

**Home or Away: (Re)Negotiating Identity Through Living in the
'In-between' – A Qualitative Investigation of the Kurdish
Diaspora in the United Kingdom**

By

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Thesis submitted

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Canterbury Christ Church University

2023

Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Qadriya, who once had doubts but now witnesses the successful culmination of my academic journey. It serves as a testament to the belief that dedication and determination can overcome any obstacle. I am also dedicating this work to my husband, Mohammed, and my children, Rosh and Noor. Without their unwavering support and understanding, this achievement would not have been possible.

I would like to seize this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to my main supervisor Dr. Christopher Anderson for his continued guidance, insightful advice, and meticulous attention to detail. I also extend special thanks to Professor Adrian Holliday, for our insightful discussions and thought-provoking inquiries that have significantly influenced my thinking. Not forgetting, John Kullman, my former chair of studies, for his invaluable support, perceptiveness, and guidance during the initial phase of my doctoral journey. Thank you, John for your unflattering support even after your retirement. Your assistance in crafting my first-ever article will forever be remembered.

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to my entire family for their constant support and encouragement throughout this journey.

I am also grateful to my colleagues and staff at the Centre for Language and Linguistics for their encouragement and support as I embarked on this Ph.D. journey and pursued my teaching career.

Also, Dr. Nour Elhouda Souleh, deserves a special mention for providing invaluable support and keeping me grounded during the past two years of my Ph.D. journey. Your presence and guidance have made this arduous journey more enjoyable and enriching and I am immensely grateful for that.

I wish to express my profound and enduring gratitude to the members of the Kurdish community who participated in this research. While I must maintain their anonymity to adhere to ethical considerations, I want to stress that their involvement has been vital to the completion of this thesis. Connecting with them solely through the framework of this research has been a privilege, and I am deeply grateful for their willingness to share their personal stories. A special mention goes to my remarkable gatekeeper, Sozan Mama. Your invaluable support in finding and selecting the participants has been instrumental in its success. Thank you, xatu Sozan!

Abstract

This study explores the experiences of eight Iraqi Kurdish (im)migrants in the United Kingdom through a 'bottom-up' approach, situated within the frameworks of 'postcolonialism' and 'non-essentialism.' Employing multimodal data collection techniques, including narratives, spoken and written accounts, and visual representations, the research aims to unravel the intricate process of negotiating cultural identities within the 'in-between' spaces, ultimately fostering a sense of home, and belonging in a new cultural setting.

Central to this exploration is the recognition that individual cultural identity plays a pivotal role in understanding the dynamics of cultural fluidity. The traditional rigidity associated with concepts of 'culture' and 'identity' has evolved into more adaptable notions, a paradigm shift that this study both underscores and substantiates. Through 'thematic analysis,' the findings reveal how Kurdish community members strive to preserve and enrich their Kurdish cultural identity while integrating with diverse cultural domains. Simultaneously, they adapt, harmonising their heritage with their new environment, resulting in hybrid identities that reconcile the past and present.

Despite facing challenges upon arrival in the UK and during the adaptation process, participants view these obstacles within a temporary context. Their ability to transform adversities into personal growth opportunities is a testament to their resilience. Furthermore, interaction with material culture catalyses participants' adaptation, leading to novel in-between identities that integrate diverse elements. This complex interplay highlights the multifaceted nature of migration and identity negotiation within a culturally diverse context.

The study draws from diverse theoretical frameworks, encompassing Holliday's 'small culture paradigm,' Bhabha's 'hybridity' and 'third space,' Said's 'orientalism,' Miller's exploration of material culture, and various other relevant theories. These frameworks provide a comprehensive interpretative lens. This research underscores the significance of cultural identity in the context of migration, offering empirical evidence of how individuals actively engage and thrive within the interstices of cultural diversity. By shedding light on the processes and mechanisms that underpin successful adaptation, this study contributes substantially to the evolving discourse on cultural identity, migration, and the intricate dynamics of belonging in an increasingly globalised world.

Table of Contents

1	<i>Introduction</i>	12
1.1	The Research Setting	13
1.2	The Rationale for the Research	14
1.3	The Researcher's Profile and Motives: My Positionality	15
1.4	Research Objectives and Questions	19
1.5	Mapping the Thesis Structure	21
2	<i>Kurdish Diaspora: Theoretical Outlines and Broader Perspectives</i>	24
2.1	Introduction	24
2.2	Diaspora, Border, and Transnational Identities	24
2.3	Diaspora Definition and Origin	26
2.4	Kurdish Diaspora	32
2.5	Diaspora and Adaptation	37
2.5.1	Classical Adaptation Theories	37
2.6	Intercultural and Differential Adaptation Theories	41
2.7	Diaspora in Different Contexts	44
2.7.1	Intercultural Communication, Identity Narratives, First- and Second-Generation Migrants	45
2.8	Chapter Conclusion	50
3	<i>Theoretical Framework</i>	51
3.1	Introduction	51
3.2	Cultural identity	52
	Culture as communication	52
3.2.1	Small culture formation on the go (Holliday, 1999)	56
3.2.2	Identity quest	59
3.2.3	A jelly on the beach: Identity characteristics	64
3.3	Identity in action: identity negotiation and social validation	67
3.4	Hybridity, in-betweens, and third Space: Negotiating the stairwell	71
3.5	The grammar of othering	76
3.6	Human interaction and power dynamics	79
3.7	Home and sense of belonging	81
3.8	Reading material culture: A semiotic approach	84
3.9	Chapter conclusion	88

