that a job in the Gulf offers may also act as validation for those who have decided to pursue a career in ELT and who, like Dylan, do not appreciate having to live as a poor student as middle age approaches.

For many of the respondents, there appears to be an assumption that the vast majority of those working in the region are primarily motivated by the money. In the following extract, Sheila describes what she sees as the importance of money to those working in the Gulf, but also describes another fairly common phenomenon amongst the respondents: a feeling that if they were able to receive similar salaries elsewhere they would leave:

‘Well, I would think that probably 99% of the people who are here are here for the money. I occasionally meet someone who is here because they love it, but that would be someone in a profession. I mean, certainly the labourers are not here for the love of the country, and even in the professions most people are here for the money. That’s their number one, and some people like it and some people hate it and everything in between but, you know, the money is the main motivation. It’s very rare to meet someone who’s staying because they love it and, I would have
to confess, money is my main motivation and if I wasn’t getting very good money I wouldn’t be here, but .. since I AM here, I’m happy and I like it, but it wouldn’t be my first choice, money aside. I mean, if I had to choose between here and Tuscany, for example (Laughs loudly) … or if I could go back to Syria on a similar salary then that would be a dream come true.’ (Sheila 19)

Sheila’s comments highlight the importance that money is perceived as having on the lives of expatriate workers who move to the Gulf, but she also expresses a wish that she could be working elsewhere on the same salary. This could be said to contribute to a feeling of obligation amongst some of the respondents; an issue that I cover more fully in the following section.

The impact of the money is also mentioned by James, who commented on the difference he felt starting his job in Kuwait after five years teaching in Spain: ‘Arriving here it suddenly felt like I was rich because I had money, the pay was a lot better so obviously it was very different from Spain (James 1).’ Later in the interview, James underlined the importance of the money to him: ‘The money is important but if I could get the same pay working in Spain I would be living there.’ (James 27). For teachers such as James, who is married with a young family, working in the Gulf provides a way of providing for his family even though he would rather be elsewhere, and this may affect his attitude towards his work and his students. However for Gerald, the financial rewards of accepting a job teaching in the Gulf appeared to be positive:

‘the first impressions here were incredibly glamorous .. We were put in a big hotel. We’d never had that kind of luxury before, money thrust under our noses. Buy this, buy that. A very posh apartment to start with and initially, it was a big switch in terms of lifestyle’ (Gerald 1)

This switch in terms of lifestyle could also be said to represent a change in social standing, from the comparative poverty and relatively lowly status of the English teacher elsewhere the ‘luxury’ and ‘glamour’ of staying in a five-star hotel before being provided with often extremely spacious accommodation and generous housing money. Financial security is mentioned as a motivating factor for many of the respondents; in the following extract Peter explains his reasons for accepting the job: ‘The money was important in our decision to come here. We had just started a family and the conditions offered here were a big draw. No doubt about it.’ (Peter 14). The importance of family is echoed by other respondents like Brian, who
stated that the ‘money grew more important the bigger my family got’ (Brian 20). However, for Kevin, who was sixty at the time of the interview, as the financial demands of family lessened as they left home, the demands of age appeared to increase:

‘The money is getting more important as I get older. Well, there was the family and that, but now, well, I’ve got a bit saved up – should have saved more, I know, so, putting something aside for when I’m older – only 5 years older actually (Laughs) – it’s important now but, having said that, when I first entered teaching as a young guy in my twenties the money didn’t occur to me, but I think it becomes more of an issue as you get older.’ (Kevin 15).

ELT professionals working at HEIs in the UAE, like many of those working in other parts of the world, do not receive pensions and, with their many years spent abroad potentially making them ineligible for state pensions in their homelands, the importance of saving up for retirement could also be an important motivating factor in the decision to come and work in the Gulf. Indeed, the average age of forty seven amongst the respondents could be said to reflect the older demographic amongst language teachers working in the region.

Some of the respondents, however, appear to be somewhat apologetic and ashamed about this interest in money. Perhaps this indicates a conflict between the relief felt at no longer having to suffer the poverty of the ‘student lifestyle’ with a feeling of sadness that this also may entail relinquishing some of the idealism of one’s younger, student days. In the following extract from Sheila, she appears to be facing a struggle between her youthful idealism and the realities of aging:

‘I’m much older now [sixty-two] … I no longer feel like I have to go after new challenges and really, money is very important to me now, I hate to say. But I failed to save, you know, in the first 90% of my life and if I don’t save now I’ll be destitute when I retire … so I’m afraid money comes first’ (Sheila 21).

Sheila’s apologetic tone and her use of phrases like ‘I hate to say’ and ‘I’m afraid’ when referring to the money may indicate feelings of guilt or shame at being perceived as having somehow ‘sold out’ by accepting well-paid work in the Gulf. And this may also be influenced by her age, having been an undergraduate during the late 1960s with all its political and social turmoil. She seems to regret the passing of the ‘first 90% of her life’ when she failed to save and went after new challenges and seems sad that she is now obliged to face the reality.
of having to save up for her approaching old age. Given that she had left Australia in her early twenties to travel and then, from the age of 28, had spent the next thirty years teaching English in locales as exotic as Yemen, West Africa, Bosnia, Syria and Lebanon, a time during which she had experienced wars, hardship and great excitement, it might be understandable why she appears to show regret at the comparatively sedate and affluent lifestyle that employment in the UAE has now afforded her.

Several of the respondents appeared keen to stress that money was not the most important reason for their being in the region, and yet their subsequent comments could be said to reveal otherwise, which also hints at a degree of shame attached to working in the Gulf, a feeling of somehow having ‘sold out’. When asked about the money, Norman replied:

‘The money’s not keeping me here. After a couple of years I will go off and go somewhere more interesting, but where the money isn’t as good, but having said that here I can save every month probably what I would earn if I were back in England.’ (Norman 26)

This need to deny the importance of money could be a result of the interview process itself, with Norman and other respondents keen to portray themselves in a positive light and not to be seen as having such ‘base’ motivations as the pursuit of money. Norman’s comment that he intends to go somewhere ‘more interesting’ in a couple of years could also be said to indicate a certain level of contempt for his current job and it might imply that he feels a level of compulsion to stay where he is for financial reasons. In the following extract Rose likewise claims that money was not the main motivating factor in her decision to work in the Gulf, but then, paradoxically, explains the importance that the money has had to her:

Researcher: ‘You mentioned earning reasonable money as one of the reasons you chose to come here. How important was that?’

Rose: ‘It wasn’t the main factor .. um ….. OK … (Laughs) One thing that was important to me was to have a job that would enable me to get a mortgage and to buy a property because my previous work had not enabled me to do so … so that was more important to me than the actual amount, although I did want to be able to save as well and get a mortgage.’

Researcher: ‘So it gave you more security?’
Rose: ‘Well, yeah, you know, thinking of the future I wanted an investment property so I went ahead and bought a place .. Oh, and also it enabled me to pay off a few debts .. So, yes, it is nice! It’s been nice to have had money for a few years.’ (Rose 19)

Rose’s immediate response to the question about the importance of money is one of denial, followed by an embarrassed laugh and an admission that getting a mortgage and being able to save money was important and that it has been ‘nice’ to have money for a few years. For respondents in their late-50s and 60s such as Rose, Sheila, Jack, Kevin, Gene and Margaret it may be that the approach of retirement plays an important role in their decisions to keep working in the Gulf, even though such an admission may produce a degree of embarrassment.

In this section I have attempted to show how money may act as a powerful incentive, especially as the participants get older and have families. The attraction of the money is also related to a perception that other parts of the world, although they may be may be more desirable places to live, cannot provide English teachers with the financial stability that employment in the Gulf offers. However, this financial stability may also come at a price and the perceived negative effects of money are the subject of my next section.

8.3 – Wearing the Golden Handcuffs

The negative aspects of working in the Gulf are illustrated in the following extract by Caroline:

‘The money is important. The thing is I’m trapped. I can’t go back home and work full-time. I mean, if I could just go back home and work for, like, only $40,000 a year, I would consider it, but the work’s not there … Because the kids will be going to college soon and as the primary breadwinner I think it’s important that maybe we have a bit of a nest-egg and maybe if we could buy a property back home .. Yeah .. Trapped .. Because you get used to this lifestyle, you know, like travelling several times a year and I know people who have gone back, and they are cursing the day they quit. They say it was the biggest mistake of their life and they can’t get full-time work and they can’t get a regular contract and they’re in their fifties and … bloody hell! I mean, that’s the deepest fear of us all, I think.’ (Caroline 12)
Caroline admits to feeling ‘trapped’ in her job. As the primary breadwinner in the family she feels obliged to provide financial security for her family, yet, after sixteen years working in the UAE, her seeming inability to return home to the USA is related to her ‘deepest fear’ that she would be unable to continue as a provider if she returned. However, not all of the respondents were as open as Caroline about the negative side to the money. For example, in the following exchange Dudley vehemently denies the importance of money:

Researcher: ‘So what importance does the money have working here?’

Dudley: ‘Zero! (Clicks fingers) I worked in Tanzania for $250 a month, 80 cents an hour … I’m in education because I love to work with people, I like to develop minds, I like to … I mean, if I went back to Japan the package would be about half of this and, yeah, I would do that in a second. I’m more interested in, like, the sappy crap of a meaningful and purposeful job. That’s the number one for me. If I don’t have that then I start to look elsewhere. I’d rather put cans on a shelf somewhere than not have a meaningful role, because I can do some Zen or something. Yeah.’ (Dudley 16).

In this extract, Dudley is very keen to stress that his main motivation is to have a ‘meaningful and purposeful job’ and that the money is of ‘zero’ importance to him. However, when later asked what advice he would give a teacher wanting to teach in the UAE, he replied:

‘If it is was a young, first year teacher who wanted to see the world a bit I’d say go ahead, but if they were a veteran teacher and they were serious about pedagogy it’s like ‘Why? Why would you do it?’ It’s not a very serious academic environment here. I mean you can’t have a lot of mentally stimulating experiences. I mean it’s an achievement if you can get them listening to you for 20 seconds! (Laughs)’ (Dudley 17)

This would seem to suggest that although Dudley is representing himself as someone not motivated by money and interested mainly in having a meaningful role in education, his description of the perceived lack of seriousness of the academic environment in which he is working seems to contradict this. In addition, as seen by Dudley’s admission that he colludes with his students over the issue of attendance as discussed in Chapter 7, and considering the fact that he has a wife and two young children, his claim to be motivated merely by having a ‘meaningful and purposeful job’ and that the money has ‘zero’ importance to him may not be
wholly accurate. However, Dudley’s portrayal of himself as someone motivated by ‘higher’ factors than money is also echoed by Rose, who appears keen to separate herself from those around her whom she considers to be ‘sucked into’ the lifestyle that the money provides:

‘I think some people get .. (Laughs) .. this sounds a bit judgemental .. (Laughs) .. but some people get sucked into the lifestyle and get used to that nice pay packet every month and become a bit dependant on it, so they acquire commitments that require them to have a high income, so I think the money becomes more important. But I have to admit I tried not to do that because I don’t like to feel that I am trapped. I like to have the freedom to say, if I wake up one morning and feel ‘Enough’ – that I am able to go.’ (Rose 20)

In this comment, Rose first gives a nervous laugh then admits that she sounds ‘a bit judgemental’ before commenting on ‘people who get sucked into the lifestyle’. She appears to take pride in the fact that, unlike those who she claims have made unwise financial commitments, she believes, or at least she claims, that she has the freedom to leave whenever she wants and is not ‘trapped’ like those she sees around her. Whether this ‘freedom’ comes from her successful avoidance of the alleged perils of the ‘lifestyle’ or the fact she is a single woman with no family obligations is another matter.

The potential ‘danger’ of becoming accustomed to a standard of living beyond that available to English language teachers elsewhere in the world and subsequently feeling ‘trapped’ in the Gulf is echoed by Sally who, in the following extract, explains how some of her older colleagues perceive their working lives:

Sally: ‘When I meet some of the older teachers they seem to, like, to just blame their students for any problems they have in class and it’s kind of scary. I think, ‘Wow! You’ve been here 15 years and you really hate these people? What’s wrong with you?! (Laughs) ’

Researcher: ‘Why do you think they stay?’

Sally: ‘(Whispers) Golden handcuffs. (Normal voice) They’ve told me. I mean, people have used those words with me, you know.’

Researcher: ‘Uh-huh, and for yourself and your husband how important was the money to your decision to come to the UAE?’
Sally: ‘You know, about a month before I decided to come a friend of mine invited me to a movie. I had a full time job as an English teacher and I was sitting there, counting ... now do I have the eight dollars to pay for a movie, still get food and pay my student loan? I don’t think so! Better not go to the movie! So .... Yeah!! (Laughs a lot)

Researcher: (Laughing) ‘Been there’

Sally: ‘Yeah! Money was important. It really was.’ (Sally 26)

In this exchange, Sally highlights the phenomenon of working in the region being perceived as ‘wearing the golden handcuffs’ which could be described as a situation where teachers may deeply resent being made to feel that they are being forced to work in a place and with people they actively dislike because they cannot afford not to. Sally describes her encounters with older teachers who appear to have a negative attitude both towards the students and the society in which they are living, but who see themselves as forced to remain because they cannot afford to leave. This theme is further developed by the Al:

Al: ‘There is a lot of money here, to be made, let’s be frank about it, so there is this very crude, mercenary attitude towards language teaching that appals me ... certainly in the Gulf my experience is that a lot of the Westerners here are mercenaries with quite .. er .. you know, quite reactionary, right-wing views about this part of the world ... one of the typical comments you hear here among the teachers is ‘Oh, I didn’t come out here for the culture’ – it’s said in a kind of sarky way – ‘I came out here to make bucket loads of money and pay off my mortgage and then go home.’ It’s like ‘I’m doing time here’, like it’s some kind of hardship posting ... it’s appalling! And unfortunately it’s something you hear a lot.’

Researcher: ‘So how important is the money for you?’

Al: ‘How important is the money for me!?’

Researcher: ‘Hmm ..... I mean, do you have a family?’

Al: ‘Oh yes, I do, I do, of course. It’s important .. um .. but I really do like this part of the world. I feel very passionately about this part of the world. I’m very .. I feel that I’m very much connected with this sort of .. with
mainstream society. So .. um .. er …. I’m fortunate to be in a part of the world that I like very much, and where I can make money and where I can do a job that I kinda like … but if I was offered a job in a country where I found myself at variance with the local society and they offered me a lot of money I would not go! I would not go at all!’ (Al 30).

Al claims that he is appalled by the attitude towards the profession held by many of his fellow teachers in the region, and by doing so seems eager to distance himself from what he describes as their ‘crude mercenary’ attitude. Although he admits that the money is important in that it provides him with the means to support his family, his final comment that he would not work in a country where he finds himself at variance with the local society could be said to indicate a desire to separate himself from his non-Muslim Western colleagues, ‘a lot’ of whom he appears to perceive as being mercenaries.

During the interviews, there appeared to be a split between respondents like Al and Rose, who seemed to want to separate themselves from other teachers in the region to whom they appeared to ascribe somewhat base motives, and those such as Sally and Peggy, who seem more open and honest about the importance of the issue. For example, when I asked Peggy about the importance of money, she replied:

‘The money was very important in my decision to come here and I think that is universal. I think a lot of people would be quite happy to go and work in a country where they don’t make a lot of money but I think the reality is that they want to save up for that house and stack away some money so that one day they can go off and spend a year in Vietnam, for example, and not feel a tug on the purse strings.’ (Peggy 18)

For Peggy, the Gulf is seen as a place to provide financial stability so that she can later teach in areas where the pay is not so good. However, as Betty points out, ‘the money was very important to my taking a job here, but it also makes it very hard to leave’ (Betty 15). It would appear both from Betty’s comment and from Sally’s mention of ‘the golden handcuffs’ that for some of those working in the region the money means that they feel obliged to stay working in their well-paying jobs even when they no longer enjoy it. Indeed, as Gerald admits, ‘the money is crucial – I don’t like this part of the world enough to stay without it’ (Gerald 20) and for Alice, ‘living here there is not really very much to hold you apart from the money’ (Alice 18).
This sense of financial obligation could therefore be a major contributing factor to the negative attitudes among ELT professionals in the region described by Al and others, and for teachers who bring these negative attitudes into the classroom, this could have a serious impact on their overall teaching experiences. Al is not alone in finding the attitudes of his colleagues problematic. As mentioned in section 5.6, Jennifer talks of ‘a huge population of doom and gloomers’ whom she advises teachers new to the region to avoid and for Mandy, these negative attitudes are related to the money which, she claims, can be detrimental to those working in the region:

‘Invariably people come here for the financial benefits and, in my experience, hardly any are interested in the students per se, apart from as a means to pump up their bank account, and it does people’s personalities no good in general, I find.’

(Mandy 16)

For Mandy, who three months after the interview left the region to work in South East Asia, the money had a negative effect on people. Her claim that ‘hardly any’ of the teachers in the region are interested in the students except as a means of pumping up their bank balances is certainly a serious accusation and one that could be said to have significant implications for the shaping of a professional identity. However, the data would seem to suggest that, at least amongst some of the respondents in this study, this lack of interest in the students may not be as widespread as Mandy suggests. For Mandy herself, the money had provided the initial impetus to come to the Gulf but had since, she claimed, diminished in importance:

‘When I first came here the money was important because I had to pay off a debt from my Masters and I owed my mother money, but I paid that off and subsequently I’ve been saving a fair amount of money but for no reason – I don’t have any financial commitments and I don’t intend to have any in the future, so I’ve just been piling up money and it’s not giving me any satisfaction whatsoever. But it’s been nice to finally, for the first time in my life, in my late-40s, to actually have some money, but I can’t think of anything to spend it on, so I am someone who is here not for financial reasons so it’s easier for me to leave. I’m not bound here as so many people feel they are’ (Mandy 15)

Again, Mandy underlines the concept of obligation, of being ‘bound’ to the job, which she sees as having such a negative impact upon some of those teaching in the region and which could be the driving force behind the negative discourse towards teaching in the region. Her
comment that it has been nice to finally have some money also highlights how the Gulf may provide financial stability in a profession which, in many parts of the world, it is unable to do so.

In this section I have attempted to show how the issue of money and the effect it may have is perceived by the respondents. The data appears to reveal that there is a perception that, for a sizeable number of English teachers, the main reason they are working in the Gulf is the money and that it can create feelings of obligation and compulsion that could be said to contribute to a negative discourse amongst some of those in the profession in which the perceived shortcomings of local society become part of an essentialist view of Gulf Arabs that informs and shapes their teaching practices. However, in the next section I turn to data which reveals the complexity and heterogeneity of the ELT community in the Gulf in that it appears to indicate that not all native-speaker ELT professionals in the region are what Al describes as ‘crude, mercenary types’.

8.4 – More than the Money

Although the desire for financial stability may play a major role in attracting teachers to the Gulf, the desire for adventure, excitement and exoticism may also be an important factor. The initial exoticism of the region is something upon which several of the respondents commented, and this may add to the sense of excitement at moving to a new country for the first time. For Siobhan this initial exoticism has a strong impact which, she claims, has stayed with her throughout the years:

‘I had imagined somewhere dusty and desolate and then I got here and found myself living in a beautiful apartment overlooking a shining turquoise sea (Laughs) a permanent feeling of being on holiday, and the whole multicultural aspect of society here was fascinating. Just looking out the window and seeing all the people walking back and forth, and the variety of headgear that would go past, from the Sudanese with, you know, ‘piles of laundry’ on the head to the backwards baseball caps on the Emirati guys, to those little pork pie hat things, you know, the whole thing was just fascinating, and wonderfully exciting .. and still is’ (Siobhan 4).
For Siobhan, the exoticism, warmth and strangeness of the Gulf countries appears to have had a profound impact, leading to what she describes as ‘a permanent sense of being on holiday’ and a sense of excitement and fascination at living in such a multicultural part of the world. And this idea of life in the Gulf being seen as a ‘holiday’ is echoed by Samantha who, when asked what her family and friends thought about her living in the Gulf, replied that, even after 22 years they still seemed to think she was ‘on holiday’ (Samantha 4). For many of the respondents, who originate from colder northern climes, this association of permanently warm weather with the idea of a holiday and a pleasant lifestyle is unsurprising, and indeed, the provision of spacious housing, sometimes with access to private swimming pools, the proximity to the beach and the growth of the UAE as a tourist destination with all its accompanying entertainment facilities, could be said to add to the allure of ‘the lifestyle’. As Wendy points out ‘There’s lots of benefits to working here, both financially and lifestyle-wise’ (Wendy18).

However, it is not only the better weather that supplies the attraction of life in the Gulf. For Gwen, the people are also important and states she has ‘always been made to feel very at ease and comfortable and welcome in this culture’ (Gwen 18), and the warmth, hospitality and friendliness of the local people could be seen as quite a contrast for those such as Gwen who come from less welcoming areas such as South-East England. Another attraction, although this is one that is not restricted to those who move to the Gulf, is highlighted by James:

‘You are free here in a way that you are not in other places. I am more able to be who I am here than I am in the UK where people have more expectations of who you are and I think that is part of the nature of the job. I think people in EFL are .. well, they are not as hierarchical as other professions and you don’t have people reacting to you because of your accent, for example’ (James 28).

This perceived freedom from the constrictions and prejudices of home may add to the attraction of work in higher education in the Gulf, where the multinational nature of the faculty and local society means that teachers may be less subject to the bigotries attached to accent and class in their homelands.

During the course of the interviews it became clear that, despite the presence of the negative and fearful discourse described in previous sections, many of the respondents seemed to appreciate professional opportunities unrelated to salary that the Gulf offered. For Gwen, the working conditions available to teachers in the region are seen as important:
‘I like teaching and this is why I am here, and this is a fairly good job: the working conditions are far superior to something in Australia and that’s part of it as well: job satisfaction, and at the moment the money is good and that’s another reason why we’re here (Gwen 21).’

Gwen’s reference to the ‘superior working conditions’ could be said to refer to the facilities and technology, comparatively small class sizes and low weekly teaching hours available in the Gulf, conditions that often compare very favourably both to educational institutes in their home countries and in other parts of the world. And for Jack, he admits that the money is important but also that it is not the only factor in his decision to work in the region. When asked about the money, he replied:

‘I have to be mercenary, because when I came here aged 40 I had absolutely nothing. And most people my age, I’m now fifty-five, are more well-organised than I am financially … But I hasten to add it’s not just that, I mean, I do like the atmosphere here, the students, the colleagues, and so on (Jack 37).’

Jack states that there is more to the job than just the money and for Gene, it also appeared that money was not necessarily the main motivating factor behind people’s decision to work in the region:

‘Look, people are mercenary everywhere, not just here, and the large number of single people and dinks (double-income-no-kids couples) like you and ‘Rachael’ [the researcher’s wife] working here shows that the expat lifestyle itself is more important for a lot of people than just the money.’ (Gene 21)

Gene makes reference to the number of single people or childless teaching couples working in the region, those unburdened by the financial responsibilities of family, and his statement that they may be more motivated by the attractions of the ‘expat lifestyle’ could be said to indicate one of the main motivating factors that seems to propel people into the world of ELT in general: the desire to travel and the attractions of living away from home.

However, although high salaries and expatriate lifestyle appear to be major motivating factors, there are also those who find great professional satisfaction from working in the region. In the following extract, Sally expands on her working life and the professional challenges she faces:
Researcher: ‘So, five years on is it still the money that is keeping you here?’

Sally: ‘There’s definitely more to it. You know, I was talking about this the other day to a friend of mine. I was like, you know what has really driven me here for a while was like, one, I like working with the first year students because I really like helping them to see how they can learn. This challenges me every single day so I am fascinated, professionally, and I am curious every single lesson, I mean, I love it! It’s addictive, you know, and also I noticed that managing classes is still a challenge, you know, and I realise it’s not the technical side of classroom management but managing them so that they can get stimulated, managing them so that their imaginations are captured in some way. That really keeps me going.’ (Sally 26)

Sally’s comments would appear to prove the exception to Mandy’s earlier comment that teachers in the region are not interested in the students per se, except as a means of pumping up their bank balances. For Sally, and perhaps for more teachers than Mandy’s comment might suggest, the difficulties and pressures of working in HEIs in the Gulf appear to present a fascinating professional challenge and one that may be personally very rewarding.

8.5 – Conclusion

To conclude, in this section I have attempted to show how the issue of money may affect the respondents in this study. The hitherto unknown levels of wealth and comfort available to English teachers in HEIs in the UAE could be said to provide a major incentive, but the money also appears to raise moral questions for some of the group; the dramatic increase in income and standard of living that many of them experience, with its accompanying increase in social standing, while providing financial security for many, also raises questions about the fairness of the society in which they are living and concerns about the morality of personally profiting from a society which, when looked at from the perspective of their own societies, may appear to be unjust.

For many of the respondents the need for financial security that comes with age and family responsibilities, and the comparatively lower incomes available for English language professionals in other parts of the world, appears to exert a strong influence on their decision to work in the Gulf, even when they no longer enjoy doing so. This may result in feelings of
resentment and, as discussed in section 7.5, practises that may be perceived as unprofessional. The conflict between the need to remain in well-paying employment and concerns about the morality or desirability of doing so could therefore be said to have a major impact upon the lives of the respondents. And the way that many of the individuals in this study deal with this complexity, uncertainties and pressures of their working lives is the subject of the final findings chapter: the use of humour.
Chapter 9 – Humour

9.1 – Introduction

I now turn to an issue that emerged from the data as one of the major ways in which the respondents may deal with the pressures of their working environment – the use of humour. In the first section I present data which reveals how a sense of humour is perceived as important in negotiating the complexities of life in the region, then, in the second investigate how humour is also perceived as a vital part of teaching methodology in the region.

To illustrate these two themes I would like to start with the following exchange with Mary in which she discusses the importance of a sense of humour both as a vital attribute of potential employees, and as an essential component of effective teaching:

‘Researcher: ‘Now working as a manager here for the last ten years or so, what are you looking for in teachers when recruiting?’

Mary: ‘Hmmm .. good question. I’m doing some interviews this afternoon, actually .. Err ….. What I want .. and we have, obviously, criteria, things like the Master’s degree, but that a formality, that’s the paper side of it. I’m looking for people who are passionate about what they do. Who enjoy teaching. When you say to them ‘OK, tell me about a great lesson you had’ they can think of something. We’re not looking for people who just want to .. um .. use it as a way of getting around the world, or, you know, if that is their subtext then that is fine but at least they have to have passion. They have to show an interest in other human beings. And for me, actually, what’s key is a sense of humour .. and respect and interest in other cultures because if they don’t they won’t do a good job here. I mean, you might get someone with a PhD but if they don’t .. um .. look, our students have great bullshit detectors (Both laugh) .. You know, they’ll survive, a teacher will survive, but if they don’t care about the students then the students will understand that and they will not .. it will never be as good as it can be … I’m not saying I get people like this all the time, sometimes I have to make do with foot soldiers, but .. um .. the kind of person I like is someone who is passionate about their profession, cares about their students, likes a bit of a laugh, flexible, as well as having the Master’s and the experience at tertiary level.’
Researcher: ‘You mentioned someone with a sense of hu …’

Mary: ‘(Interrupting) Oh, crucial! Crucial .. Och! .. The students have a very strong sense .. that’s why I LOVE it here! I didn’t understand the humour in China, and so I would say that the Far East just doesn’t do it for me, whereas I LOVE .. er .. the guys have me in stitches, they crack me up here. They’re very good .. er .. humourous. There’s a lot of banter .. and I think if you can work with that then you can tell them the tough .. and I am a very tough supervisor, just ask them. But I think they like me because I laugh with them even .. Hmm .. OK, publically I will always smile and laugh, but alone in my office, some of the guys I give them a very hard time, but humour is ESSENTIAL in this part of the world, otherwise you don’t get anywhere … and teachers who don’t understand that will never get the best out of their students.’ (Mary 5)

Mary states that humour is an essential component of teaching in the region and that teachers who do not use humour will face possible difficulties in their work and I will discuss this issue in section 9.3. However, Mary also states that when interviewing prospective employees what is ‘key’ is a sense of humour which could be said to indicate the importance of being able to laugh about some of the frustrations that life in the region may entail.

9.2 – GSOH Required

Mary highlighted the importance of a sense of humour in the individuals she would consider recruiting to work in the region and, as demonstrated in the following extract from Dudley, for teachers new to the Gulf their introduction may be far from easy:

‘I think my first year here I was almost like a rookie on the new team and the students were the teammates. It felt like .. er .. I think my first year here was probably my worst year in fourteen years of teaching. Um .. the guys, I found, and I hear this when I’m talking to other teachers, they like to play a lot with the new teacher and although I had some fun with them, I think they had a lot more fun with me! (Laughs loudly) … You see, I was coming from Japan and here is really the polar opposite.’ (Dudley 1)
Dudley, who at the time of interview had been working in the Gulf for four years, claims that his first year in the region was probably the worst in his teaching career, which could be said to reflect some of the difficulties new teachers may face. As discussed in previous chapters, unfamiliarity with local beliefs, culture, religion, gender relations and political structure may prove problematic and Dudley describes how his students like to ‘play’ with new teachers, perhaps exploiting their ignorance of the new environment for their own amusement. An inability to deal with such incidents with a sense of humour could lead to an increase in the fear felt by new hires as well as seriously affect their perceptions of their students. An example of such ‘play’ can be found in the following exchange with James:

James: ‘I’ll tell you about my very, very first class in Kuwait. I went in and there were about eight students and they said ‘Have you been in Kuwait long?’ and I told them and they said ‘Well, we have to line up in front of you and we have to kiss you. On the nose.’ So all eight students kissed me on the nose and then sat down and the rest of the class happened and only at break time did I find out that they were taking the mickey (Both Laugh) …’

Researcher: ‘So this first incident, the fact that they played a practical joke on you your very first class, in your own teaching since then, have you ever used humour?’

James: ‘Absolutely, yes, definitely.. um .. and in fact one of the things the students like is if you is if you speak to them in Arabic, so if you learn a few set phrases, then they love it if you speak to them in Arabic or just drop them in there every now and again. Like ‘If you could use your Mukh Khabeer’ – your big brain, or whatever.’ (James 2)

James laughs about the ‘nose kissing’ incident, perhaps now realising that although there is a custom of nose kissing amongst males in Gulf Arab society, it usually denotes a sign of extreme respect and is mainly used for tribal leaders and members of the royal family. In Kuwait, James worked at a major industrial facility and his students were workers usually aged between thirty and sixty and it was not uncommon for them to have had experience living and working in the West. For them to insist on kissing their new, inexperienced, thirty-one year old teacher was obviously meant as a practical joke, knowing the discomfort it would cause him, a situation to which he reacted with amusement.
James also claims that a use of Arabic in a humorous way is something the students love, and this could be said to underline the importance of building a good rapport with classes in the region. In a working environment where, as discussed in Chapter 6, such emphasis is placed upon student feedback and assessment, it may be that jokes and humour play an important role in ensuring that teachers receive positive feedback and thus maintain their lucrative employment. This may also be a consideration in the following exchange with Sheila, in which she stresses both the need to ‘have a laugh’ with the students but also the importance of being able to overlook certain behaviour:

Sheila: ‘Working here I think you have to be a bit more laid back (laughs) I mean, they don’t want someone who’s all prissy and .. you’ve got to be able to have a laugh with them and take it easy and overlook a lot of things.’

Researcher ‘So how important is having a sense of humour?’

Sheila: ‘Oh, extremely, but it comes easily, you don’t have to work at it. (laughs) Because they’re very, you know .. jovial lads. I think it would be pretty bad here if you didn’t have a sense of humour. But you’d have to work on not having a sense of humour because they like to have a laugh with you.’ (Sheila 4)

Sheila’s comment could be said to reflect Mary’s comments in the introduction where she cites the students’ sense of humour and the fun she has in class as her main reason for loving working in the region. Sheila also highlights what she perceives as the importance of having a sense of humour, claiming that that life would be ‘pretty bad’ for teachers who were not able to enjoy the students’ humour. Indeed, according to Al, this may prove problematic for Arab/Muslim teachers working in the region who ‘may be perceived as stiff and unbending while Western teachers are perceived as more ‘fun’’ (Al 21), which may suggest that, as will be discussed in the following section, Western teachers feel pressure to ‘entertain’ their students more than their Arab colleagues.

Sheila also states that in addition to ‘having a laugh’ with students she feels it important that teachers ‘take it easy’ with them and are prepared to overlook things. An example of this may be found in the following exchange with Dylan, who comments on how his students have created a humorous situation out of an issue that, as discussed in Chapter 7, may be problematic for teachers – the issue of lateness:
Researcher: ‘You mentioned that you found your students in Saudi had a fantastic sense of humour, so how important is humour to your own teaching?’

Dylan: ‘Oh, absolutely essential. Yeah, yeah, and I don’t mean going out of your way to be humorous, I mean just enjoying … erm … at the moment in one of the classes I’m teaching the students have made a huge poster just saying ‘Sorry’ because I had said ‘Don’t say sorry! You think you can come in at five past nine and you can just say sorry? You come in over an hour late and you think it is OK just to say sorry? Being a good student means you don’t have to say sorry!’ So they don’t say sorry any more. They just come in late and point at this enormous poster they made (Laughs).’ (Dylan 20)

For Dylan, the issue of student lateness was one which he and his students appeared to deal with in a humourous way, but for teachers new to the region student lateness may be more difficult to handle and, as discussed in Chapter 7, may lead to serious conflict in the classroom. For Dudley, who described how difficult he found his first year, learning to understand what he perceives as the cultural differences between his attitude to lateness and that of local society could be said to have lessened the potential for conflict in his classroom and increased his rapport with his students:

‘Lateness is a common thing here … the guys here just walk in the door and ‘Salaams!!’ You know, it’s like a big greeting and you’re in the middle of introducing something and it’s just not really respectful from our cultural perspective, but from theirs it would probably be rude not to so now, after four years, I’m just like ‘Yay! Welcome! Thanks for coming! I’m so glad you could make it!’ (Laughs) Before I got quite P.O.-ed about it but there’s no need to, it’s their culture so .. Not being aware of that, though, it’s not an appropriate way to enter a room from a Western mind.’ (Dudley 12)

Dudley appears to have learnt that in Gulf Arab culture it is good manners to say Salaam Aleikum (peace be upon you) when entering a room and that the ‘big greeting’ that late students will bestow upon their classmates is expected behaviour for them, even though it might appear rude and disrespectful to the Western teacher whose class is being interrupted. Dudley’s initial reaction of being P.O.-ed (‘pissed off’) by his students’ disruptive behaviour has now been transformed by his increased understanding of local cultural norms so that he now joins in the ‘big greeting’, albeit in a potentially sarcastic and mocking way. Dudley’s
finding of humour in a cultural practice that he previously found irritating may indicate a coping mechanism that the respondents may employ when faced with cultural difference.

As discussed in Section 7.3, the prevalence of domestic workers in Gulf Arab society may result in the participants perceiving the locals as being at the top of a ‘servant culture’ and this may manifest itself in the way students address their teachers. In the following extract, Samantha discusses her use of humour in the classroom as a way of dealing with potentially offensive demands from the students:

‘Another source of humour in the classroom is you know, you haven’t got your book or something, so ‘What did your last maid die of?’ if you think I’m going to bring the book to you! Coz that’s another thing ‘Oh, Miss, can you do this?’ and I’m like .. ‘I’m not your maid. What did your last maid die of? Ha, ha, ha, ha’ .. kind of thing.’ (Samantha 16)

For Samantha, it appears that her method of coping with being asked to perform tasks in the classroom which she may perceive as beneath her (as the teacher) is to joke about not being the students’ maid. Working in a region where the majority of students are likely to have at least one maid in their houses, a maid who often will be unable to speak Arabic and is thus communicated with in basic English, inexperienced English teachers may find the way they are addressed by their students potentially rude and disrespectful. For those who do not realise that this may be the only form of English that their students have hitherto encountered, such brusque commands as ‘Miss, bring me the book’ may be perceived as discourteous and even aggressive. For Samantha, joking about the students’ seemingly treating her like a maid could be said to act both as a lesson for the students in appropriate language and as a method of dealing with her own irritation.

The importance of humour to life in the Gulf is also stated by Matthew who, in the following exchange, gives his response when I ask him what advice he would give to a teacher asking about the region:

Matthew: ‘Initially I would say ‘Yeah, come here, it’s great’ but then I realise it’s not for everybody. I would explain the conditions and say they are good – much better than at home. But the main issue I think makes or breaks it for you is whether you can handle the Arab mentality. And some people can’t. I think you have to be quite flexible and I always make the point of saying if you
can’t handle that mentality then don’t come here and it’s essential you keep your
sense of humour because that’s the best way of dealing with it.’

Researcher: ‘So do you use humour?’

Matthew: ‘A lot. I hardly ever get angry. I deal with problems with a bit of
humour and they relate to that much better, because if you get angry they see you
as losing face.’ (Matthew 18)

For Matthew, maintaining a sense of humour is the best way of dealing with what he
describes as ‘the Arab mentality’ and is vital for those who are considering working in the
region. By ‘the Arab mentality’ Matthew may be referring to those aspects of the local social
environment that appear different from the norms of expatriate faculty and may be the source
of potential conflict for the uninformed. Humour, patience and flexibility, as stated by Mary
in the introduction to this chapter, are themes that repeatedly emerged from the data as crucial
attributes for ELT professionals in the Gulf. And the use of humour also emerged as an
important component of their teaching methodology.

9.3 – Teacher as Entertainer

In this section I introduce data which appears to support the idea that humour is perceived as
an important teaching tool by the respondents, often much more important than in previous
contexts. I ended the previous section with an extract from Matthew, in which he stressed the
importance of humour to ‘dealing with the Arab mentality’. He then continued to discuss how
and why he uses humour in his classroom:

‘I’ve found that a really good teaching tool is the use of funny anecdotes because
the students here are not very good analytical thinkers so to explain things in
terms of grammar or, you know, technical explanations don’t work that well but
an anecdote works really well. You give them a story about how a student made a
mistake before by putting a word in the wrong context or something, and they
have a good laugh but the point gets across, they really understand what you
mean, rather than talking about collocations and analysing the .. you know, why
this was wrong. … And I found in Japan the students were a lot more serious.
They did relate to some of the stories, but, you know, then they want to get back
to doing the exercises whereas here, I think Emiratis have a really good sense of
humour and they love to laugh. They love to laugh and it’s partly because, I think,
because they are an oral culture, you know, they sit around and talk and joke a
lot, so humour works well with the culture.’ (Matthew 19)

Matthew claims that his use of humour works so well partly because his students come from
an ‘oral culture’. This view of Khalijis coming from an ‘oral culture’, with is resultant
challenges for ELT professions, was echoed by Dudley, who states that ‘a lot of these guys
are not reading in their own tongue so it’s basically gone from an oral society and skipped
literacy and gone into this third thing of cybercy’ (Dudley 18). Matthew also claims that, in
comparison with his former students in Japan, his Emirati students lack ‘analytical skills’,
which may mean that they are unfamiliar with the metalanguage he had used in Japan.
However, Matthew has found humour and jokes to be effective teaching tools and this view
was reflected by several of the respondents. For example, the following exchange with Al
occurred after I had asked him about the teaching methodology he used in the Gulf:

Al: ‘I don’t like this term methodology. I think this idea that there’s a
set of rules or principles or mechanism that lead to, you know, to better language
learning is .. I mean, if there were then we’d all be fantastic language teachers! So
I just don’t think there is a methodology. I think what really matters is being able
to motivate students, being able to convince them that what they are doing may
be meaningful and useful, and that has to do with developing rapport.’

Researcher: ‘And what do you find is the best way of developing rapport?’

Al: ‘I often tell people when they ask me ‘What do you do in the
classroom?’ I say ‘I’m a stand-up comic.’ That’s what I do and I think that works
best and I try to create memorable experiences in the classroom and link it with
language. You know, maybe do bizarre things in the classroom and link it with
language. And that works but this wasn’t the case when I was in Italy. I had a
very academic approach there. In Italy you can be asked by a pretty mediocre
student ‘What’s the subjunctive mood of that verb?’ and you get into all sorts of
technical metalanguage and it’s great fun and you have to know your stuff
because you won’t get very far if you don’t know. So it was a completely
different approach there, very structural, very academic. Here it’s very chatty,
very social and humour really works well.’ (Al 10)
Like Matthew, Al appears to find a noticeable difference between his previous teaching experience and his work in the Gulf. Al’s comment that he perceives himself as ‘a stand-up comedian’ providing bizarre, memorable experience for his students that he links to language could be said to underline the perceived importance of the role of the ‘teacher as entertainer’ in the region. Al’s comment that the ‘stand-up comedian’ approach to teaching had not worked in Italy may highlight a potential problem for inexperienced teachers who attempt to use the approaches they used in previous contexts in the Gulf. Given the importance of positive feedback to new teachers during their initial six months’ probation, it could be said that those who are flexible and quickly adopt a more ‘entertaining’ approach to teaching, even if this contravenes their own beliefs about effective teaching methodologies based on previous experiences, are those who are more likely to survive.

Al links his use of humour to motivation which is echoed by Alice:

‘Here I think it’s a lot harder to keep the motivation going. I think you need, for example with the IELTS. You know how IELTS can be pretty dull .. er .. in Hong Kong if I was teaching IELTS the students don’t care if it’s dull. They’ve paid their money and just want their IELTS, whereas here I need to intersperse it a lot more with fun activities and actually have to give a lot of consideration to how to make it more fun and interesting.’ (Alice 4)

Alice contrasts her experiences in Hong Kong with the UAE, stressing the importance of ‘fun’ as a means of motivating her Emirati students. She also reveals that her previous teaching had been done in a context where her students were paying for their English classes. It could be argued that a lack of personal financial investment in their own education could have a negative effect on the motivation of students attending HEIs in the UAE, and that teachers who are able to deliver ‘fun’, entertaining lessons may be providing the motivation for some of their students to attend; for the entertainment and laughs, if not for the education.

Although humour may be a useful tool in motivating students and helping them understand language concepts, teachers in the region may also perceive humour as a means of obtaining positive feedback from their students, illustrated in the following extract from Gerald:

‘I’d say that humour was 98% of my teaching style here, to be honest. You know, I need that and our guys are the easiest in the world to make laugh. They will laugh at all levels of humour. They will laugh at from Mr. Bean upwards. And
they want that, and they’re desperate for it. And I get lots of feedback on that, you know, ‘We like Mr. Gerald because he laughs and he makes us laugh’, you know, and I always make it so they can laugh at me. You know, if you are teaching here and you are not using humour then you are missing the major trick … Look, they want it, they love it and they love you for it. And then you can go serious, you know, you have like a gear when you go serious, but even then I find it hard not to revert, you know, because …. well, you know, I don’t want to spend five hours in a classroom without having a laugh.’ (Gerald 12)

Gerald highlights the importance of humour as a teaching tool in the region, claiming that teachers who do not use it are ‘missing the major trick’, that ‘98%’ of his teaching involves humour and that he finds Emirati students ‘the easiest in the world to make laugh’. However, he then highlights its importance both as a means of ensuring positive feedback from the students (‘they love you for it’) and its personal importance to him. His comment ‘I need that’ when referring to his use of humour may also reflect the role of humour outlined in the previous section as a possible means of coping with the stresses of the job.

The emergence of humour as a major theme in this study could therefore be said to indicate that in spite of, or maybe because of, the complexities, difficulties and restrictions that ELT professionals may face and the fear and uncertainty these may cause, life in the Gulf may in fact be extremely enjoyable and rewarding. In the exchange with Mary with which I introduced this chapter she stated that the students’ sense of humour was the reason she loved working in the region, as opposed to her experiences in the Far East where she ‘didn’t get’ the humour. And the fun, laughter and enjoyment that may be available to teachers who manage to build up good personal relationships with their classes is also highlighted by Oliver:

‘Humour has always been a part of my teaching but it just seems that it is more effective here, there seems to be more of a reaction. I’m not sure if the humour and joke thing is a way of getting yourself emotionally a bit closer to the students, but I think the students are also trying to get closer to you, emotionally, as well. I’m not sure if it’s a father-figure kind of thing or if it’s because Arabs tend to rely on personal relationships more and to be honest, I haven’t had a class yet here where the relationships with the individual students haven’t reached a point where it’s made the class enjoyable. Look, I enjoy being in the classroom here
more than anywhere else I’ve taught. Other aspects of the job? No, no. (Laughs).’

(Oliver 5)

Oliver tentatively links the closeness that he feels with his students to what he describes as an Arab tendency to ‘rely more on personal relationships’. And the enjoyment that some of the respondents indicated they found in the Gulf is also echoed by Siobhan who, in the following extract, comments on the positive attributes of Gulf Arab students:

‘The guys were funny. They made me laugh a lot ... Students here are wonderfully hospitable, friendly, generous, open, appreciative and just a pleasure to spend time with.’ (Siobhan 15)

And so it appears that in spite of the difficulties they may face, for some of the respondents, the actual teaching may be extremely enjoyable and rewarding. The native-speaker ELT community in the Gulf may harbour its share of individuals who Jennifer describe as the ‘doom and gloomers’ and who Mary calls the ‘hard-nosed cynical types’ (Mary 24), holding what Al claims are ‘crude, mercenary attitudes’ (Al 5) towards teaching in the region. However, as I hope this study has shown, such individuals and attitudes comprise only a part of the complex and diverse native-speaker ELT community working in the region, a community which also contains individuals who may perceive the difficulties and restrictions of the job as exciting professional challenges, who may gain great enjoyment out of their classroom experiences and who may regard their students with deep affection.

9.4 – Conclusion

In this chapter I have introduced data with which I have attempted to show the role of humour in the participants’ lives. Humour emerged as being perceived as a vital and effective component of teaching methodology in the region, both for the building of class rapport and as a means of enhancing student learning. Humour was also identified as the best way for participants to deal with the ‘Arab mentality’ – signifying differences between their own beliefs and expectations and those of the locals.
9.5 – Conclusion to Findings Chapters

It has been my intention in these findings chapters to demonstrate not only the challenges, complexities and potential conflicts facing those who teach English in the UAE, but also the wide variety of responses these individuals exhibit in a teaching environment that may be substantially different to any they had previously encountered. I believe I have shown that ELT in HEIs of the UAE is an extremely complex issue and that the reactions of this group of native-speaker ELT professionals to the demands of their working environment defy easy generalisation.

In my final chapter I now turn to a discussion of this thesis’s key findings, possible implications, limitations and recommendations for further study.
Chapter 10 – Discussion, Key Findings and Implications

10.1 – Introduction – Tiptoeing through the Minefield

In this chapter, I first summarise the key findings of this study in relation to the research questions outlined in Chapter 1 and the literature discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. This is followed by a discussion of the implications of this study and concludes with a discussion of the limitations and suggestions for extending its scope.

As detailed in Chapter 1, this thesis was conceptualised out of a professional and personal interest in understanding the ideology inherent in my and my American wife’s roles as ELT professionals working in the GCC since 1994. This interest was dramatically heightened by the events of September 11th, 2001, in which the cousin of several of my students, Marwan AL-Shehhi, killed Robert Eaton, a close boyhood school friend, along with hundreds of others in the south tower of the World Trade Centre. Subsequent events ensured that the relationship between the Muslim World and our Anglo-American homelands became the focus of extensive media coverage and critical studies into the role of ELT in a ‘post-9/11’ world began to appear, raising moral and ethical questions about the ideological implications of ELT.

Adding to critical studies which investigated the English language’s role in linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992), cultural politics and colonialism (Pennycook, 1994, 1998), racism (Kubota & Lin, 2006) the role of the native speaker (Rampton, 1990; Davies, 2002, Holliday, 2006; Aboshiha, 2007; Holliday & Aboshiha, 2009; Brekenridge, 2010; Brekenridge & Erling, 2011) and even linguistic genocide and crimes against humanity (Skutbabb-Kangas, 2000, 2008) came studies that focused on ELT in the UAE and the wider Arab/Muslim world as discussed in Chapter 3. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to add to this growing body of literature addressing ELT in the Arab/Muslim world, a process which has already begun (see Hudson, 2011, 2012), as well as informing wider discussions regarding the ideological implications of ELT in the 21st century.

In addition, this study addresses the construction of a professional identity in a specific context by native-speaker ELT professionals. However, as Aboshiha (2007) points out, much of the literature constructs the ‘native-speaker’ within discussions of the ‘native/non-native’ dichotomy based on perceptions from the ‘non-native’ standpoint. According to Brekenridge & Erling (2011), such studies, which call for an end to the dichotomisation and
essentialisation of the ‘non-native’ with the intention of empowering non-native teachers and promoting resistance to the global hegemony of English, may paradoxically result in essentialised notions of the native speaker English teacher which fail to take into account the multidimensional and multilayered nature of their identities, especially those with extensive expatriate experience such as the participants in this study.

The importance of this study, therefore, lies in providing new information on how ELT professionals perceive and react to the complex environment of ELT in HEIs in the UAE, how they construct their professional identities in light of the ideological considerations impacting upon this environment, and by adding to a wider understanding of the experiences and identity of the ‘native-speech English teacher’ – a figure frequently essentialised and villianised in the literature, but one whose voice is rarely heard.

In naming this thesis ‘tiptoeing through the minefield’ I was attempting to convey some of the sense of fear and uncertainty I had observed amongst my colleagues (and occasionally myself) during the years my wife and I had spent working as an ELT professional in HEIs in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Perceptions among expatriate educators of the precarious nature of employment in the region, described by Baalawi (2009:75) as being like a ‘tightrope walker’, were regularly reinforced by the dismissal and deportation of colleagues. As such incidents were almost never explained by management, they tended to be explained in ‘the rumour network’ as relating to the sacked teacher having in some way caused offence to local cultural, religious or political norms, and this subsequently informed the professional discourse of the community of practice that is the ELT community in HEIs in the UAE.

In order to negotiate the complexity of this potentially explosive working environment an extensive knowledge of Emirati society, religion and politics would appear to be necessary and yet this study has shown that gaining such knowledge and understanding how it impacts upon English language teaching was by no means easy or clear for many of the respondents. With this in mind, I now turn to an analysis of the key findings of this study.

10.2 – Key Findings

This section discusses the study’s key findings in relation to the following research questions, as outlined in Section 1.1:
1) What are the attitudes of a group of native speaker ELT professionals working in HEIs in the UAE towards the social aspects of the environment in which they are working?

2) In what ways and to what extent do these native speaker ELT professionals consider that their teaching materials and pedagogy are affected by this environment?