4	<i>The Research Process and Methodology</i>	90
4.1	Introduction	90
4.2	The Philosophical Underpinning	90
4.3	Research Design	93
4.3.1	Narrative research	94
4.3.2	The connection between the interpretive constructivist approach and narrative enquiry	99
4.3.3	Narrative interviews, visual ethnography, photovoice, corpus of material objects and story writing as a multimodal construct	102
4.3.4	Research setting: approaching and selecting participants	105
4.4	Multimodal data collection methods	107
4.4.1	Hybrid narrative approach: Extracting stories	108
4.4.2	Story writing	111
4.4.3	Visual ethnography, photovoice, and corpus of material objects	112
4.4.4	Data collection limitations	113
4.5	Researching multilingually	115
4.6	Positionality and reflexivity	118
4.6.1	Positionality	118
4.6.2	Reflexivity	120
4.7	Trustworthiness	123
4.8	Ethics, ethical procedure, and limitations	124
4.8.1	Power relation and status	125
4.9	Data analysis	127
4.9.1	Thematic analysis	127
4.10	Chapter conclusion	133
5	<i>Negotiating and Navigating Identity</i>	135
5.1	Introduction	135
5.1.1	The organisation of the findings chapters	135
5.1.2	Introduction to Chapter Five	137
5.2	Multiple cultural worlds	138
5.2.1	Navigating multiple identities	138
5.2.2	Agency and dynamic nature of self-representation	142
5.2.3	Evolving identity	148
5.2.4	The illusion of wholeness	156
5.3	Home and sense of belonging	162
5.3.1	Home, identity, and sense of belonging: An interplay	163
5.3.2	Mobility and sense of belonging	170
5.4	Ethnic reactivity	174
5.5	Chapter summary and discussions	179
6	<i>Migration Experiences: Past, Present, and Future</i>	181

6.1	Introduction	181
6.2	Experiencing culture and language	182
6.2.1	Language difficulties and cultural challenges	182
6.3	Othering: The politics of self and other	190
6.3.1	Ethnocentrism and stereotypes	191
6.3.2	Interracial discrimination as a new form of othering	194
6.3.3	Xenophobia, racism, and the role of language	201
6.4	The Effect of perceived discrimination on adaptation and well-being	205
6.5	Chapter summary and discussions	211
7	<i>The Intersection Between Material Culture and Identity: The Kurdish Case</i>	214
7.1	Introduction	214
7.2	Objects as art	215
7.2.1	Participants' use of artefacts and their impact on identity	215
7.2.2	Laurels and journal as a material culture	220
7.2.3	Heirlooms as memory objects	229
7.3	Place attachment and identity	236
7.3.1	The power of place and identity	237
	(Ari - interview 1)	237
7.4	Clothing and identity	244
7.4.1	Apparel, clothing, and identity	244
7.5	Preserving participants' cultural identity through celebrating cultural traditions	250
7.5.1	Kurdish diaspora in the UK: imagined community	251
7.6	Ritualising food	257
7.6.1	Food as an icebreaker in reducing social isolation	258
7.6.2	Food sharing and performing identity	262
7.7	Chapter summary and discussions	266
8	<i>General Discussion, Implications and Conclusions</i>	269
8.1	Introduction	269
8.2	Addressing the research questions	270
8.2.1	Addressing the first research question	270
8.2.2	Addressing the second research question	272
8.2.3	Addressing the third and fourth research questions	274
8.3	Understanding the findings through 'hybridity,' 'third space,' 'orientalism' and 'stuff' theories	277
8.3.1	Hybridity and third space	278
8.3.2	Orientalism	281
8.3.3	Stuff as material culture	283

8.4	Research contributions:	285
8.5	Research implications	287
8.5.1	Implication for further migration research	287
8.5.2	Implication for the policy makers	288
8.6	Suggestions for further research	289
8.7	Concluding notes and final reflection	291
9	<i>Reference list</i>	294
	<i>List of appendices</i>	337
9.1	Ethical approval	337
9.2	Consent form	338
9.3	Participant’s information sheet	340
9.4	Interview reflection worksheet.	343
9.5	A sample of the interview transcription – Hana’s interview	344
9.6	Story writing sample – Kani	356
9.7	Story writing sample – Saman.	357
9.8	Story writing sample – Hana.	358
9.9	A sample of the written narrative – Omer.	359
9.10	A sample of the follow up interviews on WhatsApp.	361
9.11	Permission granted from the H & L Design via Messenger.	362
9.12	Traditional Kurds clothing for men – Additional items can be worn by men.	363
9.13	Halabja at the time of the attack.	364
9.14	Graves of Halabja victim	365
9.15	The Anfal campaign or the Kurdish genocide.	366
9.16	Celebrating Eid in the UK	367
9.17	Samawar & Art work	368

List of Tables

Table 1: World Migration Report between 2000 - 2022. _____	26
Table 2: The distribution of Kurds across Europe and North America. _____	36
Table 3: Cia and Rodríguez (1996, p. 35) proposition explains the proposition during first utterances (Time 1) and the role of experiences (Time 2). _____	42
Table 4: Participant's demographic information. _____	108
Table 5: The process of thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). _____	129
Table 6: The organisation of the findings chapters. _____	136

List of Figures

Figure 1: The location of Kurdistan geographically. _____	32
Figure 2: Hollyday's (2010) Grammar of Culture driven from Intercultural Communication and Ideology. Sage, p. 131. _____	57
Figure 3: The connection between the interpretive constructivist approach and narrative research. _____	100
Figure 4: My Reflexive Turn during the data collection stages. _____	121
Figure 5: Thematic analysis coding process. _____	132
Figure 6: An illustration of a thematic map taken from the second findings chapter – Chapter Six. _____	133
Figure 7: Goizha Mountain in the city of Sulaimani – Northern Iraq. Photo by the researcher _____	165
Figure 8: Kani stands by the 'I love Sulemani' sign, located at the front of the Sulaimaniyah governate. _____	167
Figure 9: Kani's ancestry test result. _____	177
Figure 10: A screenshot of Karim's journal. _____	199
Figure 11: Vintage Rotary Telephone and Viceroy film box camera positioned at one side of Kani's living room. The data is collected via visual ethnography. _____	216
Figure 12: Traditional Kurdish Frame Drum, Def or Dayereh and Riq. The data is collected via visual ethnography. _____	218
Figure 13: The artwork that Saman created for his wife. The data is collected via visual ethnography. _____	219
Figure 14: An old house in Iraqi Kurdistan. The house is in Erbil Citadel, closely imitating Saman's original artwork. _____	220
Figure 15: Hana's dedication award. The data is collected via visual ethnography. _____	221
Figure 16: Karim's journal dated back to 1999. _____	223
Figure 17: A collection of photos from Kari's journal indicates different migration 'stations'. _____	224

<i>Figure 18: A selection of Karim's written record - poems.</i>	226
<i>Figure 19: The Kurdistan national football team jersey.</i>	230
<i>Figure 20: Mishki that Kani bought from Kurdistan. The data is collected via photovoice technique.</i>	232
<i>Figure 21: Different coloured jamana. the data is collected via the corpus of material objects.</i>	232
<i>Figure 22: Atasbih and a bowl Kani kept in memory of her parents. The data is collected via photovoice technique.</i>	233
<i>Figure 23: Samawar or [səmə'var].</i>	235
<i>Figure 24: Omer's artwork – the historic cities in Erbil.</i>	235
<i>Figure 25: Image 1 - A historical town in Kent; Image 2 - A listed building in the Kent region. The data is collected via photovoice technique.</i>	239
<i>Figure 26: Ari took the photo in a town fifty miles away from London a few months before the interview. The data is collected via photovoice technique.</i>	240
<i>Figure 27: Karim's favourite place in his town. the data is collected via visual ethnography method.</i>	242
<i>Figure 28: The inside of Karim's favourite cafe/bar. The data is collected via visual ethnography.</i>	243
<i>Figure 29: In London, Kani and her friends donned traditional Kurdish clothes, celebrating their cultural heritage at an event. The photo is taken and forwarded by the participant.</i>	246
<i>Figure 30: Layers of traditional Kurdish clothing for Women</i>	247
<i>Figure 31: Layers of traditional Kurdish clothing.</i>	248
<i>Figure 32: Layers of men's Kurdish clothing – Kurdish Central. The data is collected via corpus of material culture</i>	250
<i>Figure 33: Halabja Magazine in collaboration with the Kurdish Community in Portsmouth and other Kurdish communities across the UK.</i>	253
<i>Figure 34: Kani and her family are celebrating Newroz in London. The data is collected by utilising photovoice technique.</i>	254
<i>Figure 35: A tree planted in a park in London in remembrance of those Kurds killed in Halabja. The colour of the flowers represents the colours in the Kurdistan flag. The data is utilised by the photovoice technique.</i>	255
<i>Figure 36: Different types of Dolma that are popular in Iraqi Kurdistan. The data is collected via the corpus of material objects technique.</i>	261
<i>Figure 37: Kurdish style Kufta and Kuba. The data is collected via the corpus of material objects technique.</i>	261

Figure 38: Gazo, a traditional Kurdish sweet. The data is collected by the researcher using visual ethnography technique. _____ 264

Figure 39: Trkhena – a traditional Kurdish food. The data is collected via the visual ethnography technique. _____ 265

1 Introduction

This thesis delves into the experiences of eight Iraqi Kurdish immigrants who settled in the United Kingdom (referred to as the UK) over a decade ago. By scrutinising their narratives, encompassing spoken, written, and visual accounts, this research seeks to uncover how these individuals navigate their cultural identities while dwelling in 'in-between' spaces. Rather than aiming to formulate novel theories, this study's primary goal is to provide a fresh and comprehensive perspective on the experiences of migrants, with a specific emphasis on the Kurdish diaspora. It endeavours to bridge existing gaps in the literature and accentuate the significance of examining migration experiences from a grassroots perspective, firmly rooted in the context of the Kurdish diaspora. In pursuit of this objective, the research aims to contribute to a broader understanding of migration processes and to foster a more nuanced comprehension of the lived realities within the Kurdish diaspora.