3) In what ways do these native speaker ELT professionals deal with potential classroom conflicts that may stem from their interactions with the local environment?

4) How do these native speaker ELT professionals construct their professional identities with regard to the potentially conflicting ideological forces that impact upon their working lives?

10.2.1 – Research Question 1: Attitudes

The key findings regarding the participants’ attitudes towards the social aspects of the environment in which they were working are as follows:

**Complexity and Diversity** – The first key finding of this study is that the data illustrates the complexity of the teaching environment in which the respondents are working and the diversity of their attitudes towards it., Cultural, religious, social and political forces from both local society and those of the expatriate ELT professionals all have an ideological impact upon the provision of English language education at HEIs in the UAE and the wide range of attitudes expressed by the participants illustrates the lack of homogeneity amongst native speaker ELT professionals in this context, reflecting the multi-layered and complex identities that these individuals have. For example, some of the respondents could be said to have evidenced the form of essentialising, Othering discourses highlighted as typical of ‘native-speakerism’ (Holliday, 2006), reflected in descriptions of students and local society, in which issues such as the ‘Arab mentality’, the students’ perceived lack of knowledge, maturity and motivation and the perceived shortcomings of local gender relations, religious practices and political systems were highlighted. Such discourses could be seen as examples of what Holliday (2012) describes as the neo-racist cultural disbelief inherent in ‘native-speakerism’ which portrays the non-native Other as culturally inferior, often negatively comparing the ‘individualist’ Self with the ‘collectivist’ Other.
However, such discourses were by no means universal and, it could be argued, did not necessarily reflect a dominant discourse amongst the respondents. Indeed, a realisation of one’s position in local society and the importance of gaining an understanding of how ELT may be affected by the ideological considerations particular to this context were issues highlighted by several of the respondents, with adaptability, flexibility, patience and a sense of humour being perceived as important components of successfully navigating the complexities of the social aspects of the local environment. In addition, several of the respondents expressed their exasperation both with the way Arabs and Muslims are commonly portrayed in the media of their homelands and with the attitudes of colleagues who seemed unable to adapt to the environment in which they were working. It could be said, therefore, that the complexity and variety of the findings both confirm and disprove the ‘denial of ideology’ Holliday & Aboshiha (2009) claim as being inherent in ‘native-speakerism’ by revealing that it is by no means universal amongst the native-speaker ELT professionals interviewed for this study, especially those with extensive expatriate experience.

The Fear Factor – The second key finding is the strong suggestion arising from the data that, for the majority of the participants, their attitudes towards the social environment in which they are working are informed by a pervasive professional discourse of fear, regardless of their attitudes towards the ideological implications of their work. This discourse of fear is maintained firstly through the precarious nature of employment in the region, characterised by a lack of job security (Mercer, 2007) and a perception that dismissal and deportation faces those perceived to have offended local cultural, religious and traditional norms (Nazzal, 2006; Saffarini & Shamseddine, 2006), a perception fed by stories which are transmitted and possibly embellished through an active rumour network.

The findings indicate that the second source of the discourse of fear is the level of uncertainty felt by the respondents regarding the extent to which their work needs to be censored in order to conform to what are often vaguely defined local norms, values and beliefs. This uncertainty seems to be only exacerbated by management, the majority of whom also tend to consist of native English speaking expatriates, whose lack of clear direction and whose failure to provide relevant socio-cultural professional development for expatriate faculty in federal HEIs in the UAE has been noted by Mercer (2005, 2007), Baalawi (2009) and Smith (2010). The majority of expatriate management and faculty appear to be aware that there is a demand for some form of censorship from government and local society, yet the exact nature
of this censorship is rarely articulated and so it is left to teachers to make their own decisions on the matter; a situation that, as the findings reveal, may result in either an infantilising and uninteresting over-censorship of materials or be the source of ‘calamities’ in the classroom, with unwary teachers introducing subjects or materials that prove to be offensive to their students.

Related to this uncertainty, the findings indicate that a third source of the discourse of fear may stem from the participants’ perceptions of Islam, especially to the extent by which these perceptions are shaped by Western media coverage of international incidents involving Islam or Muslims. It appears that for some of the respondents, despite daily interaction with Muslim students, colleagues and neighbours, the often violent and frightening Western media depictions of incidents related to Islam, such as the Danish cartoon scandal, play a role in shaping their attitude towards the religion and hence the way they deal with it in the classroom. This, combined with the dominant ‘no religion, no politics’ mantra and the fear of the students using the word Haram both highlighted in the findings, has the effect of making the subject of religion a potential source of fear. It appears that this fear is further complicated by the fact that although religious issues appear to be unproblematic for the majority of the students, several of the respondents mentioned the possibility of there being a ‘hidden mullah’ (religiously conservative student) in the classroom who may take exception to an issue that the rest of the class may find inoffensive but whom they would feel obliged to support.

A final source of fear appears to stem from the participants’ perceptions of their own position in Emirati society, with many commenting upon their subservient position to the locals, including their own students, and acting accordingly. The power that the students are seen as holding over their teachers appears to result in a general caution towards their lessons by the majority of the respondents and, in some cases, the occurrence of ethically dubious practices such as over-generous and unrealistic marking of students work and laxity regarding the colleges’ attendance policies.

Reactions to Restrictions – A third key finding concerns the participants’ attitudes towards the restrictions they perceive as being part of their working lives in HEIs in the UAE. As detailed in the previous section, the need for a censorial approach to teaching provides one of the sources of the discourse of fear, but some of the participants also expressed frustration, dissatisfaction and, at times, incredulous amusement with some of the restrictions they saw as
impacting upon their teaching. Furthermore, the perceived need for self-censorship in the classroom was seen by some of the respondents as necessitating a level of dishonesty with their students with which they were not comfortable. Indeed, having to constantly bite one’s tongue and hide one’s true beliefs for fear of potentially offending the students was seen as limiting both at a personal and at a professional level.

However, given the precarious nature of their employment and their perceptions of their own subservient position in Emirati society, it appears that the majority of the respondents feel obliged to continue providing a restricted form of ELT, despite the possible consequences such an approach may have to their students’ chances of passing the culturally-laden (Lanteigne, 2004) international examinations they need to graduate. The findings also suggest that, when combined with the attraction of the large salaries available at HEIs in the UAE, such restrictions may result in negative attitudes towards local society and the students, with some individuals feeling ‘trapped wearing the golden handcuffs’ working at jobs that they have come to detest. Again, this has implications for the quality of education that the students are receiving. That is not to say that all the participants held such attitudes. Indeed, the findings show that some individuals were more understanding about the restrictions placed upon their teaching and viewed them more as an exciting professional challenge than an unpleasant burden, again illustrating the complexity and diversity of the individuals involved.

Attitudes towards the Students – A fourth key finding concerns the attitudes of the participants towards their students. In addition to the fear of the perceived power the students were seen to wield over their teachers mentioned in the previous section, the data also suggested that there the practice of infantalising the students and seeing them as immature was fairly widespread amongst the respondents. Throughout the interviews it was common for many of the respondents to refer to their students as ‘boys’ and ‘girls’ and several commented upon the difficulties of dealing with what they considered immature behaviour in the classroom. Another attitude commonly given, reflecting that highlighted by Dahl (2010), was that the students were spoilt and unmotivated, although amongst some respondents this perceived lack of motivation was seen more as a professional challenge than an annoyance. However, given the nature of Emirati society, in which locals have been provided with free education to tertiary level, subsidised housing, periodic debt relief, soft loans and the guarantee of well-paying employment in the public sector, perhaps it is unsurprising that the youth of what Davidson (2012:117) calls ‘citizenries … deprived of any motivation to gain
meaningful qualifications’ may be seen as lacking maturity and a serious attitude towards their studies.

**The Gender Question** – The final key finding regarding the participants’ attitudes towards the social environment in which they are working concerns the issue of gender. As shown in Chapter 6, gender-related issues provided the major source of problematic incidents in the classroom, especially at women’s colleges, contributing to the discourse of fear and the level of censorship. However, they also appeared to comprise the area where the participants’ own beliefs and values clashed most obviously with those they perceived local society as holding. There is also a suggestion that some of the participants’ perceptions of their students led to essentialised discourses which served to infantilise and Other male students as unmotivated and undisciplined and female students as naïve and over-protected, reflecting Dahl’s (2010) detailed descriptions of Emirati students by gender. Such discourse may also have been influenced by what Smith (2010:7) describes as Western perceptions of the allegedly ‘oppressed’ state of women in the Arab world, reinforced by their portrayal in the Western media, which have ‘the potential to poison the perceptions and perceptive abilities of the Western instructor in the Gulf’ whose capacity to assess the gender dynamics of local society ‘necessarily coloured, and perhaps compromised, by a powerful and historied Western narrative about female subjugation in the Arab world.’

The findings also suggest that differences in perceptions of appropriate gender roles in society between the participants and their students may be the source of internal conflict for the participants as they struggle to equate their own beliefs on the issue of gender, and the extent to which they felt able to reveal these beliefs to their students, with the attitudes towards gender that they perceive to be held by their students and local society. Therefore, as Hudson (2012:22-3) points out:

‘Gender and attitudes towards gender roles could be said to have a major influence on the lives of ELT professionals working in the Gulf, and how they decide to reconcile their own beliefs on the subject with potentially opposite views held by their students can have a serious impact on their working lives. Those who decide to contest cultural attitudes that they find unacceptable may be putting their jobs at risk, whereas those who choose to avoid the issue and take a censorial approach to their teaching may run the risk of giving their students an ‘incomplete’ education.’
10.2.2 – Research Questions 2 & 3: Materials, pedagogy & potential conflict

The key findings regarding the participants’ attitudes towards how their teaching materials, pedagogy and ways of dealing with potential conflict are affected by the environment in which they are working are as follows:

**The Censorial Approach: Complexity and Diversity** – The first key finding regarding the participants’ attitudes towards their teaching materials and pedagogy is the prevalent censorial approach that informs ELT in federal HEIs in the UAE, an approach that appears to be maintained by pressure from government, society, management, students and the discourse of ELT professionals in the country. The findings show that the censorial approach extends beyond teaching materials and into methodology, with constant, vigilant self-censorship perceived as an important facet of teaching in the region. This perceived need for censorship and self-censorship may be conflicting with the need to prepare students for international examinations but, as this study has shown, there is a general fear of following Hyde’s (1994:304) recommendation of ‘explicitly confronting the foreign culture in the classroom’.

In addition, the findings indicate that the lack of clear direction and appropriate sociocultural training from management may lead to what Picard (2007:28) describes as ‘an over-censoring of content which is not in fact offensive to the majority of learners, resulting in bland materials with little interest to learners’. This may not only have repercussions for the students’ education; both in terms of motivation and their ability to pass culturally-laden international English examinations, but may also have the effect of demotivating teachers.

The censorial approach is an attempt to deal with the perceived threat that the English language and English-medium higher education is seen as posing to local culture, beliefs and traditions. As Ahmed (2010:2) states, ‘the challenge posed in the Arab Gulf countries is how to … ensure that the type of learning responds in an effective manner to the needs of individuals and countries, without disrupting beliefs and traditions’. However, the findings indicated that there was great variation in the extent of this censorship. Below are some of the different approaches to censorship identified in the findings:

- **The ‘Bull in a China Shop’ Approach** – This refers to teachers who appear to refuse to acknowledge the context in which they are teaching and persist in pursuing their own personal agendas by using inappropriate materials and methodologies in the classroom. However, it appears that those who follow this approach tend not to last
long in employment in the region, and tales of their dismissal only serve to add to the prevalent ‘discourse of fear’.

- **The ‘Innocent Abroad’ Approach** – This refers to individuals who, through ignorance and lack of appropriate socio-cultural professional development (Baalawi, 2009; Raza, 2010), may inadvertently cause offence to their students in the classroom. The findings show this is a common occurrence for teachers new to the region and is usually one that is understood and forgiven by the students. However, if the teacher’s ignorant mistake is perceived to be serious enough it may also lead to dismissal, regardless of their intention.

- **The ‘Infantilisation’ Approach** – This refers to the fostering of a ‘parent-child’ relationship by teachers with their students, perhaps in the hope that such a relationship may ‘protect’ the teacher from potential clashes in the classroom. However, as shown by the findings and reflecting Elyas’s (2011) account of student resentment at ‘being treated like kids’, such an approach may not only encounter resistance, but may also limit the students’ educational development.

- **The ‘Keep You Head Down and Don’t Rock the Boat’ Approach** – The findings indicate that this is probably the most common approach taken by the participants. In this the motto ‘better safe than sorry’ results in the highest level of censorship, reflecting Picard’s (2007) ‘over-censorship of content’, in which teachers avoid any subject that, in their opinion, could potentially pose a problem in class. Rather than attempting to contextualise and explain cultural aspects of Western culture that may appear in the English classroom, teachers taking the ‘Don’t Rock the Boat’ approach prefer instead to avoid them altogether. However, the findings indicate that it is often these same teachers who then complain about their students’ lack of motivation, interest and progress.

- **The ‘Bend Over Backwards’ Approach** – This refers to what could be described as an over-enthusiastic highlighting of issues in course-books that the teacher perceives as offensive to the students, accompanied by what could be seen as inappropriate and counter-productive apologies. In their attempts to be ‘politically correct’, a common aspect of ELT highlighted by Waters (2007), such teachers may actually be causing problems for their colleagues and their colleges by bringing to the attention of students issues that could otherwise have been avoided, ignored or contextualised.
• The ‘No-Nonsense’ Approach – This approach appears to be the one adopted by some of the more experienced respondents in which potentially problematic issues are neither avoided nor highlighted by the teacher. If an issue is raised by students, the teacher using this approach will answer honestly and explain the Western cultural context involved, treating the students as adults and expecting them to behave accordingly. However, given the prevailing ‘discourse of fear’ described in depth in this thesis, this is an approach that only the most confident appear to adopt.

Over 50% of the respondents indicated that they never used the course books issued by their HEIs, instead spending a lot of time preparing materials that they thought would be more ‘culturally sensitive’ to the context in which they were teaching. The findings therefore suggest that the respondents are, to various degrees, producing materials and using teaching methodologies that actively seek to reduce the impact of their alleged ‘native speaker dominance and norm as a model for students’ (Kubota & Lin, 2006:481), certainly when it comes to the cultural content of their classes. In addition, it would appear that Alderson’s (2009:30) contention that native speaker teachers ‘ignore the cultural context of their learners and seek to impose an alien learning culture’ would therefore not seem to apply for many of the respondents in this study.

Conduct unbecoming? – The second key finding regarding pedagogy is that the data strongly suggests that perceptions of local power structures may lead to unethical practises amongst some native speaker ELT professionals working at HEIs in the UAE. For example, it appears that in an attempt to win the students’ favour and avoid potential repercussions, practises such as the manipulation and/or unrepresentative marking of internal student grades and examination results and a selective implementation of institutional rules regarding lateness and absenteeism may be commonplace amongst some expatriate faculty and management. Such actions may not only negatively impact upon the students’ ability to pass external examinations, but may be dispiriting and demotivating for faculty who do not engage in such practises. The power that students and local society are perceived to hold over expatriate educators through the use of feedback forms and wasa (influence) may seriously impact upon teachers’ actions and, as will be discussed in the following section, may also affect the construction of their professional identities. Given the lucrative financial rewards that ELT in HEIs in the UAE can offer, it is perhaps understandable that expatriate teachers’ and managers’ main focus is on maintaining their employment, even if this involves keeping their students (and the local community) ‘happy’ through the awarding of unrealistically high
grades, lax marking of attendance and even the manipulation of internal examination results to ‘pass’ students who, in reality, have failed their courses.

The Use of Humour – The third key finding regarding pedagogy findings also suggest that the use of humour is perceived as an effective component of teaching methodology in the region, both for the building of class rapport and as a means of enhancing student learning. This corresponds with the findings of Al Shammari’s (2011) study into the attitudes of students at the American University of Sharjah towards English teachers which found that ‘being entertaining’, along with ‘having a good personality’ and ‘treating the students well’, were identified as the major personal traits seen as being important in an English teacher. And in Sadek’s (2007:53) study of students at a university in Abu Dhabi one of the respondents described a good English teacher as someone who ‘should be culturally sensitive and inject humor in the class, be immersed in our culture, and show that she sees the good side of our culture.’ The findings suggest that the use of humour and an ‘entertaining’ teaching style is perceived as being especially effective in HEIs in the UAE; for conveying the meaning of language, for building up class rapport, for increasing student motivation and for minimising the potential of classroom conflict. Humour was also identified as the best way of dealing with the cogitative dissonance that may occur through the participants’ interactions with a social environment that may differ radically from those previously encountered. And humour also plays a role in the subject of my next section: how the respondents construct a professional identity while working in HEIs in the UAE.

10.2.3 – Research Question 4: Constructing a professional identity
The key findings regarding how the construction of a professional identity by the participants is affected by the environment in which they are working are as follows:

More Complexity and Diversity – The first key finding regarding the construction of native speaker ELT professionals’ professional identities in the federal HEIs of the UAE is the complex and diverse nature of such identities revealed by the data. Miller (2009:174), in her analysis of how professional identity is defined in the literature on ELT, concludes that it can be viewed as ‘relational, negotiated, constructed, enacted, transformed and transitional’ so for newly arrived ELT professionals the process of building new relationships and negotiating their new workplace will involve the construction of new professional identities reflecting the realities of their new environment as they perceive them. However, as qualified ELT
professionals with extensive experience in a wide variety of global educational contexts, the participants of this study demonstrate the construction of complex and diverse professional identities in response to the working environment of federal HEIs in the UAE, identities which defy simple generalisation.

**A Difficult Transition** – The second key finding regarding the construction of professional identities highlights the difficulties that some ELT professionals may have making the transition from the working environments of their previous employment to the working environment of federal HEIs in the UAE. The data would suggest that for some faculty new to the region there may be a disconnect between the professional identity that they bring with them and professional identity as it is constructed in this context, leading some not only to question the professionalism of their new employer but also to run the risk of engaging in classroom practices that could jeopardise their continued employment. Amongst the issues that were identified as particularly problematic were gaining an understanding of the impact of the socio-cultural-political-religious context on ELT, the lack of adequate or relevant professional development and the demands of the corporate style managerial system on teachers. Those who fail to make this transition effectively may leave, not make probation, be dismissed or struggle on, disliking both the place where they are working and their students, and passing this negativity on to their colleague.

**The Nature of Professionalism** – The third key finding regarding the construction of professional identities is the complexity and diversity of the respondents’ attitudes regarding the nature of professionalism in the context of federal HEIs in the UAE. Despite these institutions’ outward signs of professionalism, symbolised by their corporate style of management, regular and extensive faculty appraisals, focus on the use of technology in ELT and strict dress codes, several of the respondents commented on what they perceived to be a lack of professionalism in the institutes in which they were working. Such comments highlighted issues such as the perceived lack of student motivation, the perceived power of the students and the wasa system and the perceived lack of managerial support for faculty who attempt to enforce the institution’s attendance policy and mark assignments and examinations in a way that accurately reflected the students’ ability. This could lead to resentment amongst some teachers, who saw themselves as committed, professional educators forced to spend far too much time on activities designed to give a superficial ‘corporate’ professionalism to their institutions whilst simultaneously observing common practices that they considered to be deeply unprofessional.
Money and Status – The final key finding regarding the construction of professional identities amongst ELT professionals working in federal HEIs in the UAE concerns the issues of money and status. The salaries and benefits available to ELT professionals in these institutions are much higher than those available in most other parts of the world and as a result employment in the region is much sought after. However, it does appear that for several of the respondents there is a price to pay for accepting such lucrative employment. Indeed, especially amongst the older respondents, there seemed to be a level of embarrassment or shame about working in what they saw as such an ‘unprofessional’ teaching environment, a situation that they appeared to justify by claiming financial necessity. For respondents who were the primary breadwinners of their families, having a career as an ELT professional elsewhere in the world, especially in their homelands, seemed to be the cause of great financial hardship and as a result there appeared to be great pressure upon them to maintain their employment in the UAE, even if it involved practices that in other contexts they might consider unprofessional. However, the salaries and benefits available to ELT professionals in HEIs in the UAE also brings with it a status that is often not found in other contexts, and for individuals who have worked hard in many different contexts and have gained the necessary post-graduate qualifications, perhaps this money and status acts as a form of validation, one that ELT professionals in the UK, the USA, Australia etc. rarely appear to achieve, as noted by Kubota (2005) and Aboshiha (2007). And, as the following quote from Davidson (2012:12) contends, money may also make expatriates such as the respondents in this study more likely to follow the censorial approach to teaching that governments in the region require:

‘as long as the remuneration and other benefits remained higher that in their country of origin, and as long as regimes kept blocking any path to naturalisation, then expats would remain mere labour migrants primarily interested in safe and stable short-term wealth creation before eventually returning home. Thus, they would have no interest in altering the domestic political status quo, and if anything the more influential, wealthy and skilled expatriates in the Gulf monarchies would become another supportive or at least silent constituency of the traditional monarchies.’

The construction of the participants’ professional identities would therefore appears to involve a series of choices in which teachers have to consider not only what may be best for their students in terms of English language learning, but also how their actions may impact
upon their chances for continued employment in light of the political, religious and cultural context in which they are working. However, the complexity and variety of the respondents’ reactions to contextual considerations in their working lives indicates that there are a multiplicity of ways of dealing with the ‘cognitive dissonance’ (Maertz et al, 2009) that their expatriate experiences in the HEIs of the UAE may cause.

10.2.4 – Key Findings: Conclusion

To conclude, I return to Lave and Wenger’s (1991) contention that knowledge about teaching in a particular professional context is socially constructed and negotiated through participation in communities of practice. The data indicates that in the community of practice of ELT in HEIs in the UAE one of its major defining features is the prevalent discourse of fear resulting in the near ubiquitous censorial approach and the ‘no politics, no religion’ mantra. However, as Wenger (1998) points out, professional identity is constituted not only by the practices that teachers engage in, but also by those that they don’t and, as the findings indicate, not all of the respondents seemed willing to accept the dominant discourse of fear. Indeed, the data seemed to indicate that some respondents had, with time and experience, constructed individual professional identities which were able to successfully navigate the contextual complexities of HEIs in the UAE.

Regarding the construction of professional identities in light of the potentially conflicting ideological forces that impact upon the respondents’ working lives, the findings suggest that this may vary greatly dependent upon factors such as the individuals’ experiences, age, beliefs and values, gender, financial situation and personality, making simplistic generalisability problematic. However, they are all faced with the ‘struggle between ideals and pragmatics’ (Findlow, 2001:51) that manifests itself in what Hudson (2012:12) describes as:

‘A common quandary faced by Western teachers in the region is dealing with the clash between a professional desire to raise students’ awareness of the wider world while simultaneously ensuring that one is not perceived to be offending the local cultural, traditional and religious norms by stating opinions or exposing the students to ideas that could challenge these norms’
The findings appear to indicate that this quandary is one with which some of the respondents struggle and it may be the cause of frustration, with the need for self-censorship seen both as a restriction upon their teaching and the cause of feelings of guilt over the perceived necessity for dishonesty in some interactions with the students, especially regarding religious or gender related matters. However, for other respondents such censorship and potential dishonesty seems to be unproblematic, perhaps reflecting Zemblas (2003) and Crookes’ (2009) descriptions of multiple teacher identities in which individuals do not possess one stable, unified identity, but may have several, potentially conflicting identities resulting from a polymeric product of many experiences.

Having discussed the findings of this study and how they relate to the research questions and the literature, I now turn to a discussion of the implications of this thesis.

10.3 – Implications

I believe that this study has shown the complexity of ELT in the classrooms of HEIs in the UAE. The high salaries and generous benefits available to native speaker ELT professionals in these institutions serve to make such employment both highly attractive and extremely competitive. However, given the sometimes conflicting ideological, institutional and societal demands placed upon them, ELT professionals working in the UAE may be faced with moral and ethical questions about their teaching; questions which they may have never previously encountered. The struggle to gain an understanding of how to successfully navigate the complex interplay of competing ideologies whilst balanced on the tightrope straddling the clash between ideals and pragmatics inherent in ELT in the region is one which not all will succeed. Those who fail and receive the ‘gin and tonic and a window seat’ mentioned in Chapter 1, serve only to perpetuate the dominant discourse of fear which appears to inform ELT in the region. And I believe that some of the ways individual ELT professionals decide to deal with the complexities of their working lives raise serious implications for the quality of English-language education being provided in federal HEIs in the UAE.

At an institutional level, I believe this study has raised questions about the initial preparation of new faulty as well as the provision of contextually-relevant continuing professional development opportunities. Furthermore, there appears to be a problematic lack of clarity regarding these institutions’ expression of their expectations regarding the need for faculty to
adapt their teaching to suit local cultural, social, political and religious beliefs and values. This lack of clarity may stem from the often contradictory demands that HEIs in the UAE place upon their expatriate teachers and managers, who are expected to provide a ‘modern’, ‘Western’ education that in no way poses a threat to the culture, traditions and beliefs of local society. And yet their mere presence in the classroom and the language they use could be said to be a ‘threat’ to local culture, traditions and beliefs, not to mention local language.

In this section, therefore, I will discuss the implications of this study as I see them relating to ELT professionals, HEI institutions, teacher training, intercultural relations and applied linguistics.