Before delving further, it is essential to clarify terminology regarding the Kurdish population under examination. The terms 'migrant' and 'immigrant' are employed, along with the concept of 'diaspora,' although distinctions exist. 'Migrants' typically denote those who make temporary relocations, sometimes within the same country (Anderson & Blinder, 2021), while 'immigrants' encompass individuals who cross international borders with the intention of permanent settlement (Guskin & Wilson, 2017). Both terms encapsulate those departing their native country due to socio-economic, socio-cultural, and geopolitical factors. My rationale for using these terminologies is tied to the individuals in this study, who I categorise as '(im)migrants.' These people voluntarily left Kurdistan, and crossed borders, often seeking employment, better opportunities, and the realisation of lifelong dreams. It is important to note that some of them initially entered the host country as undocumented immigrants but were subsequently granted asylum. While these individuals share common experiences with other migrants, it is crucial to acknowledge the unique situation of this subgroup, where many left their homeland primarily due to socio, economic and cultural factors rather than political ones.

Throughout this thesis, the individuals under investigation will be referred to as 'participants' and 'research participants.' These designations underscore their active engagement in the research process, encompassing various research activities such as narrative interviews, photovoice, and story writing. The deliberate use of both terms interchangeably within this study aims to prevent repetition while emphasising the significance of the individuals' contributions to our understanding of the Kurdish diaspora experience. Further details on the participants' involvement can be found in Chapter Four, section 4.4.

1.1 *The Research Setting*

Migration, a phenomenon deeply embedded in human history for millennia, encompasses the movement of both individuals and communities across geographical and political boundaries (Castelli, 2018). The era of globalisation has not only prompted but also facilitated international migration. By the second half of the twentieth century, there was a notable rise in the number of people settling in foreign lands (Baser, 2011), with nearly a hundred million individuals residing beyond their country of origin. This trend has been further influenced by political upheavals, particularly in regions like Iraq and the Arab world, resulting in the displacement of approximately 16 million refugees globally (Kingsley, 2015). Among the groups affected, Kurds, constituting one of the largest ethnic and linguistic communities without an independent state, have experienced migratory patterns dating back to the nineteenth century (McDowall, 2021). Recent waves of Kurdish migration have garnered significant attention within the literature due to the transnational nature of the Kurdish case.

Numerous researchers have directed their studies towards exploring this essential humanitarian concern, utilising knowledge from various academic disciplines. Noteworthy advancements in this realm encompass the writings of Baser (2013), Castellie (2018), Finney and Catney (2016), De Hass (2021), Zalme (2017) and others. Through their joint efforts, our understanding of migration and its complex outcomes across different situations has been improved. The study of Kurdish individuals within the European context is a recent occurrence. Over the last thirty years, multiple investigations have examined the concept of Kurdish identity across various European nations. Some of these inquiries encompass research by Alinia et al. (2014), Ameen (2018), Ata (2017), Baser et al. (2013), Demir (2012), Eliassi (2013), Enneli, Modood & Bradley (2005), Khayati (2014), Wahlbeck (1999), and Zalme (2017). These studies, for the most part, are fuelled by Kurdish nationalism. Additional examinations have concentrated on language, ideologies, and aspects of identity (Mahmud, 2018; Yilmaz, 2016, 2018). Nevertheless, various dimensions of the Kurdish diaspora experience require further attention, such as the intricate process of identity negotiation and navigation among first-generation Kurds, (Fox, 2021; Mahmud, 2024) the impact of material culture on identity (Mahmud, 2023) and the formation of identity through material culture (Mahmud, 2024). These facets require further exploration to develop a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies present in the lives of Kurdish migrants.

Given the identified research gap, the present study seeks to move away from essentialist and nationalist perspectives that tend to portray Kurds as a homogeneous nation with a single, unmistakable national identity. Instead, my primary objective is to enrich my understanding of the lived experiences of individuals within the Kurdish diaspora. I aim to delve into the

intricacies and diversities inherent in the Kurdish diaspora, recognising the multifaceted nature of Kurdish identities and their adaptability within the context of migration. This research approach aims to enrich my understanding of the Kurdish migrant experience, providing a deeper and more nuanced perspective that challenges prevailing stereotypes and overly simplified notions of Kurdish identity.

The titles of the thesis, namely 'home or away,' 'negotiating identity,' and 'living in the in-between,' encapsulate fundamental yet intricate concepts. This title has paved the way for novel avenues in investigating the real-life experiences of migrants. It is important to emphasise that these concepts remain open to interpretation, introducing a layer of complexity into this study. Chapter Four will offer additional insights into the data collection process, while subsequent chapters (i.e., Chapters Five, Six, and Seven), dedicated to data analysis, will continue to explore, and elucidate these thematic dimensions. Before proceeding further, it is important to clarify that this thesis does not primarily focus on the Kurdish national identity. Although the social sciences recognise the distinct theoretical underpinnings of concepts like nation, nation-state, and nationalism, these terms have been employed throughout the thesis for explanatory purposes and to provide background context about the people under investigation. The core focus remains on exploring the multifaceted experiences of migrants in the context of their sense of home, identity negotiation, and living in between cultures.