10.3.1 – Implications for ELT professionals in the UAE

In 2005, Karmani wrote the following regarding ELT professionals in the Muslim world:

‘As TESOL professionals, we need to be perpetually aware of how our current language teaching paradigms relate to the political, cultural, and economic aspirations of the host culture in which we find ourselves and how they ultimately play out on the international political stage. … How might we exonerate or at least mitigate our role as de-Islamising agents on the linguistic front between ‘Islam and English’? … We need to be far more conscious of the extent to which we as English language teachers are reproducing or even delivering global ideologies, particularly when they are diametrically in conflict with the worldviews of our Muslim learner … [and] determine the moral and rational grounds for legitimizing our role in contexts with which we might be ideologically at odds’ (Karmani, 2005a:266)

The writings of Karmani, according to the Saudi writer Elyas (2011), are indicative of what he describes as the ‘strong Islamization’ approach to ELT which advocates the strict censorship of any content deemed ‘unIslamic’, yet Karmani’s concerns about the ‘moral and rational grounds for legitimizing our role in contexts with which we might be ideologically at odds’ could be said to lie at the heart of the conceptualisation of this study. Although I would disagree with Karmani’s somewhat militaristic depiction of English teachers as ‘de-Islamising agents on the linguistic front between Islam and English’, I feel that this study raises a fundamental moral question for ELT professionals in the UAE: to what extent are
their prepared to compromise their commitment to ethical and effective education in order to maintain their employment?

In an environment characterised by a dominant discourse of fear, ELT professionals need to reflect on how they negotiate the complex and often contradictory ideological forces impacting upon their working lives, and the extent to which the pedagogies they employ result in effective language education. Consideration needs to be given to the extent to which a strict censorial approach to English language teaching effectively meets their students’ needs rather than just providing job security. ELT, almost inevitably, involves exposing the students to a certain degree of ‘cultural’ content, so it therefore falls to the ELT professional to understand the potential impact such content may have upon their students and their classes, and, crucially, the role a knowledge of such content may play in achieving success at international examinations such as the IELTS or TOEFL.

This study would suggest that when dealing with the issue of the cultural content of their work, ELT professionals in HEIs in the UAE show a range of responses. Firstly, there are those who, either through ignorance or their own ideology, take a confrontational approach (Hyde, 1994) towards cultural issues, exposing the students to ‘the harsh imperative of contestation’ (Holliday, 2010:16) in which the teacher may highlight cultural differences between the Anglophone West and the Gulf Arab world. However, this study has shown that negative student reactions to such an approach have repeatedly resulted in the dismissal and deportation of teachers – the ‘gin and tonic and a window seat’ phenomenon mentioned in Chapter 1. This, in turn, has led to the strict censorial approach in which an ultra-cautious over-censorship of content (Picard, 2007) results in bland lessons which motivate neither student not teacher yet, especially when combined with unethical behaviour such as the unrepresentative marking of student work and persistent laxity regarding attendance, may ensure the teacher’s continued employment even though it may place the students at a disadvantage when faced with external examinations. These responses are summarised in Figure 10.3.1 below:
Unfortunately, it would appear from the findings that a majority of ELT professionals working in federal HEIs in the UAE fall into the left-hand category in which a strict censorial approach to ELT is maintained. The dismissal and deportation of many of those falling into the ‘contestation’ right-hand side of the diagram appears to do much to perpetuate the discourse of fear and the continuation of sub-standard ELT at HEI’s in the UAE.

A major implication for ELT professionals in the region would therefore seem to be that those who are able to steer a course between contestation and censorship could be said to be providing the most effective language education, while also retaining their employment. Central to such an approach appears to be the contextualisation of potentially problematic issues; an approach which the study shows can be achieved with rapport building, the use of humour and a deep knowledge of the local context.

A context approach (Bax, 2003) to ELT is obviously needed in HEIs in the UAE; one that implies a deep understanding of local beliefs and values and local society’s expectations regarding ELT, but this need not necessarily imply a strict censorial approach. However, such an approach assumes that teachers have an extensive knowledge of local conditions and how these apply to ELT. And yet it appears that for the majority of the respondents gaining such
knowledge is something that is left for them to do on their own, with little input from management and the institutions in which they are working. And for those who fail to gain such an understanding, the consequences may be severe, with little sympathy or help from management and no recourse to professional organisations such as unions or employment tribunals that they may have had access to in other educational contexts.

10.3.2 – Implications for English-medium HEIs in the UAE

The federal English-medium HEIs of the UAE tend to be attractive places to work, with state-of-the-art facilities, including the most up-to-date educational technology, high salaries, free housing, annual flights home, health care, large relocation grants and payment of faculty’s children’s school fees amongst some of the benefits on offer. They also have stringent employment criteria, with applicants requiring qualifications to at least Master’s level and extensive overseas experience. And yet, despite the time, money and effort the hiring of such ELT professionals entails, federal HEIs in the UAE could still be said to have relatively high staff turnover rates and poor student graduation rates. The implications for such institutions arising from this study are therefore as follows:

**Orientation, Professional Development & Lack of Clarity** – In order to reduce high staff turnover and avoid classroom conflict, which may result in unwanted negative publicity in local media, both senior and middle management at federal HEIs in the UAE need to consider providing expatriate faculty with adequate and relevant initial orientation and continuing professional development which highlights the social, cultural, religious and linguistic aspects of ELT in the region from the local perspective. The findings would appear to indicate that this is especially important regarding issues of gender – identified as the main source of potential classroom conflict in this study – which, given that several federal HEIs in the UAE have started introducing mixed gender classes since the data for this thesis was collected, is increasing in importance.

There also needs to be clarification from senior local management and government of the nature and extent of the censorial approach to ELT they deem necessary in their institutions. Indeed, this study has shown that the lack of clarity and communication from management contributes to the ‘active rumour mill’ amongst faculty which provides a major source of the prevalent ‘discourse of fear’ amongst ELT professionals. This reflects Tibi & McLeod’s (2011) study of faculty at a university in the UAE, which revealed that there was a general
perception of there being a lack of clarity in management communication as well as a lack of effective and appropriate opportunities for professional development that would help them better deal with local socio-cultural-political considerations. And in Raza’s (2010:162) study of professional development provision at a federal university in the UAE she noted that:

‘Institutional initiatives are perceived as top-down, imposed, arbitrarily decided upon, and based on seemingly generic institutional goals which teachers associate with authoritative procedures of the institution. Teachers perceive themselves as peripheral participants in their own professional development as their learning goals/activities are continually determined and decided by others resulting in lack of autonomy in deciding on learning that teachers perceive as appropriate to their needs’

This lack of appropriate training was also highlighted by Weber (2011:63), who claims that ‘cultural sensitivity training is rarely, if ever, provided by educational institutions in the region’ and recounts how, upon arrival at an HEI in the Gulf he:

‘was handed a one-page photocopied sheet of ‘do’s and don’ts’ and was also pulled aside in the hallway by colleagues and given some informal advice on local Islamic sensitivities. This was the extent of cultural training that the institution offered’ (ibid).

Without appropriate socio-cultural-religious training and with a lack of clarity and communication from management, even the most qualified and experienced ELT professional faces the possibility of classroom conflict which, if deemed serious enough by the students, could lead to their dismissal and deportation. For management, the inconvenience of covering the resulting teacher-less class and the expense of procuring a replacement, not to mention the possibility of having to deal with negative press coverage of the incident, would seem to highlight the importance of avoiding such incidents. And yet, as highlighted by Mercer (2005), Baalawi (2009) and Raza (2010), senior management at HEIs in the UAE appear to regard professional development as an ‘inessential’ expense, given the ease by which faculty may be replaced. However, as this study has shown, federal HEIs in the UAE contain ELT professionals with many years’ experience teaching successfully in the region; a potential training resource which, unfortunately, appears to be woefully underused when it comes to professional development. This, I would suggest, is linked to the next
implication I would like to discuss: the effect of the ‘corporate’ management system on HEIs in the UAE.

**The ‘Corporate’ Management Model** – This thesis would seem to suggest that the eleven federal HEIs where the data was collected are characterised by the ‘corporate’ style of management noted in studies of HEIs in the UAE by Mercer (2005, 2007), Picard (2007), Baalawi (2009) and Raza (2010). This may result in ‘excessive managerialism’ (Picard, 2007:39) and a ‘punitive organisational culture’ (Mercer, 2005:283) in which faculty may be dismissed without reason at any time, a situation described by Baalawi (2009:70) as the ‘casualisation of the academic workforce’. Being seen as expendable and easily replaced may lead to feelings of marginalisation amongst teachers, and marginalised teachers are unlikely to be very motivated or efficient.

Such a working environment cannot help but add to the prevalent ‘discourse of fear’ this study has highlighted, and, as noted by Raza (2010:133) ELT professionals are also subject to the ‘pressures associated with performance appraisals of teachers … including the amount of time and work involved in extensive documentation of work records and the apprehensions associated with students’ evaluation of teachers.’ One implication of this is that expensive, experienced teachers may be wasting a lot of time on inessential paperwork created by the corporate managerial system instead of concentrating on the language needs of their students. And, as this study has shown, the student evaluations were seen by the respondents as a powerful tool that may be deployed against ‘unpopular’ teachers, and the fear of receiving negative feedback from the students may lead to actions by teachers that are both unethical and damaging to the students’ education such as the unrepresentative marking of assignments, laxity regarding the attendance policy and even changing the marks of internal examinations.

A major implication, therefore, is that federal HEIs in the UAE are employing highly qualified and experienced ELT professionals and then treating them in a manner which may have a negative effect on the language education that their students are receiving. This study has shown how, due to the punitive organisational culture and the climate of fear it engenders, teachers feel unable to raise issues of concern or ‘stand up for their principles’. There appears to be a general perception of there being a lack of support from management, especially regarding students who have wasta (influence). Indeed, amongst respondents from both faculty and management there was perceived to be a direct link between setting high
standards for the students and the risk of being dismissed, resulting in a fearful ‘keep your head down and don’t rock the boat’ attitude. However, given the precarious expatriate status of both faculty and the majority of management, few are willing to challenge the status quo, despite the implications this may have for student success.

Ideals v Pragmatics – Findlow (2001:51) described HEI in the UAE as a ‘struggle between ideals and pragmatics’ and it could be said that the decision to introduce English-medium HEIs into the UAE (and other Gulf Arab countries) was taken for the following pragmatic reasons: the Gulf region had little history of tertiary education; English, as the ‘world language’, would better-equip graduates to compete in the global economy; oil wealth had made it possible to afford such a system; and, finally, HEIs staffed mainly by replaceable expatriates were easy to control and thus less likely to develop into centres of dissent as seen in HEIs in other parts of the world. However, these pragmatic reasons lie side-by-side with the ideals that such an education will not pose any threat to the culture, traditions and beliefs of the UAE. Whether such a system is even possible is debatable, but English-medium HEIs in the UAE need to consider the implications of the efforts of ELT professionals attempting to negotiate the complexities of these, at times, contradictory demands

At a pragmatic level, HEIs in the UAE tend to use easily available international ELT course books and materials due to the lack of mainstream ELT publications targeted at the Arab World. In addition, these institutions rely on international English language examinations such as the IELTS and the TOEFL as benchmarks for student success and as requirements for graduation. The consequences of the continued use of these culturally-laden international English language examinations as benchmarks for graduation also need to be considered, given the poor student success rate in such tests, as does the persistence of the purchase and distribution of thousands of copies of expensive international English language course books which teachers feel they are unable to use due to their potentially problematic cultural content.

HEIs in the UAE need to consider the socialising effect English-medium higher education may be having upon the youth of the country, especially on their attitudes to culture, beliefs, traditions and the Arabic language, issues highlighted in recent studies by Jendli, Troudi & Coombe (2007), Issa & Dahan (2011) and Karmani (2011). Despite the efforts of many ELT professionals to reduce the cultural impact of their work through the use of a strict censorial approach as show by this study, as Khelifa (2010:19) states, ‘many Emirati youth now follow
Western curricula delivered in English by Western and Western-educated faculty, and are therefore heavily exposed to Western thought, ideals, values, and behaviours.’ Khelifa (2010:25) concluded that her survey of Zayed University students in Dubai suggested:

‘that students think that the curriculum puts a higher emphasis on promoting Western values, Western identity, and the English language. They do not think that the curriculum affirms their Arab and Islamic identity or develops their Arabic language skills but rather grounds them firmly in Western culture and thought.’

This corresponds to Sadek’s (2007:43) study of student attitudes at an English-medium university in Abu Dhabi which found that 64% of her respondents stated that their worldviews had changed after learning English. Although some of the respondents in this study seemed unaware of or indifferent toward the potential ideological impact of their work, others showed that it was an issue with which they grappled and which caused concern. Indeed, the idea that they may be ‘spreading Western culture’ through their work was an issue highlighted by some of the respondents as being of especial concern, and one which they attempted to avoid through the ‘deculturisation’ of the materials they use and their pedagogy. However, this ‘deculturisation’ may then adversely affect their students’ ability to pass the culturally-laden international examinations they need to graduate. It therefore appears that the majority of the respondents in this study are following the recommendations of Sadek (2007:59-60), who states that:

‘English teachers should be selective in what they teach Muslim English learners … They should give less attention to teaching models based on native-speakers values and norms, and more to developing culturally neutral, non-exclusive, and learner-oriented EFL/ESL programs.’

This appears to be having the desired effect. In Khelifa’s (2010:28) study of Zayed University students she stated that: ‘the results suggest that, in general, Islamic values seem not greatly affected by a Western education. Young Emirati female students are still preserving religious beliefs and other core values representative of the Arab-Islamic Emirati culture.’ However, that is not to say that a carefully censored English-medium education is having no effect on the students. Khelifa concludes that the students ‘are, however, picking up some Western values such as independence, autonomy, freedom, and assertiveness which do not clash with Islamic beliefs but decidedly signal a major change in culture of the country
and a departure from traditional norms (ibid).’ And Sadek’s (2007:56) study of students in Abu Dhabi found that the respondents ‘felt that being fully assimilated in the Western culture during their learning process could pose a threat to their Arabic cultural, social, and most importantly, religious identity.’ The findings indicate that this is an issue with which some, but by no means all of the respondents struggle.

10.3.3 – Implications for Teacher Training
After having highlighted some of the problems that ELT professionals may face teaching at HEIs in the UAE I feel that this study raises questions about the emphasis placed upon contextualising language teaching in teacher education. I believe that one of the implications of this study is that there is a need for the inclusion in initial EFL training courses of sessions which highlight the importance of adapting methodology and content to suit local social environments, rather than the current emphasis on a ‘one size suits all’ pedagogy. ELT training courses should include analysis of the wide variety of ELT contexts trainees may encounter, preparing them better for some of the pedagogical, cultural and ideological problems they may subsequently face. Indeed, another implication of this study is that an awareness of the ideological implications of ELT should also be provided to trainee teachers including an introduction to some of the major themes emerging from the field of critical applied linguistics. I believe this study has shown that ELT is not a ‘neutral’ occupation and that wherever the ELT professional decides to work there are ideological implications.

10.3.4 – Global Implications
In Arab/Muslim and Anglophone societies ‘Occidentalist’ and ‘Orientalist’ discourses perpetuated by the media may serve to demonise ‘Arabs/Muslims’ or ‘Westerners/Non-Muslims’ as an essentialised Other, increasing the potential for misunderstanding and conflict. Experienced native speaker ELT professionals in the UAE, however, could be said to be situated at the intersection of such discourses, and the knowledge they have gained from negotiating the complexities of intercultural communication in the region could serve to inform the debate on the relationship between Arab/Muslim and Western societies in a rapidly globalising world.
10.3.5 – Theoretical Implications
This study indicates that there is a need to rethink the construction of the native speaker English language teacher in the literature. The huge complexity of the context and the lack of clear cut behaviours, opinions and perspectives from the respondents indicate the multi-layered and multidimensional nature of their identities, identities that all too often are reduced and constrained by essentialising depictions of a problematised and villianised ‘native speaker English teacher’ in the discourses of critical applied linguistics. These identities are also essentialised by what Holliday (forthcoming) describes as the ‘commodified and confining image of the native speaker … reducing them to a list of saleable attributes which are less than what or who they are.’ Holliday also argues that ‘to overcome the problems associated with the native-non-native speaker issue requires a major paradigm-shift in the way in which we think of teachers, students and culture’ (ibid). This study has shown that the wide diversity of attitudes, beliefs and practices of both teachers and students in the rapidly changing and highly complex culture[s] of HEIs in the UAE all defy simple labelling.

Furthermore, although the findings do show examples of attitudes that could be considered examples of ‘the chauvinism inherent in native-speakerism’ (Holliday, 2006), the presence of contrary attitudes amongst the respondents would appear to support Breckenridge & Erling’s (2011) call for a recognition of the multidimensional and multilayered identities of native speaker English teachers in critical applied linguistics, a recognition that hitherto appears to be missing in their essentialised portrayal in many critical studies.

10.4 – Limitations and Suggestions for Extending the Scope of this Study
This study was restricted to 32 native speaker ELT professionals working at 11 HEIs in the UAE, thus limiting its generalisability. In addition, as this is a phenomenological study, it is limited in that the data produced from the interviews consists of not of ‘factual reality’, but is a socio-psychological construction (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:12) by the researcher and the respondents. The subjective nature of the study also extends to the inevitable alignment of the researcher, although by attempting to maintain critical subjectivity I have tried to minimise the effect of researcher bias inherent in my own identity as a native speaker ELT professional. Further research by Gulf Arab and other researchers not from the Anglophone nations of the West into the issues raised by this study is therefore recommended, providing as they may different perspectives on the role of ELT in HEIs in the UAE. The scope of this
study could also be extended by research into the experiences of ‘non-native’ ELT professionals in the region and their attitudes towards the social environment in which they are working.

Although 69% of the participants had previous experience working in other Arab/Muslim countries, further research into contexts outside the UAE are recommended. Investigations into the shaping of expatriate native-speaker profession identities in contexts outside the Arab/Muslim world are also encouraged. The scope of this study could also be broadened by investigations into other educational contexts, such as the provision of ELT by expatriate native-speakers in business and industry or in primary and secondary education. Finally, the issues highlighted in this study could also provide the basis for large-scale quantitative enquiries into the ideological, societal and pedagogic implications of the growing importance of English in the region.
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Koch, R & Smith, C (2006) The Suicide of the West, New York: Continuum


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Appendix 1: Censorship & ELT

Should the following subjects be included in English classes in the Gulf?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>OK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pictures of people in revealing clothing</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>Individualism and materialism</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information / maps about Israel</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>Music and songs</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food that is not Halal (Pork / Bacon)</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>Christian beliefs / attitudes / festivals</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking and alcohol</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>Dancing and parties</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating, Boyfriends/Girlfriends</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>Cigarettes and smoking</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancing and parties</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>Dating, Boyfriends/Girlfriends</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian beliefs / attitudes / festivals</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>Drinking and alcohol</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cigarettes and smoking</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>Pictures of people in revealing clothing</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music and songs</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>Food that is not Halal (Pork / Bacon)</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism and materialism</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Information / maps about Israel</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The suitability of topics included in English classes in the Gulf, (Hudson 2006:89)
Appendix 2: Perceived Barriers to Student Success

Native-speaker Perceptions of Barriers to Student Success in an HEI in the UAE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Motivation</td>
<td>Identified as the central factor holding back student learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Language Skills</td>
<td>Both in English and in Arabic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking Skills</td>
<td>Students were perceived to lack general knowledge, have difficulty making decisions or express opinions, were generally passive and reactive, lacked curiosity and ‘critical thinking’ skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>A fear of enforcing behavioural or academic standards, since student complaints could lead to dismissal, meant that policies on absenteeism, tardiness and other behavioural issues were often ignored by the administration and/or faculty and that pressure was felt to give passing grades to underachieving students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Laptops and mobile phones distracting and potentially disruptive in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Status and Families</td>
<td>Poorer students were seen as harder working, but nepotism and wasa (influence) seen as problematic. Tribal loyalties seen as influencing attitudes to cheating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society &amp; Culture</td>
<td>Local society seen as unwelcoming to critical thinkers, unwilling to take responsibility but quick to assign blame to external forces, and that ‘excessive’ government generosity led to a paternalistic system that relieved citizens of personal responsibility. Social attitudes to cheating and plagiarism were identified as problematic. The culture was seen as suspicious of the unacceptable cultural imprint carried by the English language and Western education and traditional forces meant that a censorial approach to ELT was needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbooks and Curricula</td>
<td>Teachers constantly involved in curriculum and materials development as the British and American textbooks issued to students contained unsuitable and potentially offensive material, including references to pork, pubs, dancing or kissing, and pictures of young women in inappropriate attire.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Summarised from Dahl, 2010:94-101)
## Appendix 3: Participant Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Experience in GCC</th>
<th>Experience in ET</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Doe</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>Dubai</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>20/01/2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Smith</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>15/02/2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Lee</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>KSA</td>
<td>Riyadh</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>12/03/2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Johnson</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>18/04/2023</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Experience in GCC and ET refers to the number of years working in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Emirates (ET) respectively.*
Appendix 4: Initial Pilot Interview

Before we start I would like to say that this interview will be kept in the strictest confidence. Your name will not be used, nor will the name of the town in which you live. I will use pseudonyms for all respondents. The purpose of this interview is to gather research data for a PhD research project on the relationship between Islam and English language teaching in Arabia.

1. Could you tell me something about your educational background?
2. How do you feel in general about the English language?
3. How do you think the use of English in this country will develop over the next 10-20 years?
4. Do you have any worries about the increased use of English by young nationals in this country?
5. How do you feel about Friday sermons being delivered in English in some of the mosques here?
6. Do you think there is any need for an Islamicized form of English, for example to help with prosletysing?
7. The Arabic language is very closely linked to the Holy Quran, yet English does not have this religious base. How difficult do you find it to express common Arabic expressions like ‘Bismillah, Mashallah & Alhamdallulah’ in English?
8. To what extent do you think that the use of English by Muslims is a form of ‘imitating the kaffirs’?
9. Let’s talk now a bit about English teaching. Can you tell me about the various English teachers you have had in your life?
10. Have you ever come across anything you consider ‘unIslamic’ in your English books?
11. Have you ever had a non-Muslim English teacher say or do anything you consider ‘unIslamic’?
12. How much agreement is there in society here about what is ‘unIslamic’? For example, music.
13. To what extent do you think English teachers should censor what they teach?
14. Should non-Muslim teachers be allowed to teach in Arabia? Primary, Secondary, Tertiary?
15. Do you think a language can be taught without its culture?
16. English-speaking countries are very secular – there is a big separation between religion and government, law and education. Religion is seen as a private matter. In Arabia this is not the case. Do you think this could be a problem for non-Muslim teachers?
17. In the west there is a tradition of critical thinking where absolutely everything is questioned. One of the HCT’s graduate outcomes is to encourage critical thinking. Do you think there could be a problem when western ideas of critical thinking are taught in Arabia?

18. Some writers have said that English teaching in Muslim countries is a form of imperialism and that English teachers are as bad as soldiers invading Muslim lands. Do you see the English language as a form of cultural imperialism?
Appendix 5: Initial Pilot Interviews – Transcript & Notes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education (English-medium)</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| F01         | F   | 28  | Bachelor of Education in Information Technology  
Master of Arts in Innovation & Entrepreneurship | Coordinator, Continuing Education Department |
| M01         | M   | 32  | Bachelor of Applied Science in Information Management | Coordinator, Information Technology Department |
| F02         | F   | 22  | Bachelor of Education in TESOL | Trainee College English Teacher |
| M02         | M   | 23  | Bachelor of Applied Science in Information Management | Trainee College Information Technology Teacher |

Pilot Interview F01 – Conducted 17th June 2008, 11.00 am

PH – OK, I think it’s working now ... yes it is, OK. So, before we start I’d like to say the interview will be kept in the strictest confidence. Your name will not be used, nor will the name of the town where you live, so you’ll be completely anonymous ... I’ll use pseudonyms for all respondents so I won’t use your name. Um ... the purpose of the interview is to gather data research for a PhD research project on the relationship between Islam and English language teaching in Arabia.

F01 – OK

PH – So, um, if we could just start with some biographical information ... um ... if you could tell me something about your educational background?

F01 – Well (sigh) ... I’ve studied in ... Do I mention the name or just ... (inaudible)

PH – Hmm

F01 – ‘Kay, I’ve studied, first I started with Higher Diploma here at _____. er, er, here at Higher Colleges of Technology, and then I completed my Bachelor’s in Education . er . for Information Technology ... Now I’m doing my Master’s in Innovation and Entrepreneurship again and with the Higher Colleges of Technology so in ... erm ... since then it is a continuous thing.

PH – OK, and when is the Master’s due to finish?
F01 – Uhm ... We’ll be done by, supposedly, by end of September

PH – Oh

F01 – Yes

PH – That’s soon

F01 – Yes

(Both laugh)

PH – Yes, and, sorry to ask this question, but how old are you now?

F01 – 28

PH – 28, OK, just for the, for the details

F01 – That’s OK, that’s OK, don’t mind

PH – So, how do you feel in general about the English language?

F01 – Um ... In fact I love English

PH – Hm

F01 – Um, since I .. er . I was a child. My mother had nothing to teach us else Quran and English and mathematics, that’s be .. er .. prior to going to school, so she was good in, in, in those three subjects and she was teaching us those, so, you know, um, I found myself very good in English and once I entered the first grade it was, you know, just like kind of piece of cake, nothing, um, um, um, and my teacher was so impressed by my English and, ohhh she already knows all the, you know, alphabet ..erm.. letters and everything, and the numbers in English, so.. couple of words . erm . you know .. er . which and the la .. er . erm.. and . erm . colours. So, erm, you know when I . er. I was very proud of myself so I wanted to devote more and more so . er . this is why . er I think, I think I am very good in English and I LOVE English.

PH – OK, and do you still study at all, or ... practise?

F01 – Yes, yes, yes I do. I love watching, er, movies, in fact I er, um, gain my accent from movies.

PH – Hmm

F01 – So I was practising . er. sin . since I was a child, like just by watching movies, learning the language, learning the pronunciation erm ... reading ... only English . erm . stories and novels ... so, um, ... do? . and, and, and, as being working in such an English speaking environment this helps me more even.

PH – M’kay – And how do you see the use of English in this country developing over the next 10 to 20 years?

F01 – Since we started the . the schools, erm, I I remember my sisters started in, in, in her, you know, doing the English subject, erm, in the fourth grade.

PH – Hmm

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F01 – But then they changed the... you know, the the system, and it is now starting, er, from not only first grade, they, they’re now even teaching them kindergarten... at private schools... So I think, um, the English subject is is one of the main subjects in schools either in government, local or or private schools... erm... most of the government and local, er, sorry, the the private departments, they are using the English as um... an official language for their letters, for... erm, you know, the communication with outsiders... (sigh) Yeah.

PH – OK, you talked about the children doing it. Do you have any worries about the increased use of English by young nationals in the UAE?

F01 - ..... well, .. from my side I say no

PH – OK

F01 - ..Erm, personally with, .. it it’s very good .. for for me to learn English, because if you are .. erm, er .. you know, we are an open country ... erm ... we’re, we’re, we have more expatriates than, than, just, just, you know, the local original .. erm .. Emirati people here in the country and we have to deal with them, we have lots of .. Indians coming here to work, ... foreigners, so, so I think it’s, it’s very good to communicate with them, to use a common language which is, which is the English to communicate either with, with, in inside the country, or even outside. Now everybody.... look, erm, you know, if, if some perso simple things like, erm .. we, we go to ... for holidays we choose ... um .. different countries, it’s not only Arab countries like we don’t go just within the GCC, or let’s say the Middle East countries if, if we can say that .. Syria... um, or, er, Africa, the E, Egypt or Sweden ... we just use .. er, oh, um .. not just, it’s just most of us prefer erm .. cold countries during the summer, so those we find them in the West and we have to have a .. a good English .er . skills or at least we have to have the language to, in order to communicate with them.

PH – OK. Now I’ve often seen children, young small children, Emirati children in the Mall, playing with each other, running around and using English

F01 – Yes.

PH – Now is that worrying, to see little children, brothers and sisters speaking to each other in English?

F01 – It’s not, it won’t be very much worrying if, if they practise Arabic or if they speak Arabic, er, um, you know .. as, as often as they speak English. It’s not they just speak English because Arabic is the main language for us to. er, specially for, for the Holy Quran, to read the Holy Quran ... erm .. I know . some people who, who are born just speaking, you know, . er. English. That it doesn’t mean that they don’t speak Arabic and they don’t understand Arabic, the, their main communication way is in English, I mean ..er.. at home, especially the ..er..specially the ..erm .. the loy .. erm ... royal ..erm .. families, but they do speak Arabic, they learn er .. the Quran, they, they understand it as, as the main ..erm .. subject at home before they go outside like er, er, study it and, erm, Islamic subjects at college or at school.

PH – Talking of Islamic subjects, in some of the mosques in Dubai, um, the Friday sermon at the mosque is given in English, not in Arabic. Um, how do you feel about sermons in mosques being given in English? Not the prayer, but the sermon.

F01 - ... Well .. it’s fair .. I think it’s fair. Those, those, erm, Muslims who are, who do not understand Arabic, they will get benefit of it .. so ... um .. it’s not necessary for all local or Emirati ...um ... to go to that ... um . specific mosque, for example, just to hear the lecture in,
in English, it’s OK with them to hear it in Arabic but it’s for the men who are living here in the UAE, and Muslims, but they do not speak Arabic, or they do not understand a word in Arabic, for example the Indians we, whom we have here, um, but all different nationalities who we have but do not understand very good Arabic they or, you know, um, those, that, those, they do just speak and understand broken Arabic. It will be very useful for them to hear the lecture in English. This, this, I think, I think this is what they need. This is what they want.

PH – OK. And do you think there’s a need for an Islamicised form of English? Um, there, there are Muslim English teachers saying that they should organise a form of English that can be used to talk about Islam and agreement on the correct English to use.

F01 – I think we already have it, and even, even, um, the internet has um, you know, you can access different websites that teach Islamic subjects, teach you will find the Quran, the translated Quran, because to deliver Islam in, in a right way, and, in, in, you know, this is, this is how, what Islam is talking about and this is, er, what er, what Quran talks about and what, what it teaches so I think, erm, erm...

PH – It’s possible to do that in English?

F01 – Possible, yes, it’s very much possible, why not?

PH – OK. Erm, the Arabic language, and the development of the Arabic language is very closely linked to the Holy Quran. Um, yet English does not have this religious base, it’s not a, a language based on a Holy book. So, as an English speaking Muslim how difficult do you find it to express Arabic expressions like, um, inshallah, bismillah, ma’ashallah, alhamdulillah, how difficult is it to say these in English?

F01 – .... Erm, it makes us, er, it makes us think of, you know, we don’t, we just don’t explain it right away, we just think OK, this means, for, for example, um, inshallah, if, if God, if, if Allah wills, or if, if God wants, um, this is how we explain it. I don’t find any difficulties really in, in doing that, erm, and as I said Quran has been translated in English. Lots of people um, um, for example there is Muslim countries who do not speak Arabic at all, but they do understand and memorise the Quran. They understand and memorise it but they don’t speak Arabic at all, they don’t understand a word in Arabic if you speak to them in Arabic, if you communicate, but when they open, open the Quran because they have the translation next to it they know this, this word means such, but I think, um, because they’re not used to, to hear it, maybe, to hear the word or the part or the pronunciation of it, it will be very difficult for them to understand or to, to to realise that this is the same word which, which was mentioned in the Quran. But as I said, to to to explain those expressions is not really, erm, difficult for, for, this is for, personally I see it and, and, um, with those, um, let’s say about the, the my colleagues in the class, they, they don’t find any difficulties explaining it, um, we, we say it absolutely correctly.

PH – Now, um, final question on this subject, um, difficult question, to, to what extent do you think? Muslims who use English could be accused of copying or imitating the kaffir, the unbeliever?

F01 - ....... I .... I .. can you explain that a little more?

PH – Well, the, the, the, the, the, some of the Muslim writers I’ve read, the more extreme ones, or the stricter ones, have said that Muslims must be very careful not to imitate the
unbeliever, not to copy what the unbeliever does, So like in, in .. um, Saudi Arabia Valentine’s Day is forbidden

F01 – Yes

PH – .. because that’s copying the kaffir, or the unbeliever. Could, could using English when you could use Arabic, could that be seen as copying the unbeliever, or the kaffir?

F01 - ...... No .. no because it’s, um ..... Islam is not really that, you know, it restricts you from doing, this is, what’s, what’s haram is haram um ... what’s forbidden is forbidden, but . but there are lots of cases that this is . er . we have to do such and such, it is allowed .. um .. in, in, in just cases, like, er, if, if .. um .. for example .. if a person, if a Muslim .. um .. had a cup of wine, and he didn’t know that this is a wine, .. erm .. OK. then because he didn’t know it is a wine then he won’t be punished for having it because he just drank that one without knowing .. um . There are lots of situations that we do things .. knowing it, but not doing the, the haram things, the forbidden .. erm, erm .. the totally forbidden by, by Islam because this is breaking, breaking our religion .. and .. for us, when, when doing that we, we will ..er . receive a huge, you know, big punishment from Allah .. er .. and maybe go to hell .. so .. um .. you know speaking English is not copying ... er .. you know, the ..er .. the unbelievers .. um . it’s a communication way, and unbelievers can speak Arabic so I don’t think they believe this is forbidden or wrong thing for them. .....um .... even, I think ...... because, as I say a lot of people ... do not speak Arabic .. they speak their own language and maybe the common language in their country, the communication language in their country is English but this does not mean that they, they become unbelievers ... This, this is .. this is a totally normal thing ... It just copying the, the .. er, the unbelievers with what they do .. maybe if they drink .. er, wines or alcohol .. This is, this is, this is what ... er .. wrong and forbidden for us to do ... which .. erm .. erm .. if, if we copy people, unbelievers, we say .. doing something right ... and, erm .. it’s for, for the benefit .. erm .. of everybody then I don’t think it’s even forbidden in .. it’s not, I don’t think .. it IS not forbidden for us.

PH – .. OK. Alright now let’s talk a little about English teaching. Now you said your mother taught you English as a . as a child, yeah?

F01 – Yes

PH – So could you tell me about some of the other English teachers you’ve had in your life ... maybe starting at primary school and those you can remember?

F01 – ... Erm .. Yes, I remember a local .. um .. lady who taught us .. um .. English and I still have got her .. you know, telephone number and I still contact her, I speak to her from time to time .... erm .... Her, her English is .. you know she taught us English, she .. um .. her English was good, but the pronunciation .. erm .. was, was .. different ... um .... I .. never corrected her pronunciation because we believe that this is disrespect .. at class (Both laugh)

PH – OK ... she’s the teacher

F01 – (Laughs loudly) Yes! She’s the teacher

PH – Which grade of school was this? Were you at .. secondary school? Primary school?

F01 – Yes, this was secondary, she’s the one who I remember the most because I still can, you know, talk to her, I guess, I have her, you know .. we still in touch .. er . we are still in touch ... Erm .. you know it’s not correcting her and in as I said ..erm .. if .. whenever she, she
pronounced a word incorrectly .. if we have to speak about a subject around that word, ..erm .. we have to use it, and if I’d been, like, . erm . asked to use it . I, I use it in the right pronunciation, because .. er . (laughs)

PH – So she was Emirati

F01 – She was Emirati, yes

PH – Some of you other English teachers? Where were they from?

F01 – Erm ... Syrian .. erm . I never had an Egyptian . (laughs loudly) .. no Egyptian (laughing) ... teacher, no but, yes .. Syrian and Emirati .. most of the teachers who I had were Syrian in .. er .. in all different levels.

PH – And were they all Muslim?

F01 – Yes, all Muslims

PH – All the way through

F01 – Yes

PH – And how about in Higher Education? .. Your English teachers.

F01 – ... Um .. in higher education I had non-Arabic .. none of them was Arabic .... so um .. Canadians ... I remember you (Both laugh loudly) ...um .. (Clears throat) .. of course you .. I remember Felicity .. British .. the Canadian ...... who was that? .... Hmm, I cannot recall names just but I remember all of them.

PH – Thank you .. Now ... in all of the time you’ve been studying English if you think of the books .. er .. and the materials that we use to teach, have you ever come across anything in the books that you would consider unIslamic? ...... In the books

F01 – ..... Um .... it’s just a ... unIslamic .. I can’t .. remember, but I remember there were lots of ... erm ... articles in the books we were using .. were not, you know .. um .. given in the class .. I remember the Headway .. (laughs loudly) I remember the Headway, I remember it very well .. because it was the first, in the foundation, .. um, it was the first book which we received and all in English .. um .. of course it, you know, higher level .. I don’t mean that we .. the, the school . erm .. syllabus was not in English, it was all in English, of course, it’s just that Headway was with a higher level .. and .. it was so excited to know, to, to discover ..er.. what this book was talking about .. um .. we were bringing the book in the class but we were not using it very often .. and ... I remember when .. just, just after we finished the foundation, the whole year, I sat down during the summer just looking at the book, to not lose my English, to practise. This is how I do it in all, .. er .. after we, we finish every semester .. every academic year. During the summer I have to borrow books or nov, novels, stories, whatever . all in English and read them to keep my, my .. my skills .. Erm .. so I remember that Headway ... I was just going through it .. the book and I remember there were lots of ... um .. reading passages and articles which we didn’t .. er .. come across and we not, .. er .. we were not .. er .. you know .. just we didn’t take that lesson

PH – The teachers wouldn’t use them

F01 – Yes, he didn’t use it .. erm .. use them .. and I thought, I thought why ... why we were given this book? Then, maybe to practise .. and, just for curiosity I remember .. one of the
subjects was about the Christian ... er .... was it the Headway I think, it was about the Christian .. er .. Christian thing ... erm ... I can’t remember what exactly it was about .. but that was .. a little bit like er .. it’s, it’s not our culture it’s not .. erm ..... part of our religion. But I was not .. erm .... You know I didn’t felt bad about it .. because I read that article . I enjoyed it . I learned something new. I wanted to know about different cultures, different religions and their beliefs. We do, we do ... know those beliefs .. er .. exactly .. because we .. we .. we got, you know, .. we were taught at school. We know what Christians believe, we know what Muslims believe, it’s all ... They, they all believe in God .. um .. but, you know, the culture, .. um .. how they do and what they do it’s just .. it was interesting subject I wanted to know.

PH – So ... do you think if the teacher had done that article in the class that might have been a problem?

F01 – For me, no, but maybe for some .. some yes, because .. I remember one of the classmates she was, you know, arguing every single thing the teacher says. Sometimes when we go .. when we have, you know, free time and we go outside the subject .. er .. she just, you know, argues with the, with the Christian . er . teacher . er . whatever she says. When she says, for example, we believe this and this .. (Changes voice to louder and angrier tone) ‘Why do you believe that, we, it’s supposed to be this way because this is what we learnt it and how we learnt it would be!’ .. (Resumes normal voice) but .. um .. I didn’t like her way .. um .. to deliver the information and we’ve been asked, in the Holy Quran, that we don’t deliver the information in such way.

PH – This is the student you didn’t like

F01 – The student, yes, the student. And, and the teacher was really polite and she just, you know .. she, she was a good listener and she was and .. and I, then, then she changed the topic because normally if I ... well, basically if I was her I would do the same.

PH – OK .. so we talked about the books, now have you ever had a non-Muslim English teacher say .. or do anything in class that you considered unIslamic?

F01 – Consider Islamic?

PH – UnIslamic

F01 – UnIslamic

PH – ... Hmm .. are there any incidents of anything a teacher said or did .. in the class?

F01 – .... Hmm ..

PH – It could be me .. or any of your teachers

F01 – .... Erm ..... well, it’s, it’s, it’s not an English teacher .. um ... it was, it, um ... a teacher from Harvard Business School who we had .. er .. for the, you know, for the Masters Program .. he taught us marketing, entrepreneurial marketing, and .. the, the, the first time I came .. erm .. he was, you know he asked me about my name and I told him my name is ____ , and he said (Changes voice) ‘That’s! ... I know that name!’ (Resumes normal voice) and then he went to Wikipedia .. just to remember, you know, that, that name and where he, he .. found that name and then he said (Changes voice) ‘Yes! It’s Moses’ sister!’ (Resumes normal voice) It’s Moses’ sister’s name and .. um .. it wasn’t an unIslamic thing .. for me, you know, I
found it OK, you know... that’s normal but then he... you know, started talking about... er... Moses and the story, and this is her name and I told him that... er... erm... we have Moses’ story in the Holy Quran but we don’t have that... er... we do know that... er... his sister... was there and she, she, she put him in the box and, and the Nile and the river and everything... we have all the story but we don’t have her name... in, in the Quran, and it wasn’t mentioned in ANY Islamic book that her name was... and basically... was the name of... um... you know, who you call... but we don’t call her... we call her... erm... I felt he was, he didn’t like what I said... because he just said (Changes voice) ‘Noo! It can’t be!! It’s...’... er... (Resumes normal voice) I said ‘OK.’ (Laughs) It was not an unIslamic thing, I believe... it, it, it... that just was one, one thing and I... err... it wasn’t offended... I wasn’t offended or something, you just... this is how it goes... HE reacted.

PH – So if you had an English teacher, a non-Muslim English teacher who talked about Christianity in English class would... would that be a problem?

F01 – As I said for me, no,... but with some, some people it could be a problem, maybe... Because I’m the first one, maybe if you interview other people with other different minds, I think they would mind... maybe you will find lots of... um... different ideas... um... they will say yes... but however we, we already know about this religion, we know... um... what they celebrate, what they believe in and it’s all they believe in God and after all this is what we believe.

PH – A more general question, now, we’ve been talking about haram things

F01 – Yes

PH – in English class. How much agreement is there... in the UAE and in... Khaliji countries... How much agreement is there amongst the people about what is haram? For example, music... is music haram?.... Do people agree?

F01 – .... Um.... OK. (Laughs loudly) I agree with you, yeah, no, no.. not.. not all of them agree that music is haram.... um.... the d... there were... erm... you know in the past, and nowadays as well, there, there were different beliefs with the Sheikhs who we have... the, the most... religious people who, you know, study basically Islam... Islam and understanding of everything in Islam... um... there were different opinions... they said, some said it’s just, like... forbidden... um... which we say... um... it’s not haram but... um... preferable we don’t

PH – M... M... Mukhrub?

F01 – Mukhrub! Yes! Mukhrub. You know, preferably we just don’t go close to it, so the saying in Arabic is whatever is Mukhrub it’s preferable we don’t touch it, we don’t go across so it’s, it’s... we, let’s basically be on a safe side and doesn’t have to be haram as it’s, it’s... after all not something that Allah might like... um... if we do. Allah and... and the majority say yes... they... er... music and singing is totally haram...er... I believe, yes, it’s, it’s, it’s haram... and as you say there’re lots of singers, Khaliji singers and Arab singers who sing songs with music and everything, so it’s just different ideas, they just would like to use their talent, they don’t wanna lose it... others who believe in, that music is haram, they use their talent but without music. We call these... um... um... some kind of melodies... um... nasheet

PH – Nasheet

F01 – Nasheet. This is what we call it, you know, just singing... without music.
PH – So ... if, if there’s not really agreement about what is haram ... what kind of problems does that pose for the non-Muslim teacher in this region? ... What advice would you give a teacher who is not a Muslim and isn’t really sure if something is haram or not?

F01 – ... (Laughs) .. (Laughing) Take it or leave it! (Laughs loudly) ... No, we, I would say ... um ....

PH – I mean, to what extent should English teachers censor what we teach and what we do in the classroom? Should we be censoring ourselves?

F01 – ... Um ... Mainly I would say for every English teacher, if they’re going to play music, if they think to play music in the class, preferably they don’t. They .. really, I prefer they DON’T do it in class because some, really I would say that, some people do believe that this is haram and they don’t listen to music at home .. For me, if I’m in a public place and I hear ... and, and there’s music going on, I, I .. I have some kind, really, I control myself to not even, really, I don’t realise that there is ... (My mobile phone goes off)

PH – Sorry

F01 – It’s OK

PH – I should have turned that off

F01 – That (laughs) there is music going on or, you know, playing in the background because ... I just, you know .. because I don’t listen to music, I don’t like listening to music I just get .. get used to that, OK

PH – So, apart from music, do you think .. with other subjects and things that English teachers should always censor what they are going to teach?

F01 – ... Um ...

PH – Or what they say?

F01 – Censor .. I would say be careful .. more careful .. and .. it’s the, the beautiful thing, really, I hear from all .. erm .. I heard and I keep hearing here .. erm .. from all English teachers and from everybody, all the teachers here in the colleges is that they apologise right away for ... erm, you know, if they .. you know, if, if, if they’re offending something or they’re .. er .. hurting somebody’s feelings .. so, um, please forgive me or some teachers do ask before they do something .. um .. I’m going to do this thing so .. would you mind? ... Now you remember that Ha .. Harvard university teacher, the non-Islamic thing he did was .. it, erm, it was a normal thing and everybody can watch these, these types of .. um, .. er .. advertisements, but the topic he brought was .. a shaver for women and the advertisement was .. (laughs in an embarrassed way) .. No .. because we, we, we are a mixed class and he’s a male .. if, if .. let’s say for example if the teacher was female .. and all the students from the same gender, females .. they might accept it but in an .. a .. you know .. um ... let’s say .. 70% accept it, but 30% could you know, like, think in a different way then .. why is the teacher doing that? Because this shaving were .. was not only in the face but was in the different places .. and .. erm .. they .. I .. I didn’t watch that movie .. it was NO! NO!

PH – Very haram

F01 – It was NO! NO! It was NO! NO! For me. I didn’t watch that movie! (laughs) And he apologised, but it was still that, erm, you know that you came to an Arab .. um .. country, to a
Muslim country .. You should have .. changed that case, maybe you could bring another case, but not that in particular because you’re not in a foreign country that would accept it.

PH – So should non-Muslim teachers be allowed to teach in Arabia?

F01 – (Surprised) Yes, why not? Because we .. we .. we bring teachers for their qualifications, for their knowledge, we don’t bring them for being Muslims or not Muslims

PH – OK

F01 – Erm ... It’s, it’s very good for everybody to learn .. to und .. about the other cultures because .. as .. as ... one day they come to us perhaps another day we will go to them, .. and we might live there for, for a long time ... erm ... the same we’ve got along .. let’s say I’m doing my PhD. The PhD is three years or maybe I decide to stay for a little bit longer, maybe four years .. I have to understand their culture .. the, the, the Nos and Yesses I have to do in that country .. before .. if I go there and make mistakes perhaps the mistakes won’t be forgiven. (Both laugh)

PH – OK ... Well, if you’re in England and you, you go to the front of the queue of people? .. No, that’s not forgiven.

F01 – Really? (Both laugh) Yeah, I know! In the line if they are there ...

PH – So do you think a language can be taught without its culture?

F01 – English can be taught without ...?

PH – its culture. Do you think English as a language can be taught or can be used without looking at the culture of English speaking countries?

F01 – Erm ... Yes? ... I think. But .. um .......... everybody who, who can, you know, who goes, you know, to, to, to, to different countries I think they bring their culture with them, so, like, um .. the simplest thing is .. their clothes .. um ... it will be, like, pretty obvious from their shape or the look, their look .. OK, you would know that, OK, this person is Arabic or this person is, is .. American, this person is British, but here in the colleges we, we are wearing just uniform .. you know, the tie and, and ... and that’s OK but ... erh ... can the language be taught without the culture? Yes .. I think .. Yes, it’s not necessary we understand the culture because we can read about it later, we can .. you know ... watch it and, and, and get the topic and watch that in the television .. we’ve got the different ... um ....

PH – So if you just learn the language then it’s up to you to discover .

F01 – Yes, the culture. That’s, that’s OK.

PH – Now, English-speaking countries, especially Britain . um . Australia, not America so much, um . are very secular .. um, that means there’s a big separation between religion, on one side .. and government, law, education on the other.

F01 – OK

PH – A very big separation. Religion ... in English speaking countries is seen as a very private matter.

F01 – Uhuh
PH – It’s nothing to do with the govern ... personally I think it is because of the hundreds of years of religious wars we’ve had, between Protestants, Catholics and now people just don’t talk about it and we have the government but it’s not religious.

F01 – Uhuh.

PH – In Arabia this is obviously not the case

F01 – Yes

PH – Islam is part of everything

F01 – Yes

PH – in life. But for Westerners religion is not, there’s a lot of your life that has nothing to do with religion. Your religious life is very private and you don’t talk about it.

F01 – Yes

PH – Do you think this could be a problem for non-Muslim teachers? That they don’t understand how important Islam is? Or how wide Islam is in society?

F01 – (Laughs) You ...

PH – Sorry .. long question

F01 – (Laughs) You’re the best person to, to, to answer this question because .. um, of being from different religion and you came here and you, you understood our religion. A lot of people do respect Islam and they ... love how Muslims behave .. they .. um .. lots of things they, you know, they .. um .. you know, surprises them because .. um .. how could this person .. you know, whatever .. um .. let’s say for example .. the families .. They still don’t believe that .. err .. we’ve got extended families .. still ... you know, at home and .. parents with the grandparents are staying in the same family with their grandsons .. They still don’t, you know .. they can’t believe that it’s happening but I think that they do respect it because of the strong relationship ... um .. the Muslims have between each other. About the religion we don’t have anything to be .. to feel ashamed on. This is our religion, this is how we pray, this is how we do it, this is how we respect people, this is how we .. we .. we learnt lots of beautiful things from our religion and it is a beautiful religion .. um .. Respecting people is the priority, is the main thing .. um .. what we do is for ..... um ... you know, for the sake of, of .. er .. er .. seeking heaven .. and, you know, making Allah ... be ... be ... erm .. you know .......... erm ... acceptance in heaven, and be proud and happy, happy of us ... Um, whatever we do is just .. um .. to not ... we do believe inside that this, this world is gonna end in ... in ... in ...

PH – Judgement day

F01 – Yes. In just one day it’s gonna end, we will not be living forever and even if we die we have to die with good will, we have to die with good .. er .. work, we have to have good wills with us.

PH – OK. I’ve just got two more questions.

F01 – Of course.
PH – One of the graduate outcomes at the college here is to encourage students to be critical thinkers

F01 – Mmm-hmm

PH – Now, in the West the tradition of critical thinking means that absolutely everything..

F01 – Mmm-hmm

PH – Everything is questioned. That you accept nothing, you question everything, you want scientific proof for everything. Do you think there could be a problem when this Western idea of critical thinking is encouraged in education in Arabia?