1.2 The Rationale for the Research

This research is interdisciplinary, primarily situated within the domains of sociology, cultural studies, and intercultural communication. It draws upon critical theories from a wide array of fields, including migration studies, psychology, social psychology, archaeology, anthropology, human geography, and sociolinguistics. These perspectives are further elucidated in Chapter Three, the Theoretical Framework chapter. Consequently, the theories and concepts applied here have emerged from these interdisciplinary fields. The rationale behind incorporating literature from these various disciplinary areas is to amplify the voices of a specific group of individuals – Iraqi-Kurdish migrants – and explore their lived experiences through the perspective of a researcher who shares a similar cultural background. This multidimensional approach facilitates the deeper and more nuanced understanding and examination of the narratives and realities of these (im)migrants.

This study conducts a comprehensive exploration of fundamental concepts: 'identity,' 'culture,' 'identity negotiation and navigation,' 'adaptation,' 'in-betweenness,' 'home and sense of belonging,' and 'material culture.' These concepts will be thoroughly examined and explained in Chapters Two and Three.

Furthermore, the research delves into the challenges faced by Kurdish migrants in the United Kingdom and observes their strategies for navigating and overcoming these hurdles. Through this investigation, the study challenges the notion of a fixed identity that categorises individuals solely based on social and ethnic affiliations, implying unchanging traits. Instead, it aligns with ‘post-colonialist’ and ‘nonessential’ perspectives, drawing on the works of scholars such as Bhabha, Hall, Holliday, Holmes, and Miller, among others. These viewpoints reject the idea of a permanent and static identity. Embracing these alternative perspectives, the research recognises the dynamic and evolving nature of identity, providing a more nuanced understanding of how migrants negotiate and shape their sense of self in a new cultural and societal milieu.

This research distinguishes itself through its unique theoretical and methodological attributes, aiming to explore the socio-cultural aspects of participants’ lived experiences. Employing a multimodal data collection approach, this study moves beyond conventional, individual-focused research methodologies. It recognises the collaborative nature inherent in discussions about migration and the migrant community. This recognition extends to understanding that these discussions are co-created not only by migrants themselves but also by the host society. The interactions and exchanges between these two groups significantly shape the narratives and perspectives regarding migration experiences. By comprehending the co-creation of narratives, the study gains valuable insights into the intricate dynamics and interactions between migrants and the broader host society, ultimately fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the participants’ experience (Gillespie and Cornish, 2020). The utilisation of multimodal data collection techniques, as elaborated upon in Chapter Four, empowers the researcher to incorporate a variety of rich data sources. This approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of participants’ experiences, allowing for the provision of a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973). In doing so, the study delves into the intricate layers of migrants’ lives and the multifaceted interplay between their cultural identities and the dynamics of the host society.

1.3 The Researcher’s Profile and Motives: My Positionality

My profound interest in researching the cultural identity of Iraqi-Kurdish migrants stems from a series of critical incidents and academic experiences throughout my life. I was born in Southern Kurdistan, a region renowned for its rich history and vibrant culture. However, my journey took an unexpected turn when I married my Kurdish-British husband in 2007. I embarked on a life-altering journey by migrating to the United Kingdom in early 2008, leaving behind my hometown, family, friends, and cherished memories. The act of relocating covered

an extensive distance of over five thousand miles, signifying a momentous departure from the comfort and familiarity of my previous surroundings.

As a young and inexperienced woman, the prospect of crossing borders and beginning a new chapter in my life was exhilarating. Filled with hope and anticipation, I eagerly pondered the possibilities that awaited me in this foreign land. Upon my arrival at Heathrow Airport, a mixture of fear and excitement engulfed me, although I did not perceive myself as fundamentally different from others except for the language barrier. However, it did not take long for me to experience a profound epiphany, a sudden realisation that my life had undergone an irreversible transformation. I knew I had to prepare myself to face the multitude of challenges that lay ahead.

Upon my arrival in the UK, the first significant challenge I faced was the language barrier. Prior to coming here, my exposure to English had been minimal - I had only touched upon the language; I could barely articulate simple phrases of no more than five to six short sentences. Also, my reading and comprehension skills were at their weakest point. While I had some knowledge of English grammar, putting it into practice was a different matter altogether. As a result, I found myself in the difficult position of having to acquire fluency in English, adapt to a new society, and navigate the complexities of unfamiliar cultural expectations.

The process of reconciling my traditional customs and social behaviours with the demands of this new cultural landscape proved to be immensely challenging. I grappled with the ongoing dilemma of how much of my own cultural practices to maintain while also embracing aspects of the host culture. In addition to the linguistic and cultural challenges, I had to familiarise myself with the workings of the educational system to position myself optimally and pursue my goals. Adapting to a new language, cultural norms and educational environment required determination and perseverance. Overcoming these obstacles required a steadfast commitment to my personal growth and integration into UK society.