F01 – No, not at all. In fact, when we were... you know, when I joined the college we were encouraged to do the critical thinking. I loved it and I found... um, you know... a lot of things that... um... answers to a lot of things. We are also encouraged at school but in a very limited things, like... do not ask about like... um... um... um... What’s Allah? What’s God? Do not ask about those things because there you will go very... erm... you know, far, and you might be unbeliever, because of we say that the Devil might interfere with your thinking... um... but critical thinking? Yes! We can think about a lot of things... it’s the television, now, the internet, it’s providing everything. Whatever we, we... even if we would like to know this halal or haram we just, just go to the internet and we can... you know...

PH – Online fatwa

F01 – Yes, we can know the answers. Online fatwa. We know this, these and simply... erm... if you don’t believe that you still can... you know, there are lots of fatwa programs and on the television and, you know, just call lots of sheikhs... around... just call them and ask. If you don’t believe one, you know, you have to double and triple check.

PH – M-kay, Um... My last question... um... it’s a political one.

F01 – Mmm-hmm

PH – The last seven years, especially, the English speaking countries, especially America, Britain, and the Muslim world, have had difficulties, and there have been wars, and occupations, and some writers have said that English teaching in Muslim countries is a form of imperialism and that English teachers... first come the soldiers, then come the English teachers and that basically we are invading Muslim lands and that by teaching our language we are forcing the Muslims to learn English. Do you see English as a form of imperialism and being conquered by the Western powers?

F01 – No (Laughs) I don’t!

PH – OK, these are mostly Western writers who write this...

F01 – Yes, yes, yes, right.

PH – I mean what’s your impression of this idea of... um, you know, they called us like soldiers teaching the language. What’s your opinion?

F01 – I would say as long as we save our language, we speak our own language, we understand our language properly... um... keep the religion, the Quran, the Holy Quran, understand it... you know we, we... we won’t really be affected by the language we have to
use this language because it is a common language in the world ... Not everybody understands Arabic, not everybody understands Turkish but the common language, the communication language in the world is English, so even if I go to a non-English speaking .. er .. er. country .. I would still communicate with the people in English because they don’t speak Arabic either. So .. um, um ..... maybe ... if .. um .. if the English teachers start bringing their religion and their religious thoughts and, and force the Arabs and Muslims to believe as they do believe as if they wasn’t a Muslim ... re .. religion .. this way I would say .. this is no .. um .. this is what we don’t accept. However, everybody comes to this country, they do respect the culture, they understand, you know ... especially the teachers! ... For us the teacher is taking the Prophet’s place because he is delivering a message, delivering the knowledge and we get benefit out of that, this is for our sake, for our benefit ... why we are diffusing that? It’s just, as I said, if something is taught which offends, or kill our culture, kill, kills the religion .. the, the beautiful thoughts about a specific religion, even if this person is saying diff .. wrong things about the Christians we won’t accept it. Because as Muslims we believe in all religions, in all religions we don’t like .. er .. believe in Islam only. It is ... we will be considered non-Muslims if we believe only in Islam and we drop those other religions. We believe that there was the Bible and there was .. er .. Jesus, but it’s just with different names .. um .. it’s all mentioned in the Holy Quran. And the stories we understand no matter what the others and, you know ... think, what, what they think differently, how, how the culture has been changed in your country, how the society has been changed, your beliefs but it’s still, like, we all worship one God.

PH – So, just like as a follow-up to the last question, do you think that English has now moved beyond being the language of the British and the Americans? Do you think it is more than that in the world today?

F01 – Hmmmm ..... it is the business language. It’s the .. the .. the finance, the .. yes, it’s not just the English English language to learn, to learn it and to understand its structure and to write it. No, it’s the business language, it’s ... it’s almost interfering in everything. We don’t say that we don’t have business Arabic, we do have it, it just ... erm ... yes, we can communicate outside the centre. I keep repeating that it’s not the Arabic that is the common language worldwide. No way would I go to America and I would force them to speak Arabic and they would understand me when I say and speak something in Arabic .. um .. so we have to communicate with them in English.

PH – Hmm .. so how, just to follow up on that point, so how do you feel when you have British or Americans who come to the UAE ... and don’t speak Arabic?

F01 – It’s OK

PH – It’s OK?

F01 – (Laughs loudly) It’s OK for us ... because they are guests and they are not living here forever. Should they wish to learn Arabic we don’t stop them ... erm, truly there are lots of foreigners who came here, learnt Arabic, loved the language and also learnt our religion and they became Muslims. So .. you’ll find lots of ... we, we welcome everybody. We welcome everybody and if somebody ... erm .. you know, would like to learn Arabic we would teach him, would like to learn more about the language, sorry, the religion, the society, the culture .. we also teach them in purpose like .. not in purpose it’s just like .. um .. maybe this person is interested in this religion, in Islam, and he would like to know more about ... er .. you know, the Holy Quran and how it is .. if, if he becomes Muslim then we, you know, we welcome him. Yeah.
PH – Thank you, thank you very much _______.

F01 – Any time.

PH – Before we finish is there anything you would like to add, any advice you could give me on the PhD? Do you think I am heading in the right direction with this?

F01 – Yes, I believe yes because it’s all about teaching English and ... yeah. Keep it up, I think you will do a real ... a real big research about this and it will be successful.

PH – Well, I’ll have to write my book.

F01 – (Huge laugh) Yes!

PH – Thank you very much.

Pilot Interview – F02

1. Could you tell me something about your educational background?

   Last year B Ed st - 22

2. How do you feel in general about the English language?

   Really I think it’s very important – I love learning the language and if you learn a language you need to learn something of the history of it – Each day there is something new

3. How do you think the use of English in this country will develop over the next 10-20 years?

   There is a huge emphasis on the use of English – To apply for a job you need to have English skills. There is a huge push from the govt. to learn more English – in all subject areas

4. Do you have any worries about the increased use of English by young nationals in this country?

   Yes – If they start to push English on the youngsters, they learn the ability to use their first language properly, to write well – They can start learning English, but not in KG, but there should be more focus on Arabic

5. How do you feel about Friday sermons being delivered in English in some of the mosques here?

   There is a multicultural society so it is OK in some mosques, but not all of them – Only for Muslims who do not speak the language

6. Do you think there is any need for an Islamicized form of English, for example to help with prosletysing?

   Yes – we need to be able to present our identity and our culture and our religion well
7. The Arabic language is very closely linked to the Holy Quran, yet English does not have this religious base. How difficult do you find it to express common Arabic expressions like ‘Bismillah, Mashallah & Alhamdallulah’ in English?

For people who live here a long time they understand these expressions, but for visitors it is a lot more difficult.

8. To what extent do you think that the use of English by Muslims is a form of ‘imitating the kaffirs’?

(Again please) For me it is not imitating because our prophet urged us to learn the languages of others – Take the good and leave the bad – It’s not imitating it’s learning.

9. Let’s talk now a bit about English teaching. Can you tell me about the various English teachers you have had in your life?

Teachers mostly from Egypt – Mostly focused on grammar and vocab for 10 years, but not for communication – There is no point knowing the vocab and grammar without knowing how to communicate. The accent of westerners gave us a huge exposure to the English language – We started at college to hear the good language ...

...the way of pronunciation we learnt at school was not correct, we found out.

10. Have you ever come across anything you consider ‘unIslamic’ in your English books?

Up to high school, no – But at college, yes – Like pictures, dating and wine and these things are not acceptable.

11. Have you ever had a non-Muslim English teacher say or do anything you consider ‘unIslamic’?

No – I don’t think so – If they do, it’s because they don’t know, they don’t mean to offend us – I can’t remember an incident – And they always apologize if they do – It’s just ignorance.

12. How much agreement is there in society here about what is ‘unIslamic’? For example, music.

That’s a good one! In the UAE we listen to music, but in Saudi they are more strict – They follow the true rules – The new generation is falling apart – They think being modern is copying people in the USA or the UK – They copy without thinking – One time the teacher did a song – One said she didn’t want to attend the class – Then half the class said we want to stop – But if the purpose of a song is learning then it is OK.

13. To what extent do you think English teachers should censor what they teach?

When they first come here they will get orientation – They need to have background information about what to avoid, it will make their jobs much easier – The students might not understand and get offended – Because you come here you need to understand the ground you are standing on and what is good and bad or it could reach the parents and cause problems.
14. Should non-Muslim teachers be allowed to teach in Arabia? Primary, Secondary, Tertiary?

Yes – Native speaker teachers are a benefit for us – *We don’t want our students to think in a box – Teachers bring new ideas*

15. Do you think a language can be taught without its culture?

English is now a world language, it is not related to a certain culture

16. English-speaking countries are very secular – there is a big separation between religion and government, law and education. Religion is seen as a private matter. In Arabia this is not the case. Do you think this could be a problem for non-Muslim teachers?

Yes – *If they don’t understand how strongly Islam is linked to our lives it could be a problem – Even for the smallest thing in life we think about how it is related to Islam – Teachers should understand this*

17. In the west there is a tradition of critical thinking where absolutely everything is questioned. One of the HCT’s graduate outcomes in to encourage critical thinking. Do you think there could be a problem when western ideas of critical thinking are taught in Arabia?

No – when we come to religion we have proof in the Quran and the Hadith, there is no questioning of that, but critical thinking skills could relate to other subjects and be useful. There was the Danish cartoon incident at ZU, the teacher wanted to use critical thinking and she was fired – Islam is black and white – We do not have to think and to question any of the rules and why this or that happens – we do not question this. Do not discuss religion unless students bring it up – We do not need to discuss this

18. Some writers have said that English teaching in Muslim countries is a form of imperialism and that English teachers are as bad as soldiers invading Muslim lands. Do you see the English language as a form of cultural imperialism?

*No, I don’t think so. We want to develop and need to understand what is happening in the world. English is not just related to England or America or Australia. It is not imperialism but a way of learning and finding out what happens around the world. For new teachers they really need to understand about the culture and religion – a simple action could cause a big problem. Don’t judge Islam because of what is reported on the western news – there is a new generation with new ideas nowadays.*

**Pre-PhD Interview Questions – M01**

1. Could you tell me something about your educational background?

   *Just finished Bachelor’s – Age 32*

2. How do you feel in general about the English language?
Second language for us that we must know to communicate worldwide – It helped me a lot in my travels – Business trips

3. How do you think the use of English in this country will develop over the next 10-20 years?

UAE has a mixed population so UAE nationals need English to communicate with them – Now they started English in Kindergarten – Higher standard than previous years – His daughter now in KG2 and has started learning English, things he didn’t study

4. Do you have any worries about the increased use of English by young nationals in this country?

No, but in Dubai some nationals use English in the family and forget Arabic and writing and grammar is not good – we are forgetting our mother language – Doesn’t encourage English amongst his kids at home – There needs to be a balance

5. How do you feel about Friday sermons being delivered in English in some of the mosques here?

This is a change – We prefer the khutbar to be in Arabic – Muslims should know Arabic as the Qu’ran is in Arabic

6. Do you think there is any need for an Islamicized form of English, for example to help with proslytising?

Yeah – That is already happening – It’s on TV (Peace Channel) – You cannot pray or read surah or ayat in a language other than Arabic

7. The Arabic language is very closely linked to the Holy Quran, yet English does not have this religious base. How difficult do you find it to express common Arabic expressions like ‘Bismillah, Mashallah & Alhamdallulah’ in English?

It’s difficult to explain religious things and giving the exact meaning is very difficult – Giving them the message in English is very difficult – If this is brought up in English I will be silent, I cannot do that

8. To what extent do you think that the use of English by Muslims is a form of ‘imitating the kaffirs’?

(Please explain – Valentine’s Day banned in Saudi example) – Big sigh – Language? I don’t think so – I don’t know how to answer this – We use English as a tool for communication

9. Let’s talk now a bit about English teaching. Can you tell me about the various English teachers you have had in your life?

Mostly Egyptian and Syrian – Majority Muslims – The way they teach was not that good – We used to just copy and memorize things, not learn to communicate – In my work I discuss things with Westerners – Western teachers are better for us – I need to speak – The problem sometimes was the teachers were different (English, American,
Australian etc) – The accents and some of the vocab are different, which is sometimes a problem – One African American teacher spoke too fast and we had to ask him to repeat and repeat and repeat

10. Have you ever come across anything you consider ‘unIslamic’ in your English books?

Yes, sometimes they show us wine – *Some people are religious and they don’t like this* – Sometimes if we have a lady teacher who is not dressed properly some students *don’t* want to look at her – One listening activity was about going to a bar and we had to write down things about wine – That was not good

11. Have you ever had a non-Muslim English teacher say or do anything you consider ‘unIslamic’?

*Long pause ... Not really, but we had a discussion about profit and interest in economics, and the teacher was comparing with Islamic finance – Why did he have to specify Islam? We do not have the language to argue about this*

12. How much agreement is there in society here about what is ‘unIslamic’? For example, music.

For real Muslims who know, yes there is agreement that music is haram and wine is haram – *Look, Paul, we have a saying in Arabic: ‘The mosque is here, the bar is here – This is the choice of a human being’ – How to deal with disagreements about what is haram? This comes from whether the parents taught them – I will not interrupt the class if a teacher mentions something haram, but I will give the teacher information later – One lady teacher talked about sex: what to do if you are at work and like a lady and the teacher said the word ‘sex’ and we did not like the word – They should not be so direct

13. To what extent do you think English teachers should censor what they teach?

*It’s like a business – I cannot run a business in another country without knowing the culture – The teachers should be aware of a lot of things before they come here – There are things between the lines that they need to know*

14. Should non-Muslim teachers be allowed to teach in Arabia? Primary, Secondary, Tertiary?

15. Do you think a language can be taught without its culture?

16. English-speaking countries are very secular – there is a big separation between religion and government, law and education. Religion is seen as a private matter. In Arabia this is not the case. Do you think this could be a problem for non-Muslim teachers? These questions were not asked

17. In the west there is a tradition of critical thinking where absolutely everything is questioned. One of the HCT’s graduate outcomes is to encourage critical thinking. Do you think there could be a problem when western ideas of critical thinking are taught in Arabia?
No problems – That will lead us to have deeper understanding – The more you ask, the more you are aware, whether you are Muslim or non-Muslim – In our culture if you ask about religion people would love to talk about it – You know what you can talk about in class and what you can’t

18. Some writers have said that English teaching in Muslim countries is a form of imperialism and that English teachers are as bad as soldiers invading Muslim lands. Do you see the English language as a form of cultural imperialism?

As far as I know, No – We don’t see it like that – Westerners are the people who can teach us English in a better way – It is their mother language and it they know it better than anyone else – However, I hear in private schools some teachers are trying to affect students’ brains – The students are imitating Western styles – They are not wearing dishadashas – They do not know what is right

Any advice? You have plenty of questions – Maybe you can improve – You shouldn’t give English such a negative image – If there is a discussion about religion in class that could be bad – There might be a discussion, but the teacher should change the subject – Is there any reason to discuss these things in class? If you want to know more about the religion, go to the proper people, don’t talk about it with your students – Don’t use examples about Islam – They say if you want to discuss with a Westerner you need to go for a drink because it’s his culture. Why? It’s not necessary. You can go to Starbucks. Success depends on how open-minded people are

Pre-PhD Interview Questions – M02

1. Could you tell me something about your educational background?

Wanted to be a pilot, but eyesight was bad – Did HD and has just finished a Bachelor’s degree – Local school

2. How do you feel in general about the English language?

As you know my mother is English so it’s my mother tongue so I can’t say much about it

3. How do you think the use of English in this country will develop over the next 10-20 years?

It’s not taught to us how important it is at High School – Only when you leave school do you realize how important it is – Arabic is only one of the prime languages – Is that good or bad, I don’t know

4. Do you have any worries about the increased use of English by young nationals in this country?

Learning you own language has a national pride to it – I met someone who is half English/Arabic but cannot speak Arabic and it is a frustration for him – There’s nothing wrong with being bilingual, but remember that people should take care of
both languages – *English is important as a global language, but don’t forget your mother tongue*

5. How do you feel about Friday sermons being delivered in English in some of the mosques here?

*It’s good for a lot of expats but should be for non-Arabic speakers only*

6. Do you think there is any need for an Islamicized form of English, for example to help with prosletysing?

I think that is already there, but the Arabic version should always be used – English can only convey 80-90% of the meaning – Keep the Arabic

7. The Arabic language is very closely linked to the Holy Quran, yet English does not have this religious base. How difficult do you find it to express common Arabic expressions like ‘Bismillah, Mashallah & Alhamdallulah’ in English?

You would use the same words – Non-muslims pick things up very quickly – In the USA last year I explained the meaning a few of these things and people really appreciated it

8. To what extent do you think that the use of English by Muslims is a form of ‘imitating the kaffirs’?

*I don’t – There are some, more uneducated, people who say that – English is the language of the world – You shouldn’t stay in the dark and shut the doors – In Islam it is encouraged to learn other languages and about other cultures. English now belongs to everyone*

9. Let’s talk now a bit about English teaching. Can you tell me about the various English teachers you have had in your life?

Laughs – *Local school wasn’t challenging enough* – I felt I just bypassed it. I could speak fluently but we were never taught to write properly – At college it became a lot more difficult. The teachers were mainly Egyptians or Palestinians at school.

10. Have you ever come across anything you consider ‘unIslamic’ in your English books?

Not really, no. One time I came back from a trip to England and I mentioned the churches I had seen and the teacher became very angry about that.

11. Have you ever had a non-Muslim English teacher say or do anything you consider ‘unIslamic’?

No. There was a class about the different sexes – *I wasn’t bothered by it* – It was educational. *If you talk about things in an educated way it’s OK.*

12. How much agreement is there in society here about what is ‘unIslamic’? For example, music.
They agree music is haram, but this is bypassed. Most people accept music, but there might be one or two people who disagree. This term there was a mutawwa in my Bachelor’s class who didn’t like what the female teacher was wearing and he talked to her supervisor about her clothing.

13. To what extent do you think English teachers should censor what they teach?

*It depends on the environment. It depends on your audience. I wouldn’t want the teacher to censor – it doesn’t bother me, but teachers need to consider their audience*

14. Should non-Muslim teachers be allowed to teach in Arabia? Primary, Secondary, Tertiary?

15. Do you think a language can be taught without its culture?

The culture is part of the fun of it. In Japan, for example, you need to learn the culture to understand the culture, bowing when greeting, for example.

16. English-speaking countries are very secular – there is a big separation between religion and government, law and education. Religion is seen as a private matter. In Arabia this is not the case. Do you think this could be a problem for non-Muslim teachers?

They have to understand that in the Muslim world religion is everywhere. In the West these things are put into different boxes but here there is one box – Islam – and everything has to fit around this.

17. In the west there is a tradition of critical thinking where absolutely everything is questioned. One of the HCT’s graduate outcomes is to encourage critical thinking. Do you think there could be a problem when western ideas of critical thinking are taught in Arabia?

*Yeah. That’s a part of life. It’s good to question and it makes you a better person. E.g. one guy I know met someone proselytising Christianity in the USA so he went to the imam because he couldn’t answer her questions and doing this made him a stronger Muslim as he actually got the answers. Some imams are close-minded, but if you have a good imam critical thinking is a good thing.*

18. Some writers have said that English teaching in Muslim countries is a form of imperialism and that English teachers are as bad as soldiers invading Muslim lands. Do you see the English language as a form of cultural imperialism?

Many people use the term Americanization and I have mixed feelings about this – Many people see this as ‘modernizing’ but I wonder – is it really modernizing or is it increasing control? But I think it is just part of globalization and having a common language. Having these two powers (UK & USA) historically so strong has had an impact, for example, the British control of the UAE had an impact, but now it is commercial – Will people now start learning Chinese now the American economy is going down? English is everywhere – it is not going anywhere – We have Arabish on text messaging.
What’s the main goal of your research? I want to get rid of the bad image of Arabs and find out how to be a good teacher and how to avoid the problems of people getting sacked. - OK, well, a teacher should come here with an open mind and realize he is not in his own country – Learn about the environment – Who they are talking to has to be taken into account. Here at a men’s college you could cause problems or even start fights by talking about football! It’s about the audience. Go in with an open mind – Don’t take your own culture into the classroom – The UAE is western-looking on the outside but on the inside not so much. Being open-minded is the main thing.
Appendix 6: Pilot Qualitative Research Interview

Introduction

Before we start I would like to say that this interview will be kept in the strictest confidence. Your name will not be used, nor will the name of the town in which you live. I will use pseudonyms for all respondents. I will be recording this interview as well as writing down notes. The purpose of this interview is to gather research data for a PhD research project on the role of culture in the teaching of English in the GCC countries.

Biographic Detail

Could we start with some biographic detail – where are you from, how long have you been teaching, where have you taught etc.?

The Interview

First Experiences – Thank you. Now, I’d like you to tell me, in as much detail as you can, what you can remember of your early teaching in (first country in GCC) Listen carefully for any details that show attitudes towards the culture – Use follow up and probing questions (Do you have any more examples of this? etc) Go for rich description (So how did you feel when ...? / So what did you do ...?)

Attitudes to the region – How different was your experience of living in (first GCC country) from your perceptions of it before you came out here?

Attitudes back home – To what extent do you feel your friends and family back home understand what life in this part of the world is like? (Go for specific details)

Teaching methodology – Could you compare your method of teaching before you came to the Gulf with the way you teach now? (What has caused this change? Tell me about what you do in class.)

Teaching materials – I’d like to introduce another topic now (Ramble ending statement – Could be used anywhere) OK, we’ve been talking about how you teach, but I’d like to turn now to what you teach? Are you using the same materials you have always used or have you developed new materials?

Critical incidents – Could you tell me about any experience you’ve had, or you have heard about, where there has been a problem in the classroom? (Go for rich description (So how did you feel when ...? / So what did you do ...?) Use interpreting questions (You mean that ... / Is it correct to say you feel ... etc.) to prevent possible misinterpretation

Reflections on teaching in the Gulf – Knowing what you know now, after ___ years teaching in this part of the world, what advice would you give a young teacher from (your country) coming out to teach here for the first time?

Debriefing / Thanks

Briefly recap any points to ensure I have the right interpretation. Invite them to add anything they want. Thank them for their participation.
Appendix 7: The Interview Guide

What Kind of Questions Can I Ask?

**Introducing Questions** – “Can you tell me about ...? Do you remember an occasion when ...? Could you describe in as much detail as possible a situation in which ...?” Hopefully, these will yield spontaneous, rich descriptions.

**Follow-up Questions** – Use direct questions of what has been said or a nod, an ‘mmm’ or a pause. Repeat significant words. Listen to what is important to the subjects.

**Probing Questions** – “Could you say something more about that? Can you give me a more detailed description of what happened? Do you have any further examples of this?” Probe for content, without stating what dimensions are to be taken into account.

**Specifying Questions** – “What did you think then? What did you actually do when you felt ...? How did your body react?” For the purpose of obtaining rich descriptions I need to make sure I get a full picture of the incidents.

**Direct Questions** – To introduce new topics and dimensions. These should be kept until later to use with subjects brought up by the interviewees. Possible topics? “Have you ever had a student tell you something is haram in class? When you mention (Islam?) do you see it as ...?”

**Indirect Questions** – A question such as “How do you believe other teachers regard ...?” is useful as it potentially gives the interviewee the opportunity to present their own attitude without having to state it directly. Responses would need careful further questioning.

**Structuring Questions** – These are useful to indicate when a theme has been exhausted and can be a polite way of breaking off irrelevant rambles. “I would like to introduce another topic now ...”

**Silence** – Allow pauses to give the interviewees time to associate and reflect and then break the silence themselves with significant information.

**Interpreting Questions** – To make sure that analysis is as true a reflection as possible of the interviewees’ attitudes I need to make sure I have understood correctly. This can be done by rephrasing or attempts at clarification. “You mean that ...? Is it correct that you feel ...?”

**Conducting the Qualitative Research Interviews - Issues to Remember**

**Life World** – ‘The topic of the qualitative research interview is the everyday lived world of the interviewee and his/her relation to it.’ Remember to ask about specific experiences and what the interviewee felt, rather than just general opinion questions.

**Meaning** – ‘The interviewer seeks to interpret the meaning of central themes in the life world of the subject. The interviewer registers and interprets the meaning of what is said as well as how it is said.’ I need to listen very carefully to what is said – the explicit descriptions as well as what is left unsaid. I should try, where appropriate, to ‘send the statement back’ to the interviewee to obtain an immediate confirmation or disconfirmation of my interpretation. I must also remember to take 10 mins or so after each interview to note down my recollections.
of non-verbal communication – tone of voice, facial and body expressions. These notes will provide valuable context for later analysis.

**Qualitative, Descriptive & Specific** – Qualitative knowledge expressed in everyday language, open nuanced descriptions of different aspects of the subjects’ life worlds and descriptions of specific situations and action sequences need to be elicited.

**Deliberate Naïveté** – I need to exhibit openness to new and unexpected phenomena, rather than having ready-made categories and schemes of interpretation. I must remain as neutral as possible and not let my own opinions intrude.

**Interpersonal Situation** – Remember that questions can be dynamic as well as thematic – they can be structure to make the interpersonal relationship of the interview as relaxed and non-threatening as possible, hopefully to extract the richest possible data.