In early 2009, I made a life-changing decision to return to education and commit myself to learning the language. Three years later, driven by my ambition for a better future, I decided to take my education further. Despite my limited language proficiency, I was fortunate enough to be accepted into a local college to pursue an Access to Higher Education Diploma course. Fuelled by determination, I faced the daunting challenges with courage and perseverance. I devoted countless hours to daily study and research to improve my language skills. The pursuit of my dreams demanded significant sacrifices, but the promise of a fulfilling future made each sacrifice worthwhile. Upon completing the diploma course, I received conditional offers from three universities in Southeast England. After thoughtful consideration, I chose to study English Language and Communication at Canterbury Christ Church University. This decision

marked a pivotal moment in my journey, setting the stage for a promising future and a pathway towards achieving my aspirations. From 2013 to 2016, my life revolved around three distinct roles: a full-time student, a wife, and a mother to my two young children, aged only two and five at the time. Juggling these responsibilities while being physically separated from my family and friends presented its unique set of challenges. Nevertheless, every step I took on this transformative journey served as a steep learning curve, fostering personal growth and resilience. As a returning student to a university environment, I found a newfound confidence that motivated me to strive for greater goals, despite facing daunting challenges. With steadfast dedication and enthusiasm, I transformed what seemed impossible into achievable outcomes. By the midpoint of my final year, my hard work paid off and I secured admission to the University of Kent for an MA in Linguistics. This accomplishment marked a significant milestone in my academic journey, reinforcing my resolve to keep pushing my limits.

While pursuing my MA degree, I took on a new role at an education centre. I began as a learning support assistant but quickly transitioned to teaching English and Maths to teenagers. This experience brought me into close contact with migrant students, allowing me to offer educational support and help them reach their full potential. Through these meaningful interactions, I not only assisted others but also gained a deeper understanding of myself, grappling with the complexities and challenges of exposure to diverse cultural realities. Within this professional context, I frequently encountered questions and challenges surrounding my identity as a woman, a mother, a Kurdish individual, a Muslim, and an (im)migrant. Discrimination based on my beliefs, race, accent, and personal abilities became an unfortunate reality. For instance, I faced a situation where my manager disregarded my religious beliefs and gifted me a bottle of wine, reflecting insensitivity towards my identity. Moreover, another teacher questioned my qualifications, spreading rumours about my competence to fulfil my assigned job responsibilities. Despite having lived in the UK for many years, these experiences led me to realise that I am perceived as ‘almost the same but not quite’ within the societal landscape (Bhabha, 1984, p. 126).

A recent incident at a furniture shop triggered a deep introspection regarding my identity and sense of belonging. When asked about my origin, I replied with ‘Folkestone, Kent,’ only to have the shopkeeper persistently inquire about my ‘true’ origin. While such questions have become commonplace, this instance compelled me to ponder ‘who I am’ and ‘where I belong.’ Despite holding British nationality, I often wonder if my appearance conforms to the typical British stereotype. At home, I switch between Kurdish and English when conversing with my husband and children. My interest in Kurdish television channels has diminished, and my engagement in politics has lessened over the years. Small changes, such as my newfound fondness for coffee, highlight the fluidity of my identities, influenced by factors like age, education, religion,

and cultural aspects. Like most individuals, I continuously grapple with constructing my identity when interacting with diverse groups. I carefully consider my attire and presentation in various situations to align with the identity I wish to convey. These ongoing transformations and adaptations underscore the intricate interplay between my different identities and the dynamic nature of my sense of self.

Reflecting on my experiences as an (im)migrant, I discover a profound connection with others who have embarked on similar journeys. As a Kurdish woman deeply acquainted with the lives of Kurdish communities in the diaspora, I have developed a genuine fascination for studying refugee and immigrant identities. This passion has become evident in my academic pursuits, as evidenced by the topics I explored during my BA studies and my MA dissertation on the language identity of first- and second-generation Kurdish migrants in the UK. The combination of my personal narrative and the stories shared by the participants who share my cultural heritage and experiences has driven me to undertake this project. By examining the experiences of first-generation Iraqi Kurds in the UK, I seek to delve more deeply into crucial and contemporary issues surrounding migration, refugees, intercultural communication and other related fields.

These personal experiences have had a profound impact on my examination and subjective interpretation of the participants' experiences. My position and background as a researcher have shaped the selection of data collection methods and the approach I employed to analyse the data in this study. Being well-acquainted with the research participants' cultural norms, values, and beliefs has positioned me as an insider in this research. The ability to communicate in the same mother tongue and understand each other's perspectives has contributed to a more enriched research process. However, it is essential to acknowledge that differences in age, gender, socioeconomic background, and educational level also classify me as an outsider researcher in some respects. As a result, my role as a researcher was not fixed; rather, it continuously shifted between these two positions. This duality of positionality, where I am both inside and outside, has given rise to an in-between identity as a researcher. This concept is further explored and elaborated on in Chapter Four, section 4.5.1, where I delve into the complexities and implications of this unique perspective of my research. I share these personal stories to emphasise that my passion for researching cultural identity and the negotiation and navigation of identity is deeply rooted in my daily experiences, exposures, and struggles. These experiences have been the driving force behind my decision to embark on a Ph.D. journey and have ultimately led to the inception of this project. It is my sincere hope that this research will contribute valuable insights to the understanding of migrant experiences and pave the way for meaningful dialogue and positive change. This study aims to raise awareness of the experiences of Kurdish migrants, offering a platform for their voices to be heard. Ultimately,

my intention is for this endeavour to facilitate more informed and compassionate conversations about migration, cultural identity, and intercultural communication.