**Interview Do’s & Don’t’s**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do</th>
<th>Don’t</th>
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<tr>
<td>Listen carefully (e.g. non-verbally say “I’m listening”)</td>
<td>Close off the interview space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer supportive feedback (e.g. “Hmm”, “Yes”)</td>
<td>Interpret for the interviewee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respond to emotion (give interviewee time to talk about it)</td>
<td>Judge (e.g. offer moral comment, advice or consolation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let the interview take its own shape – let the interviewee discover things as well</td>
<td>Stick rigidly to the topics you think are important</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitor your responses to give interviewee proper space</td>
<td>Interrupt unthinkingly</td>
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**Post-interview Reflection & Evaluation** – Questions to ask yourself

**Overall:** • What was the balance of talk? • Could you have talked less? • If you take out your contribution does the resulting account flow naturally? • Was the interview rich in detail?

**Sections:** • Were there any staccato sections? • What prompted these? (‘Wh-‘ questions?) • What other strategies could you have used? • Were the transitions between sections natural? • Did you close down any topics too early? • Was there a sense of shared purpose throughout?

**Turns:** • Did you use a range of responses? • Where might you have followed-up or probed? • Which were the most/least successful questions and why? • Did you close down any responses too early? • Were you too directive?

**Action:** • Identify at least one, preferably two or three, things that you will bear in mind in your next interview. • Write them down and use them in the evaluation of that interview.
Appendix 8: The Final Interview

PhD Interview (Teachers / Management) MIC-2009-_______________

Introduction - Before we start I would like to say that this interview will be kept in the strictest confidence. Your name will not be used, nor will the name of the town in which you live. I will use pseudonyms for all respondents. I will be recording this interview as well as writing down notes. The purpose of this interview is to gather research data for a PhD research project on the role of culture in the teaching of English in the GCC countries.

Biographic Detail

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First Experiences

Was life/teaching here different to what you were expecting?

Friends and family back home

Methodology (Teachers)

What do you look for in teachers coming to work here? (Management)

Materials

Critical Incidents – Could you tell me about any experience you’ve had, or you have heard about, where there has been a problem in the classroom?

Religion / Culture / Traditions / 9/11 / Nationality

Reflections & Advice for new teachers

Debriefing / Thanks

Post-interview Notes

(In the actual interview spaces were left between the areas above for hand-written notes)
Appendix 9: The Interview Request Template

Subject: Interview on your experience teaching in the Gulf

Dear

(Insert something personal here)

I am writing this email to ask whether you would be willing to be interviewed as part of the PhD I am currently doing at Canterbury Christ Church University, UK. I am doing research into the lives and work of tertiary education providers in the Arabian Gulf region and how their work is affected by the culture, traditions and religion of this part of the world. I am hoping to speak to a wide variety of people, of differing ages, sexes and nationalities, and would, of course, guarantee absolute anonymity for all participants. The interviews will focus on your personal work experience and my ultimate objective is to discover what makes for truly effective English language teaching in the countries of the GCC.

I will be in the UAE from 5 March to 2 April 2009. If you are happy to be interviewed, please let me know and we can set up a date and time convenient for you. I will be based in Ras Al Khaimah during my visit, but will be able to travel throughout the Emirates to conduct interviews.

Thank you in advance,

Paul Hudson

Canterbury, Kent, UK.
### Appendix 10: The Interview Schedule

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Appendix 11 – Interview Extracts

Below are screenshots of some of the data showing the ir coding and transcription for all 32 interviews.

Margaret
1. Students – Infanrilization of (MARGARET & MARGARET2)
2. Friends & Family – Understood as parents also travellers (MARGARET)
3. Methodology - Teacher-centred – Chalk & Talk (MARGARET) ‘Because I came from an industry background at first I had a problem with some of my colleagues... they were very much more ‘chalk and talk’ because I think that they probably came from a schools background rather than a more practical, relevant, skills-based industry background’ (Margaret 3).
4. Materials – Made own (MARGARET)
5. Problem – Valentine’s Day (MARGARET) ‘A male member of faculty went into class and asked the students how many Valentine’s Day cards they had received, therefore insinuating that they had got a number of boyfriends... um... and, you know, kind of being fairly inquisitive about that’ (Margaret 5 – MIC-2009-03-09_10h46m12s – 11:20)
6. Problem – Wedding Night Discussion (MARGARET)
7. Problem – Disconnect (MARGARET)
8. Religion – Islam – Bound with culture (MARGARET) ‘I think one of the complexities of religion in this country is how intricately bound it is with the culture and, you know, some students would say that they are not allowed to do certain things, um, in the name of religion, when actually – one wouldn’t question it, of course, because that would be insensitive – but one who knows anything about Islam would know that actually it’s actually more of a cultural barrier than a religious barrier... the culture and the religion are so intertwined that it can get a bit complicated’ (Margaret 8 – MIC-2009-03-09_10h46m12s – 14:15)
9. Post 9/11 – An ‘ambassador’ (MARGARET)
10. Local Culture – We’re tolerated, but not understood (MARGARET) ‘Sometimes one is left very much with the impression that we are tolerated but I am not sure that we are really understood.’ (Margaret 10 – MIC-2009-03-09_10h46m12s – 17:20)

8. Materials – Textbooks don’t really work (DYLAN)
9. Problem – Fight between ‘cool dude’ & ‘traditional guy’ (DYLAN)
10. Problem – Teachers ‘thrown in the deep end with little preparation’ (DYLAN)
11. English – Agenda to impose English coming from nation’s leaders (DYLAN)
12. Post 9/11 – Sts never anti-Western (DYLAN)
13. Teachers – Our role is NOT to pass on culture (DYLAN)
14. English – Disempowering students by ignoring Arabic and imposing English (DYLAN)
15. Religion – Forbidden to discuss in KSA (DYLAN)
16. The Fear Factor – Fear of deportation restricts class topics (DYLAN) ‘I guess you keep away from certain topics because there’s always a kind of residual fear that you could be misunderstood, and we’ve all read the newspapers and we’ve all seen the articles, you know, about people being suddenly deported or, you know, creating riots just because they... (laughs) because they’ve called their Teddy Bear a name they shouldn’t have called it or something (laughs)’ (Dylan 16 – MIC-2009-03-09_12h30m33s –

19. Money – 99% Westerners here for the money – Some hate it, some like it (SHEILA) ‘Well, I would think probably 99% of the people who are here are here for the money. I occasionally meet someone who is here because they like it, but that would be someone in a profession. I mean, certainly the labourers are not here for the love of the country, and even in the professions most people are here for the money. That’s their number one, but some people like it and some people hate it and everything in between but, you know, the money’s the main motivation. It’s very rare to meet someone who’s staying because they love it here and, I would have to confess, money is my main motivation and if I wasn’t getting very good money I wouldn’t be here, but... since I am here, I’m happy and I like it, but it wouldn’t be my first choice, money aside. I mean, if I had to choose between [this town] and Tuscany, for example (laughs loudly)... or if I could go back to Syria on a similar salary that would be a dream come true for me.’ (Sheila 19 – MIC-2009-03-09_16h30m45s – 41:25)
20. Teachers – Not healthy to stay too long (SHEILA)
21. Money – Money v. important (SHEILA) ‘I’m much older now... I no longer feel like I have to go after new challenges and really, money is very important to me now. I hate to say that but I failed to save, you know, in the first 90% of my life and if I don’t save now I’ll be destitute when I retire... I’m afraid it comes first.’ (Sheila 21 – MIC-2009-03-09_16h30m45s – 44:40)
9. Problem – For many teachers Western culture 'a given' causing problems (MANDY)

10. The Fear Factor – Sunni/Shia issue brought up in class. She changed subject out of fear (MANDY): ‘If the students trust you then, certainly the more courageous ones, will bring up [controversial] issues in class and my approach is generally to just put some questions back to the class that suggest that I’m quite naïve about what they are asking and see what happens from them. For example last week the students started talking about the Sunni/Shia… and one of the students asked me if I knew the differences, and I said ‘Yes, I do’ and they said ‘How do you know?’ and I said ‘It’s from reading’ and then they broke into Arabic and I could tell there was some sort of discontent going on and I said ‘I think we should probably move on to the next thing now’ because… you know.’ Researcher: ‘Doesn’t worry you? You know, that they are bringing up the Sunni/Shia stuff in class?’ Mandy: ‘It doesn’t worry me in that I can deal with whatever comes up in class, but there is a residual fear that, of course, when a student is sitting at home having dinner with the family and it’s their turn to talk about their day, it’s quite possible that these things could come up which could result in a serious problem for me. And I’m almost waiting for it to happen nowadays because issues are coming up so frequently that I’m not bringing up, but I am fostering an environment where they can be brought up.’ Researcher: ‘Earlier on you were talking about teachers who concentrate a lot on Western culture and impose that on their students, do you think that by fostering this environment you are yourself exposing them to Western culture?’ Mandy: ‘Yes, and I think it’s perhaps the best way to do it, in the sense that the students themselves are actually interested and curious and of course they are now being exposed to more and more Western culture exponentially and… um… they have a lot of preconceptions about Western culture that I can debunk – not that I’m trying to protect it - but, for example, yesterday they asked me if I’d ever wear a mini-skirt and I said ‘No, when I’m in Australia I wear exactly what I’m wearing now, I don’t like to show my body at all, and one of them said ‘Well, when a girl does wear a mini-skirt does she want a mantol look at her?’ and I said ‘Well, not necessarily. I mean, some do but for other women it’s just fashion and they’re following it and maybe it’s just so normal that men don’t look.’ So, it’s exposing them to Western culture but not promoting it, because I, myself, don’t particularly like Western culture anyway. I’m not here to criticise it, I’m not here to promote it, but if the students are interested I’ll try and open up a neutral forum for the students to discuss… um… and I’ll try and be as honest as I can about anything that they ask even if it’s at my peril because I don’t want to be false and incoherent and I don’t want to infantilise them as I think so many teachers do.’ (Mandy 9 - MIC-2009-03-10 08h05m44s – 23:35)

19. Money – Not the main factor, but helped pay off debts & get mortgage (ROSE) - Researcher: ‘You mentioned earning reasonable money as one of the reasons you chose to come here. How important was that? Rose: ‘It wasn’t the main factor… um… OK [Laughs] one thing that was important to me was to have a job that would enable me to get a mortgage and to buy a property because all my previous work had enabled me to do so… so that was more important to me than the actual amount, although I did want to be able to save as well and get a mortgage. Researcher: ‘So it gave you more security?’ Rose: ‘Well, yeah, you know, thinking of the future I wanted an investment property so I went ahead and bought a place… Oh, and also it enabled me to pay off a few debts. So, yes, it is nice! It’s been nice to have had money for a few years.’ (Rose 19 – MIC-2009-03-10_15h01m05s – 38:50)

20. Money – Some people get sucked in to the 'lifestyle' (ROSE) - ‘I think some people get… [Laughs]… this sounds a bit judgemental… [Laughs]… but some people get sucked into the lifestyle and used to that nice pay packet every month and become a bit dependant on it, so they acquire commitments that require them to have a high income, so I think the money becomes more important there, but I have to admit I tried not to do that because I don’t like to feel that I am trapped. I like to have the freedom to say, if I wake up one morning and – enough – I am able to go.’ (Rose 20 – MIC-2009-03-10_15h01m05s – 40:25)

21. Religion – Students exploit naïve teachers (ROSE) - ‘I think that at the beginning students can try and take you for a bit of a ride if they think you don’t know the system… In the beginning the students would talk far too long for prayer time and I think this shows a lack of respect for the teacher, but with discussion and once I knew the college policy on this it stopped being a problem, but I am glad I had that experience at the beginning because I was able to check things out with the college councillor and make sure I was on the right track… but that would be good advice for any new teacher when you are not sure about things like prayer time, to check with the college councillor or a local colleague or a more experienced colleague, like you Paul [Laughs].’ (Rose 21 – MIC-2009-03-10_15h01m05s – 43:20)
3. Local Culture – Sts didn’t seem that bothered by timekeeping (OLIVER). ‘I was coming from Hong Kong which is a place where people are obsessed with work and where they are pushed hard by their employers all the time … then coming here and encountering students who didn’t seem that bothered by arriving on time … I mean in Hong Kong if the teacher walked through the door seconds late you’d get people looking at their watches, you know, but then they were paying customers as well … whereas here it seemed like the students weren’t that bothered by their studies in quite the same way (laughs loudly) shall we say. I suppose that was the main culture shock I felt in terms of the classroom, getting students to do what I wanted them to do.’ (Oliver 3 – MIC-2009-03-15_13h03m06s – 06:30)

4. Methodology – Necessary to connect personally with each student (OLIVER) ‘I find it here is much more necessary to connect personally with each student and develop a one-to-one relationship with them. It try and take an interest in what they are interested in. I think it is important for my personal well-being that I have an amiable relationship with my students’ (Oliver 4 – MIC-2009-03-15_13h03m06s – 10:30)

5. Methodology – Humour, jokes much more effective here (OLIVER). ‘Humour has always been a part of my teaching but it just seems that it is more effective here, there seems to be more of a reaction. I’m not sure if the humour and joke thing is a way of getting yourself emotionally a bit closer to the students, but I think the students are also trying to get closer to you, emotionally, as well. I’m not sure if it’s a father-figure kind of thing or if it’s because Arabs tend to rely on personal relationships more and … to be honest, I haven’t had a class yet here where the relationships with the individual students haven’t reached a point where it’s made the class enjoyable, and actually I enjoy being in the classroom here more than anywhere else I’ve taught … other aspects of the job, no, no.’ ‘Me: Yeah, I know what you mean.’ ‘But one of the worries I always have is that one day someone is going to say to me ‘We’re sending you to the Women’s College’ It’s not so much the Women’s College itself that’s frightening, it’s the fact that I won’t be able to establish the same kind of contact, of closeness, with the women students as with the men students, and that’s a lot of what my teaching’s about, I think.’ (Oliver 5 – MIC-2009-03-15_13h03m06s – 11:55)

15. Post 9/11 – A huge turning point – Stopped being apologist; disengaged herself from this part of world (BETTY)
16. Post 9/11 – Not ONE Arab (student or staff) said anything to her on 9/12 – the silence was terrible (BETTY)
17. Post 9/11 – Very painful being an American during Bush years (BETTY)
18. Post 9/11 – Obama’s arrival made me cry with happiness (BETTY)
19. Teachers – Don’t be a teacher; we are overworked and underpaid (BETTY)
20. Money – Very important to taking a job here, but makes it very hard to leave (BETTY) ‘I would tell them don’t be a teacher because teaching is a thankless job. You know, we are overworked and underpaid but … um … I would definitely encourage young people to, you know, Do it. Travel. It opens your eyes. You learn that we’re really all the same, you know, and the world is just so rich.’ Researcher: ‘You say that we’re overworked and underpaid. Now in this part of the world,’ Betty: ‘That’s why I keep my job.’ Researcher: ‘So how important is the money?’ Betty: ‘It is very important. It’s been a continuum, from being, you know, no money at all in the Peace Corps in Yemen to a medium amount of money, well, not much at all, really, when I was in Egypt, but a fantastic living situation and then to here where … um, it’s a great place to live. You can get everything you want. Um, the comfort level is very high. The salary is, well, now after ten years I’m at the top of the scale so it’s really hard for me to leave.’ Researcher: ‘But would you want to leave?’ Betty: ‘No. I actually don’t want to leave. I actually really like living here.’ (Betty 20 – MIC-2009-03-15_14h43m34s – 29:30)
21. Local Culture – The locals leave you alone (BETTY) ‘I like living in the UAE because Emiratis leave you alone. You don’t have any pressure from them at all, except for the driving. So for me it’s a great situation.’ (Betty 21 – MIC-2009-03-15_14h43m34s – 39:00)
22. English – Locals know it is the world language and it’s their choice to use it, but there should be Arabic (BETTY)
Gwen

1. Local Culture – Initially daunting & nerve-wracking – all in black (GWEN) - ‘The first few weeks I was very nervous because I didn’t fully understand the nature of the students I was dealing with because they were quite different, so it was quite daunting to go into a classroom where everybody was covered in black and that was a bit of a culture shock … but I think very quickly I realised that they were individuals and that they were like other young ladies in many respects; they liked to laugh and they liked to have a joke with you, they were eager to please, and so it didn’t take me too long to start feeling comfortable with them.’ (Gwen 1 - MIC-2009-03-16_06b06m34s - 2:50)

2. Methodology – Humour & hamming things up works well (GWEN) - ‘Yes, yes, I believe in hamming things up a bit. It helps the students relax and perhaps makes them better learners.’ (Gwen 2 - MIC-2009-03-16_06b06m34s - 4:05)

3. Students – Some stgs very sensitive (GWEN)

4. Religion / Friends & Family – Interested in day-to-day life, ‘Aren’t they all fundamentalists?’ (GWEN)

5. Methodology – Evolved & developed over the years, now anything is OK (GWEN)

6. Students – Form strong bonds with the group they sit with (GWEN)

7. Materials – Exam (IELTS & PET) materials very culturally bound, so try to relate it to stgs’ experiences (GWEN)

13. Gender – It’s a unique environment and you have to change (PETER) - ‘I just find this environment challenging, you know, some days you are just pulling your hair out, but it’s pretty unique, you know, when you think about it really, it’s a women’s college and then you are a man as well, thrown into the whole thing, and you’re foreign, you’re seen as a Westerner, it’s a really unique environment and it really makes you change, you know, you have to adapt it, and I tell myself every now and again, “Just enjoy it, because you are probably never going to teach in an environment as unique as this again.”’ (Laughs) (Peter 13 - MIC-2009-03-16_11h22m05s - 26:20)

14. Money – An important consideration, but when kids get older he’ll move as local education limited (PETER) – ‘The money was important in our decision to come here. We had just started a family and the conditions offered here were a big draw. No doubt about it. But having said that we were both quite interested in experiencing a different culture, well, not that we’ve really experienced it, but living in a different place, you know.’ (Peter 14 - MIC-2009-03-16_11h22m05s - 48:15)

15. English – Doesn’t have to be a form of neo-imperialism – English is a useful tool, not a form of control (PETER)

16. Post 9/11 – Didn’t really have an effect on him – He’s read a lot of Edward Said – That did (PETER)

13. Teachers – Expat community very insular – easy to live insular expat life (CORDELIA) – ‘It’s funny here because it’s such an expat country so all you contact with people is very multiculturally mixed. It’s easy to live a very insular expat life … It sounds hugely ungrateful, but I’m living in this massive villa all on my own. I don’t want to have a cleaner, it’s quite a small expat community and I miss the different parts of my life … having friends who aren’t teachers, for example (laughs).’ (Cordelia 13 - MIC-2009-03-16_11h47m03s - 39:45)

14. Money – Played a big part and provided stability (CORDELIA) The money certainly played a big part in my decision to come here. I had got to 38 and I didn’t have a house or a husband and children and I didn’t even have a credit card … and my job situation in England wasn’t exactly stable at the university, it was kind of on-again, off-again, so the 3-year contract here is kind of stable in terms of English teaching.’ (Cordelia 14 - MIC-2009-03-16_11h47m03s - 39:45)

15. The Fear Factor – Student got a ‘D’ which was reported to the Sheikh – Very worrying (CORDELIA) ‘I think in my first year here I worried a lot more that I do this year. Things like, for example, one of the students who got a ‘D’ … then reported it to the Sheikh. Now, in my head, to be reported to the Sheikh is a massive thing. It would be like, oh, I don’t know, like being reported to someone above the head whereas here it seems to be not such an unusual thing to do. So my understanding of that situation was far greater than it was, and my reaction was to over-worry about that. So I think things like that it’s important to be aware of, that that’s not such a scary thing to happen.’ (Cordelia 15 - MIC-2009-03-16_11h47m03s - 47:40)
14. Post 9/11 – One class suggested having a party – Very upsetting (JENNIFER)
15. Post 9/11 – He brought up rumour of Jews not going to WTC – She refused to engage with them (JENNIFER)
16. Teachers – Need a high tolerance for ambiguity (JENNIFER)
17. The Fear Factor – Be careful about sticking your head up (JENNIFER) ‘Researcher: So, after 15 years working in this part of the world, if you went home to the USA and met a new teacher who says they’re very keen on coming over and working here what advice would you give them?’ Jennifer: (Laughs) OK, I would say be flexible. Have a high tolerance for ambiguity (Both laugh). You have to develop street smarts, basically. Learn which battles you can fight. And even though I think I have a relatively high profile, I would pretty much advise someone new to this part of the world to test the waters a bit before they throw themselves into … like I did, you know, I was kind of, I was great guns to get everything started and you know how it is here. Teachers are really, really safe but as soon as you stick your head up above the rest … luckily mine hasn’t been chopped off yet … but many other people I have known have not fared so well.’ (Jennifer 17 - MIC-2009-03-17_08h39m57s – 32:30)
18. Teachers – Don’t listen to ‘doom & gloomers’ (negative teachers) – Set up ensures they remain (JENNIFER) – ‘I’d basically say ‘Don’t listen to other people’, because there’s a huge population, certainly in this college, of ‘doom and gloomers’ who are just like ‘the world’s gonna end’, you know, and just don’t have a really positive attitude and who, in my opinion, should not be in the classroom to begin with. But they are, and the very set-up of this place ensures that they can’t really be in the classroom … So I would say don’t listen to rumours.’ (Jennifer 18 - MIC-2009-03-17_08h39m57s – 33:33)

Gerald
1. Local Culture – Initially very, very glamorous (GERALD) ‘The first impression here were incredibly glamorous, we were put in a big hotel, we’d never had that kind of luxury before, money trust under my nose. Buy this, buy that. A very posh apartment to start with and initially, it was a big switch in terms of lifestyle.’ (Gerald 1 – MIC-2009-03-17_09h44m13s – 2:25)
2. Methodology – Initially a shock at how teacher-centred: Taking at 4s in rows (GERALD)
3. Money – Salary seemed very high (GERALD)
4. Teachers – Initially surprised at how little teaching (15 hrs/week) yet everyone complaining (GERALD)
5. Family & Friends – Father hates Arabs and I friend refuses to visit Arab World (GERALD)
6. Methodology – Leaving in 6 months – Wants to know if he can still teach! (GERALD)
7. Students – Unsympathetic to learning environment (GERALD)

5. Students – Some locked into a ‘cycle of failure’ (SIOBHAN)
6. Teachers – Looking for teachers with international experience and openness to multiculturalism (SIOBHAN)
7. Materials – Looking for culturally appropriate materials, but difficult to find (SIOBHAN)
8. Materials – Appropriateness not an issue with students – not bothered (SIOBHAN)
9. Problem – Content teachers often not teachers and stunned by elementary level of 4s’ English (SIOBHAN) ‘When I first came to the UAE I guess I was stunned by the elementary nature of the students’ English … yeah, that was a shock to me and there were a lot of questions about how you can have students who are barely beginning to function at the most pre-elementary level in English actually expected to follow a content course and study content through the medium of English … and I still wonder about that dislocation between school and university and how that can be magically expected to work after just one year of Foundations, and you can’t even call it erosion … ’ (Siohan 9 – MIC-2009-03-18_11h04m49s – 24:10)
10. Problem – Claudia Kirshutz incident (Danish cartoons) (SIOBHAN)
8. Local Culture – For an American, teaching st in a niqab v. difficult – prevents you from knowing st (PEGGY) I taught phonology last semester and all of my students took of their niqabs but one (Me – surprised) ‘One kept it on it front of you’? ‘Mmm… until the very end of the semester. Very clearly it was a security blanket for her, I think… but for me wanting to see her lips and it even inhibited the volume of her speech, so you struggle more to hear what she’s saying … but I can see that if that is all you ever get to see of them it prevents you from really getting to know them how they really are which is very warm and funny and friendly so, in a way, I think it’s kinda a shame, not from any kinda religious, or Western superiority kinda perspective but just because we rely very much on smiles and laughs and facial expressions to gauge people and it actually takes that out of the equation.’ (Peggy 8 - MIC-2009-03-18 12h1 3m34s – 26:25)

9. Religion – Not brought up much by st in class (PEGGY)
10. Post 9/11 – Readjustment of one’s ideas – Overwhelmed by patriotism (PEGGY)
11. Post 9/11 – Noticed st very comfortable criticizing others, but never their own society (PEGGY)
12. Post 9/11 – Has become an involuntary ambassador for her country (PEGGY)
13. Post 9/11 – Political cartoons / pictures – Arab media shows more bodies (PEGGY)
14. English – Historically English imperialist, but now hijacked as global lingua franca – Go to IKEA & listen (PEGGY)
15. Local Culture – General philosophy here ‘We want it NOW!’ – Cart before horse in edu – start w/ K1 (PEGGY)
16. Teachers – We are a Band Aid – We’re doing our damndest but it’s an uphill struggle (PEGGY)

20. Problem – Powerpoint slide of Da Vinci Mary & Child – Its said ‘Haram!’ – Some disagreed – Discussion (SALLY) ‘I had a … I don’t know if I would call it a problem, but it was certainly a critical incident that informed the way I work with students. About two years ago, we were about to read an article about Da Vinci in class, and I had prepared a PowerPoint with all these different slides of his artwork and so forth, and we were looking at it and discussing it and talking about, like, ‘What do you think his message is and so forth. And it came to one picture – it’s the one of Mary and her child, and a couple of students went ‘Teacher! Haram! Haram! Haram! Haram! Haram!’ because there’s Mary with the baby Jesus. A very lifelike, beautiful painting, to me, and I said ‘What’? and I really didn’t know what they were talking about and they said ‘You can’t paint the prophet.’ And I said ‘Really?’ and they said ‘Yes’

and I said ‘Oh … OK, OK’ but I didn’t change the slide. I just decided, ‘Stay calm. Don’t turn this into an issue.’ I really didn’t know, so I said ‘I’m really sorry. I really didn’t know that’ and then another student said ‘But this is for education. It’s OK’ and then another student said ‘No! No, it’s not’. You know, so they kind of discussed whether it was OK or not so I said ‘Well, look, this is one of his paintings and other people back in 1500 were shocked, too, because it was so lifelike, so you’re having a similar response.’ And then I changed the slide, but what made me very interested was that they seemed perfectly willing to discuss this with each other and I don’t think that they held it against me. I did apologize and said I had no idea, I didn’t mean to offend you, but you know, hey, it was his painting and we didn’t have to change it so fast …… Me. So, you are up there with the slide and the students start shouting ‘Haram! Haram! Haram!’ at you. How did you feel at that moment? Sally: Surprised. Curious. Slightly fearful (Loud laugh) … No, not fearful, but very surprised and … maybe shocked and ……. Yeah, maybe a slight fear like, ‘Oh my God! What did I do wrong?’ (Sally 20 - MIC-2009-03-19 07h1 1m18s – 30:50)

18. Local Culture – I feel I have a debt to the Arab World to providing a better image (MARY) I’m very interested in intercultural communication and I do believe that I have a debt, in a way, to the Arab world to help in any chance I have of providing a friendlier image. I have a friend who is in the British diplomatic service and she said ‘If only we had listened to the English language teachers in Iran before the revolution, because they knew what was going to happen, and we didn’t.’ Listen, I’m not ashamed of British foreign policy as I am of American. I think our foreign office is aware and, er, you know, I think we are better informed. I think English language teaching has a role to play in helping cultures understand each other, but I’m not so keen on the hegemony that goes with it – the fact that you can’t see a decent film because it’s all ghoulish blockbuster American things that come here. Er, … I see my role as helping people understand each other, you know it sounds a bit like ‘Peace and Love, man’ but that’s what I mean! ’ (Mary 18 - MIC-2009-03-19 09h05m11s – 30:15)
8. Material – Not touched the textbook – inappropriate/Wrong level (JAMES)
9. Material – Some gaffes – Replace girlfriend with sister and wine with 7up (JAMES)
10. Problem – Once told joke about God – Punchline: She’s black – Made him very worried, but it’s OK (JAMES)
11. Problem – Female wrote love letter to male T – Cause a huge problem with her family (JAMES)
12. Local Culture – Management will always back down to waste (JAMES) – One thing that you can really rely on here is that the management will back down when there is vociferous complaints from parents, especially when they pull waste” (James 11 – MIC-2009-03-19_10h22m12s – 15:55)
13. The Fear Factor – Once accidentally touched st’s knee – Was terrified! (JAMES)
14. Teachers – You have to talk euphemistically a lot (JAMES)
15. Teachers – Never raise your voice with st’s (JAMES)
16. Teachers – One teacher used karate with male st’s – English through violence! st’s responded well!! (JAMES)

Alice

1. Local Culture – Initially a very steep learning curve (ALICE)
2. Teachers – Style of management here a big shock after ‘touchy-feely’ British Council in HK (ALICE) I was quite surprised by the style of management, shall we say (Laugh) You were in those meetings with [name of manager], you know what they were like. That was quite a shock after touchy-feely British Council management for eight or nine years (Laugh). Alice 2 - MIC-2009-03-22_05h20m30s – 5:53
3. Family & Friends – People seem to think whole country is like Dubai (ALICE)
4. Methodology – Need to make lessons more fun as motivation often a problem (ALICE) ‘Here I think it’s a lot harder to keep the motivation going. I think you need, for example with the IELTS, I think you know that IELTS can be pretty dull so… whereas in Hong Kong if I was teaching an IELTS course the students don’t care if it’s dull. You know, they just want their IELTS, they’ve paid their money, whereas here… I need to kind of intersperse it a lot more with… with sort of fun activities (Laugh) and actually have to give a lot consideration to how to make it a lot more fun and interesting (Laugh)’ (Alice 4) - MIC-2009-03-22_05h20m30s – 11:40
5. Students – Building good personal relationship important (ALICE)

3. Local Culture – Surprised that children don’t think for themselves (BRIAN) ‘I think the main reason for a lot of the problems is the primary and secondary educational system here. It doesn’t… It doesn’t breed a system where they get the child to think for themselves. It doesn’t breed children who have respect or take responsibility. I mean in Saudi I tried my best to do that with the students myself and a few, very few of my Arab colleagues would do that too but most of them…’ Well, I’ve seen an Arab teacher take a kid by the back of the head and slam his face into the table, you know, and these are Arab teachers so when the English teacher comes in and he’s not doing that then the kids are just like ‘Wow!’ … and here it’s pretty much the same. I’ve seen on the You Tube, the students have shown me. ‘Hey teacher, look at this!’ and I’ve seen the violence. It needs a big overhaul and it’s, it’s deep. It runs very deep. To do with parents now they have this money. The biggest thing was in Saudi Arabia is mainly, you ask the students, you know, ‘Where’s your Dad?’ and it’s ‘Oh, he’s doing business’ or ‘He’s away’ and you ask them ‘Do you see him much?’ and they’re like ‘Not much.’ ‘What about your mother?’ Oh, she’s out shopping a lot! So, who takes care of you? ‘Oh, the maid.’ So you have a maid – sometimes it’s a Muslim, sometimes it’s a non-Muslim – bringing the children up and not really caring what they do and… and it’s sad. I even had a student telling me ‘I love you, Mr. Brian. More than I love my father.’ (Laugh) and he used to hug me and they’re looking for that love. They’re looking for that guidance which just seems to have disappeared because of the wealth. Because of the money… they are very lost.’ (Brian 3 – MIC-2009-03-22_10h39m30s – 9:25)
13. Students – Motivation not very high here

14. Money – The best (KEVIN) “For EFL the money here is the best in the world” (Kevin 14 – MIC-2009-03-22_11h36m24s – 35:20)

15. Money – At first not important, but becoming much more so now (KEVIN) “The money is getting more important as I get older and with the family and that. I mean, I’ve got a bit saved up – should have saved more, I know, so, putting something aside for when I’m older – only 5 years older actually (laughs) – it’s important now but, having said that, when I first entered teaching as a young guy in my twenties the money didn’t occur to me but I think it becomes more of an issue as you get older.” (Kevin 15 – MIC-2009-03-22_11h36m24s – 35:40)

16. English – Sts say it is a worldwide language – seems the whole world craves English (KEVIN)

17. Local Culture – Very difficult to learn Arabic in the GCC, but useful to use it in class (KEVIN)

7. English – How the language is going to be used in the region needs to be taken into account (AL) – ‘I think one of the excesses of the business is the whole commercialisation of language teaching. Textbooks, for example, tend to be very Eurocentric, or very Americano-centric, if you can say that … and I thought you could look at English through an Arab-Islamic lens, or through an Emirati lens, you know, we don’t really have to go along with the commercialization of language teaching through textbooks … and look at it this way: English is going to be used primarily within the Arabian Gulf for many of the people learning English here and it doesn’t really make much sense if you’re doing things from a Eurocentric background … I can’t see many of our guys here going to build lives in North America or in Britain or Australia. It’s really here that matters.” (Al 7 – MIC-2009-03-23_10h46m37s – 7:10)

8. Religion – TESOL Arabia very secular – The ‘I’ word is a taboo (AL) Teachers – The ‘no religion, no politics’ mantra here is absurd – What else is there? (AL) – ‘TESOL Arabia, for me, is based on a very secular model. What you find is that the ‘I’ word, Islam word, which is a very big part of what goes on in this part of the world, it’s like a taboo. We’re not going to talk about Islam, that’s politics. When I turned up in this country one of the first things I was told, it was like a mantra: No politics! No religion! Keep away from it, and I was like “Well, what’s left if you can’t talk about that?” … It’s just absurd that you can’t talk about that.” (Al 8 – MIC-2009-03-23_10h46m37s – 9:20)

8. West – Western bosses here realize they can do whatever they want (NED) “This is not so much the local bosses but the Western bosses who come out here having had too much in terms of the union and all these other sorts of legal or paralegal constraints and then they suddenly realise (laughs) that they can do whatever they like, so long as they kowtow to the person above … (laughs) … I’ve found that if there are excesses it’s Western bosses who come out and suddenly they’re Little Lord Fauntleroy because they can (laughs) it’s this repressed urge to do whatever (laughs) Researcher: Can you give me a specific example of that? Ned: ‘Yeah, sure. Anything that smacks of risk. Not courageous, for example we were doing this skills appraisal scheme for the team, with cross-training involved so we could all share expertise and a national member of the team didn’t want to do it and she went sobbing to the director who pulled me in and said ‘Who authorised this?’ and the whole thing was scrapped (laughs) It smacked of personal risk. Bad.” (Ned 8 – MIC-2009-03-23_13h32m20s – 24:10)

9. Teachers – Some Ts collude with classes to get great STFLs (NED) ‘Some teachers obviously collude with their students for an easy life, and they get fantastic STFLs, and the students all get As and if there are external benchmarks then the teachers have long flown for the summer holiday or they’re on the next class or the next course and there are other teachers who are much less popular because they’re much more exciting in their standards and it’s interesting to see how much support these teachers get from different bosses (laughs) As one boss said, I’m here to support you. I can help you stay or I can help you leave (Both Laugh) Yeah, and there are quite a few people who have been helped all the way to the airport (laughs) Researcher: ‘And these people who have been helped all the way to the airport is this because of problems with students or problems with managers?’ Ned: ‘Yeah. Exactly too high a standard from the class … Researcher: And that’s the main …?’ Ned: ‘Classes who’ve been spoilt because they’ve been with teachers who colluded for an easy life. That’s my impression, anyway, whether it’s true or not, but I’m convinced it is, actually.’ (Ned 9 – MIC-2009-03-23_13h32m20s – 27:25)
2. Students – șțis don’t do assignments here – V. different from experience in Japan (DUDLEY)
3. Local Culture – He misses strolling and public transport (DUDLEY)
4. Students – Much less motivated than had been portrayed in the interview (DUDLEY)
5. Methodology – Avoid ‘faux’ student-centeredness – Spend time getting to know individuals (DUDLEY)
6. Students – Problem-solving and critical thinking skills not very well developed (DUDLEY)
7. Materials – Not a fan of textbooks and şțis mean if he tries to use them (DUDLEY)
8. Students – Demotivating for T because şțis not really interested (DUDLEY)
9. Materials – Doesn’t produce own materials, produces tasks (DUDLEY)
10. Problem – Gay-bashing in class – Some male şțis wearing eye-liner (DUDLEY) – “A problem in the classroom? ….. Well, I guess the first thing that jumped out was recently there was a couple of gay guys, and there was basically gay-bashing in the class and this was too much, it was quite vocal. I think it went up to management level….. yeah, asking them to dress appropriately … Me: What were they wearing, then? Dudley: Pastely-blue tight shirts and make-up, you know, I don’t know if you’ve seen some of the guys but they wear make-up, you know, eye-liner, some of the guys have actually shaved their brows and paint them on. You know, it doesn’t bother me, actually, I think it’s great for expression, I think it’s wonderful. Bravo! Cheers to you, but unfortunately the others, the locals, not all of them see it that way …” (Dudley 10 – MIC-2009-03-24_10h12m18s – 23:45)

16. Teachers – Need to be prepared to work in a restricted (Islamic) environment (GENE) Advice “I would say ideally they should already have had some experience with Arab students, for example in a language school in London or Boston, say…… and they need to learn about the culture and ask themselves ‘Are you prepared to live and work in this Islamic environment where there are certain restrictions?’ I remember one incident, this was a nurse, actually, and she said to a local military person that he had the manners of a dog, and she was asked to leave that afternoon. But obviously something had offended her quite seriously and her reaction was very strong at the time, and she was very offended. So, one needs to know about the culture. One needs to know how to react to the culture and, you know, I don’t think we should bow and say yes to every cultural problem or uncertainty that we experience, but there’s a way of responding to it, you know, that wouldn’t cause offence.” (Gene 16 - MIC-2009-03-25_10h51m49s – 50:50)

17. Local Culture – Alpha-male managers more prevalent here – Can be very damaging (GENE) ‘I think with the management people can get away with things in education here that you couldn’t get away with at home. You can treat people a certain way here that you wouldn’t in the West. I think certain managers have egos here and can operate a certain way that they would not be allowed to operate back home. And I’d say that goes all the way up to the top … In this environment where you’ve got a top-down management approach that couldn’t care less about the sensitivities or the fairness towards the individuals they’re working with…… or blatantly wrong, but they can get away with stuff here that they couldn’t get away with back home. I think it’s wrong. I mean there are books written about alpha-male managers and…… you know, the damage they can do to an environment and I think that in this part of the world that management style can be … it might be more prevalent than in other countries.” (Gene 17)

18. English – Unhappy with ‘gatekeeper’ role of English (GENE)
19. English – Cultural bias of IELTS/PET means many excellent şțis unable to graduate (GENE)
20. English – English has ‘almost accidentally’ become a world language (GENE)
21. Money – People are mercenary anywhere – Large # of singles/dinks show expat life more important (GENE)
Matthew

1. Students – Initially didn’t listen to instructions so simple ‘find someone who’ activity caused bedlam (MATTHEW)
2. Local Culture – Always remember this is an oral culture (MATTHEW)
3. Methodology – Give instructions as a dialogue – modelling works well (MATTHEW)
4. Family & Friends – Initially worried but now know it’s safer here than Australia (MATTHEW)
5. Methodology – Communicative approach doesn’t work so well – Needs to be more T-centred (MATTHEW)
6. Students – Males have scattered minds and minimal discipline at home. Easy to lose them (MATTHEW). Here the discipline at home for boys is minimal or non-existent. They are given a lot of freedom and they do what they like, basically, and I find mentally they do too. Their minds are all over the place and wander, like one of them makes a comment and they all join in and in seconds you’ve lost the class.’ (Matthew 6 - MIC-2009-03-26_07h21m49s – 12:05)

19. Post 9/11 – Local sheikh got all expats together and promised them he would guarantee their safety (NORMAN)
20. Local Culture – Get annoyed by censorship – Michelangelo pages covered – How pathetic! (NORMAN)
21. Local Culture – Closing their eyes to the real world annoys me (NORMAN) ‘When I see this censorship where they black out pictures it just annoys me and I just think, ‘How pathetic.’ You know… closing their eyes to the real world… it annoys me.’
22. Local Culture – (This is going to be confidential, isn’t it?) Even now when I see a totally covered woman I feel ‘How pathetic and sad!’ It really upsets me (NORMAN)
23. Students – On the whole they’re great, but don’t expect them to be like Europeans (NORMAN)
24. Teachers – We are told we are watched by the C.I.D., but I don’t know (NORMAN)
25. Problem – Teacher did survey about local pollution and health and was fired (NORMAN)
26. Money – The money’s not keeping me here – After a couple of years I’ll go off somewhere more interesting (NORMAN) ‘The money’s not keeping me here. After a couple of years I will go and do something more interesting, but having said that here I can save every month probably what I would earn if I were back in England.’ (Norman 26)

Jack

1. Local Culture – Initially horrified but not totally shocked or surprised (JACK)
2. Students – Given everything but not interested in learning – not motivated and a teachers’ nightmare (JACK) Researcher: ‘What were your first impressions of the Gulf, the work and the life?’ Jack: ‘I was horrified, but I wasn’t totally shocked or surprised because of course I had read about the Gulf states and… shall I speak frankly?’ Researcher: ‘Please do, Jack.’ Um… from my heart… um… I was passionately pro-Arab because that was my experience of working with Palestinian refugees. I saw them as the victims, and vulnerable and suffering and I saw on a daily basis the suffering and the, the blocks and my students being imprisoned and the tears and the pain and… my heart was there with them in solidarity. These were the wretched of the earth. Very poor. Coming from refugee camps and they were the most wonderful students I’d ever had or ever have had, nice, really. Very motivated… then I went to the Gulf and it was like the complete opposite. Lots of money, you know, loads of very high incomes etc. and students not interested in learning. It was like the polar opposite. Students that were given everything and didn’t want to learn as opposed to the Palestinians who had to struggle for everything and wanted to learn very much. And very intellectual, and interested in books and then in [a city in the Gulf] I had very difficult students. Teacher’s nightmare. Not motivated and they just didn’t want to be there. ’ (Jack 3 - MIC-2009-03-26_12h22m08s – 18:20)
3. Teachers – The interviewing (for HCT) was so rigorous and so difficult and I just couldn’t face it (JACK)
4. Family & Friends – A lot more supportive when he was in Gaza than here (quite left-wing family) Parents horrified as they saw it as very vulgar, sister visited and cried (JACK) ‘Ironically, my family were a lot more supportive about me working in the Gaza Strip and the West bank than here… [they] are quite left, and into human rights and campaigning and that’s how I was brought up, as a Quaker, so lots of campaigning and causes and marching… but when I came here they all were horrified… it’s a matter of culture, of course. I’m talking about a British subculture that would consider this place very vulgar… When my sister came here she cried. She hated it so much she cried and she wanted to get on the next plane and fly out. Ha ha ha!’ (Jack 4 - MIC-2009-03-26_12h22m08s – 18:20)
18. Students – Nice, but don’t expect hard work (SAMANTHA)

19. Teachers – Lots of pressure from students to do what they want – relax, be lenient about attendance, give high grades – easy trap for new teachers to fall into (SAMANTHA) ‘There’s a lot of onus put on grades, by the students and the college system. There’s a lot of onus put on, you know, by the college, on the SFTLs. Now, if you want to keep your job, and most teachers DO want to keep their job, then... erm, there’s a lot of pressure put on you, as some teachers see, to do what the students want. If I want a high SFTL, I have to give the students what they want, regardless of whether this is actually good for them or not, so yes, I will be lax on attendance, yes, I will let them watch a video, yes, I will give them high grades... erm... and I can understand that, especially from people who’ve got families to support or maybe, you know, they’re early on in their careers and they can’t really afford to lose the job. I, fortunately, am not in that situation and... erm... I’ve got high standards for myself and I set them for other people and I’ve always said I will NOT be held to ransom for whatever reason. If they don’t like what I do, fine, you don’t like what I do, but this is how I do it! So if I’m told to take attendance, I will take attendance. If I have a paper that I think is a C+ I will give it a C+. There is no way I would give it anything higher. If a student comes to me and says I think this should be re-graded I then point out to them that yes, this can be re-graded but they will have to write a formal letter asking for this to be re-graded and if it is re-graded then the mark could go down as well as up, and if it goes down that is the mark that is going to stay. What do they think?! And I have never had anybody who’s pushed that... Look, if you have a course where everybody is getting As then I think there is something wrong with that course and there is something wrong with that assessment.’ (Samantha 19 – MIC-2009-03-30_07h48m37s – 51:33)

16. Religion – Brought up a Catholic, now an atheist (WENDY) - Wendy: ‘I was born, brought up, raised as a Catholic and went to Catholic school up until university and would now consider myself to be a pretty confirmed atheist. (Laughter)... No, I don’t. I’m an atheist, but that was my background.’ Researcher: ‘Now if the students ask you, “What are you Miss?” what would you say?’ Wendy: ‘I’d say I’m Christian. I wouldn’t say I’m an atheist because I was warned, by my husband, that that’s the worst thing you can say. Again, there goes my principles, but I wouldn’t say it to my students because... um... Well, it’s bad enough if I tell them I’m a vegetarian, (Both laugh). That’s like, completely weird, you know. So, atheist vegetarian. Oh my God. I’m from another planet. So, no, I wouldn’t tell them I was an atheist because that is really, really out there – they would find it just too strange, they wouldn’t be able to get their heads around it.’ (Wendy 16 – MIC-2009-03-30_08h53m48s – 46:50)

17. Teachers – Lower your expectations – You’ll be frustrated if you have high expectations (WENDY)

18. Money – Money and lifestyle good benefits (WENDY) ‘There’s lots of benefits to working here, financially and lifestyle-wise’ (Wendy 18 – MIC-2009-03-30_08h53m48s – 54:10)

19. Management – ‘One year they had the vacation dates established, and at the last minute they changed the vacation dates... and people lost their jobs all over the place because they booked tickets and they said, ‘That’s too bad, I’m going to Thailand and if they want to sack me, they can.’ And they got back and they got sacked.’ (Wendy 19 – MIC-2009-03-30_08h53m48s – 57:33)
6. Rapport – ‘I think it’s really important to build rapport with a class and part of that is the teaching. You have to keep things lively and interesting, but partly the students here they love it when you chat with them and you sit with them, one by one, you know, go over their work, chat with them a little bit... I know you don’t really consider them a bit cold, and that one-on-one contact is really a big deal here, I would say.’ (Caroline 6 - MIC-2009-03-30_10h18m45s – 28:10) (CAROLINE)

7. Religion – Explosive topic (CAROLINE) Religion is an extraordinarily explosive topic, you know, you can’t even begin to talk about anything even on the very edges of it without really risking some ill-will, you know, so I never, ever go there and students are religious, you know, and in the old days I used to get students giving me little evangelistic pamphlets, you know, I think they don’t know because... I don’t know why. They don’t, though... I’m a Buddhist but here I’m not practising. I think if I was back home in the States I would join a temple but here, you know, I’m back-sliding...’ Researcher. ‘And the students?’ Caroline: ‘Oh, they all assume I’m Christian.’ Researcher. ‘And if they asked you outright?’ Caroline: ‘Oh, I’ve never had it happen. I don’t know what I’d say...’ (Caroline 7 - MIC-2009-03-30_10h18m45s – 30:50)

8. Religion & Culture – (CAROLINE) Caroline: ‘I suspect that there’s, you know, there’s what they say then there’s this huge amount that’s cultural but that’s considered Islamic, you know, the whole “some people wear this, some people wear that, some people believe in evil spirits, some people believe in this, some people believe in that.” you know, it all depends so much on local things but it all seems to get mixed up, but I wouldn’t say that I’m any sort of expert on Islam...’ Researcher: ‘You mentioned spirits...’ Caroline: ‘Oh, you know how they are, like there’s this magic tree that has a jinn in it or a building that has a jinn... or a person can be possessed, I mean you know, when there is a student who is epileptic...’ Researcher: ‘And how do you feel about that?’ Caroline: ‘Well, I don’t know. You know, honestly, I don’t particularly feel that it’s not right. It may well be a spirit. I don’t know How do I know? I can’t... just because science hasn’t found spirits doesn’t mean they’re not out there. I mean, a hundred years ago we had no idea about many, many things that now we take for granted, so, I don’t know, who knows what we’ll know a hundred years from now?’ (Caroline 8 - MIC-2009-03-30_10h18m45s – 34:30) (CAROLINE)

14. Students – Critical thinking – (RACHEL) ‘I look at critical thinking from my Western perspective – I am not saying the boys are dumb, I wanna make that very clear, that’s not what I am trying to say, but they have been brought up in a system where they don’t question things, and I am now asking them to question everything they do, and they don’t know how to do that... It’s not that they can’t think, but I think that by the time you are 18 you have learned how to study and it is very difficult to change that after that age... with some of my boys it is like trying to roll a stone uphill.’ (Rachael 14 - MIC-2009-02-17_19h14m46s – 31:20)

15. Students – Memorisation (RACHEL) ‘At school the teacher will give them, like, five essays and tell them one of them will be the exam question and they have to memorise them all – there’s a lot of rote memorisation.’ (Rachael 15 – MIC-2009-02-17_19h14m46s – 32:40)

16. Religion – Islam (RACHEL) ‘A lot of my students here come from government schools, and a lot of them have Quranic teaching and you’re not supposed to question the Quran, it is the word of God, so you don’t question it, so if I use the Quran to teach a lot of things, and if my teachers do not allow me to question, if I am constantly given the answers that I need... well, when I come to them and ask them “why are you doing that?” they just look at me like “just give me the answers”... I may be frustrated but they are frustrated too... we are all learning a new process of why we do the work.’ (Rachael 16 – MIC-2009-02-17_19h14m46s – 35:05)

17. Materials – I develop new materials all the time (RACHAEL)

18. Student Problem – (RACHAEL) (Laughs very loudly) What do you want, today’s experience? (Laughs more) There isn’t a day I have had at teaching at a young male’s college in the UAE when there isn’t a problem... it may be a small problem, but there’s always a problem. Like to day I have a student who does funny voices and makes noise and just cannot be quiet in class... I’m not a psychologist so I don’t know, but he might have A.D.D.’ (Rachael 18 – MIC-2009-02-17_19h14m46s – 40:15)

19. Student Problem – Behaviour (RACHAEL) ‘Well in my class if a student slaps another student or there is kicking under the table or throwing things I am on that really fast, and I remind the students I am a lot bigger than all of them and I will take them outside and beat the crap out of them... we have had some serious fight break out in other classes... but I’m very quick to stop anything that could lead to a fight... you know how boys are, they are more physical and there is always roughhousing, but you know how roughhousing can quickly become something much worse... I’ve noticed that serious fighting tends to happen more in classes with male teachers.’ (Rachael 19 – MIC-2009-02-17_19h14m46s – 45:35)