1.4 Research Objectives and Questions

This research endeavours to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of a specific group of first-generation Iraqi Kurds who migrated from Kurdistan more than a decade ago. The primary focus lies on exploring the intricate process of identity negotiation and navigation among these individuals. To do so, the study adopts a ‘bottom-up’ approach, investigating the unique experiences and perspectives of the research participants (Hall, 1991; Holliday, 2013). The following are the research questions that guide the study:

- i. How do Iraqi Kurdish migrants to the United Kingdom (re)negotiate and navigate their identities in response to their new cultural and social context?
- ii. What challenges do the Iraqi Kurdish migrants face in the United Kingdom, and how do they cope with them?
- iii. How do Iraqi Kurdish migrants in the United Kingdom experience changes in their identity, and what is the role of material culture in easing this process?
- iv. How do Iraqi Kurdish people define themselves in terms of nations and groups?

To address the research question effectively, a qualitative data collection approach was adopted, utilising *interpretative constructivist* methodology (Holliday, 2016). This approach aimed to examine deeply into the participants’ lived experiences and provide rich insights into their migration journeys. Multimodal data collection techniques were employed, encompassing various methods such as hybrid narrative interviews, story writing, and an ethnographic approach, especially, visual ethnography, including photovoice and the examination of material objects. By employing this comprehensive array of methods, the study ensured a holistic understanding of the research participants’ experiences and encouraged them to openly share their migration stories. The findings related to the research questions are presented and discussed in three dedicated chapters, specifically Chapters Five, Six, and Seven. These chapters serve as a platform to illuminate the diverse aspects of the participants’ identity negotiation processes, shedding light on the complexities of the lived experiences of the individuals under investigation.

Embarking on an academic research journey is both demanding and rewarding. Working with marginalised communities presents unique encounters that, as a researcher, I sometimes find challenging to navigate. However, as a Kurdish researcher, the shared cultural background between myself and the participants has brought a sense of solidarity and reassurance. This realisation has reinforced the understanding that we all possess untold stories that deserve to

be expressed and given prominence. The practical outcome of this research endeavour offers an opportunity to discern the implications inherent in immersing oneself in specific migration discourses. The significance of this research lies in its potential to shed light on the intricacies of the research participants' experiences and contribute to a deeper understanding of their lived realities. Acknowledging and valuing the diverse stories within these communities can foster a greater sense of understanding and empathy, thus creating a more inclusive and compassionate society.

This research faces significant theoretical and methodological challenges that necessitate careful consideration. Firstly, it is vital to acknowledge that foreign researchers have often treated the Kurdish population as a 'homogenous entity' (Romano *et al.*, 2017, p. 301), overlooking the complex political and historical context of the Kurds as a divided nation (Kaya, 2020). The diasporic Kurdish community, originating from various countries such as Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria, has been marginalised due to limited awareness and knowledge in this regard. Scholars like Demir (2012) and Zalme (2017) have similarly highlighted this oversight. Moreover, within the realm of Kurdish diaspora studies, ongoing debates among Kurdish researchers have predominantly centred on the political circumstances driving Kurdish migration to Europe (van Bruinessen, 2000; Wahlbeck, 1999).

Despite the significance of these studies, researchers have often overlooked the role of socio-cultural factors in influencing migrants' decisions. To address this gap, this study aims to achieve a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of the issues being explored by incorporating insights from other scholars. This research seeks to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted issues under investigation by drawing from a variety of scholarly viewpoints. The primary goal is to enrich the existing academic discourse on Kurdish cultural identity; emphasising the importance of avoiding the homogenisation of experiences within the Kurdish diaspora, this study aims to recognise and appreciate the diversity and complexity within this community. By doing so, it strives to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of first-generation Iraqi Kurds in the UK and illuminate the socio-cultural factors that shape their identity negotiation and navigation.

When examining the Kurdish diaspora in Europe, another crucial aspect to consider is the employed research methodology. It has been noted that non-Kurdish researchers often adopt a 'top-down' viewpoint when engaging with the Kurdish community, focusing primarily on political dimensions, and adhering to predetermined perspectives, as emphasised by Orhan (2020) and Zalme (2017). Regrettably, this 'top-down' approach lacks the depth to capture the intricate experiences and viewpoints within the Kurdish community. In contrast, the current research takes a distinct approach, embracing a 'bottom-up' methodology influenced by Hall

(1991) and Holliday (2013). This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the actual experiences of the individuals being studied. By adopting this perspective, the study endeavours to unravel the complexities of the Kurdish diaspora in Europe, ensuring that the voices and experiences of community members remain at the forefront of analysis instead of being overshadowed by external viewpoints. The central focus is on amplifying the voices of the participants delving into the intricacies of their in-between identities. This approach is vital for constructing a theoretical and conceptual framework that aligns with the specific data under examination, facilitating a more targeted and comprehensive analysis of the research subject. Ultimately, this methodology enables the capturing of the diverse and enriching experiences within the Kurdish diaspora, leading to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the construction of their identity.

1.5 Mapping the Thesis Structure

Following this chapter, the structure of the forthcoming seven additional chapters is briefly outlined below:

Chapter Two – Migration: Theoretical Outline and Broader Perspectives

In Chapter Two, I define and explore the concept of diaspora, particularly focusing on that of the Kurdish people. Additionally, I examine the notion of adaptation, and examine different adaptation theories. The chapter also highlights the growing interest in studying migrant communities across various fields. To contextualise this study within existing research, I provide an overview of relevant case studies conducted in the past decade, linking the findings of the present study to insights gained from previous research endeavour.

Chapter Three – Theoretical Framework

Chapter Three provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for the entire thesis, with a strong focus on the literature review. This review explores key terms such as ‘identity,’ ‘culture,’ ‘identity negotiation and navigation,’ ‘hybridity,’ ‘third space,’ ‘home and sense of belonging,’ ‘othering,’ and ‘material culture.’ By considering various theoretical backgrounds, it offers a deep understanding of these concepts and synthesises different perspectives to create a robust foundation for the research. Engaging with diverse scholarly works significantly contributes to our understanding of the key concepts in this chapter. This theoretical framework forms the basis for analysing and interpreting the research findings in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven, enabling a nuanced exploration of the experiences of Iraqi Kurdish migrants in the UK.

Chapter Four – Research Process and Methodology

This chapter delves into the methodology employed in the study, starting with its theoretical foundation. I explore the research design, highlighting how the data collection technique aligns with interpretivism and social constructionism, while also considering field access and roles. I then examine the data collection methods, encompassing narrative interviews, visual ethnography, story writing, photovoice, and the collection of material artifacts. The suitability of each method for capturing diverse participant experiences is explained, along with discussions on ethical considerations, researcher positionality, and trustworthiness. Lastly, I elucidate the data analysis approach, employing thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and a ‘reflexive thematic approach’ (Braun and Clarke, 2019). This method uncovers emergent themes and patterns within participant data, shaping the study’s subsequent findings.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven – Findings and Discussion

These chapters present the findings and engage in discussions based on the gathered data. The division of these chapters is organised according to the nature of the constructs, considering their interconnectedness and relevance to the research questions. My primary objective throughout these chapters is to amplify the voices of the participants and provide insights into their migration experiences. This endeavour effectively addresses the research questions initially outlined in Chapter One, Section 1.4, and reiterated at the beginning of Chapter Four.

Chapter Five explores three central themes: (a) multiple cultural worlds, (b) home and sense of belonging, and (c) ethnic reactivity. These themes emerge prominently throughout the data and, thus, receive focused attention and in-depth analysis in this chapter to highlight the identity negotiation and navigation process.

Chapter Six Chapter Six explores the respondents’ migration experiences, examining the challenges they have encountered. It thoroughly investigates their language learning journey, cultural experiences, and encounters with othering.

Chapter Seven Chapter Seven explores the relationship between humans and material culture, focusing specifically on the objects that the participants have used or kept in the diaspora to negotiate and navigate their identities.

Chapter Eight – General Discussion, Implications, and Conclusions

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the findings, implications, and conclusions. It starts by revisiting and expanding upon the findings introduced in the preceding chapters. Subsequently, the discussion will scrutinise how the findings align with

the concepts and theories introduced in Chapter 3. A dedicated section follows, addressing the research's contributions, implications, and acknowledging the encountered limitations. Moving forward, potential avenues for future research will be explored. Finally, the chapter concludes by presenting the researcher's concluding reflections on the personal journey of investigating her own community.

2 Kurdish Diaspora: Theoretical Outlines and Broader Perspectives

2.1 Introduction

This chapter delves into the theoretical foundations and broader perspectives surrounding the notion of diaspora, tracing its historical origins. It also explores theories concerning adaptation and the experiences of first and second-generation migrants on a global scale. By examining findings from previously studied communities and their experiences in host countries, the aim is to deepen our understanding of how migrants from diverse cultural backgrounds and geographical locations adapt to their new cultural realities. This involves meticulously examining existing theories within the context of migration experiences to facilitate a more in-depth exploration of how diaspora communities navigate their new cultural environments. Through this examination, we gain a clearer understanding of how individuals from diverse backgrounds and locations adapt to their new realities.

To offer a comprehensive overview, this chapter is organised into four main sections, each with corresponding subsections. Section 2.2 provides a general introduction to the concept of diaspora, beginning with an exploration of its origins, definition, and underlying theoretical foundations. Building upon this foundation, the subsequent section focuses on examining the Kurdish diaspora. This section presents formal statistics related to the global Kurdish population and engages in an in-depth discussion about the status of Kurdish diaspora in Europe with specific attention directed towards section 2.4. Additionally, the chapter explores adaptation theories proposed by Kim (1988), Cia & Rodríguez (1996), and De la Graza and Ono (2015). In addition, the chapter conducts a critical analysis of existing migration studies carried out across diverse intercultural contexts. Through the review of relevant literature, the objective is to draw insightful comparisons and identify recurrent patterns among various migrant communities. Ultimately, this enriches our comprehension of the intricate processes involved in their adaptation and acculturation endeavours.

2.2 Diaspora, Border, and Transnational Identities

Migration is widely recognised as a complex phenomenon that arises from intersecting and fluctuating motives that defy simple explanation (Benson and O'Reilly, 2016). The history of human migration dates to prehistoric times (Mandal, 1981, p. 2), with the first wave of migration occurring 60,000 years ago as modern humans arrived in South East Asia (Stanyon *et al.*, 2009). Later, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a significant number of

Europeans migrated to the Middle East for various reasons, including trade, military expeditions, and seeking a new life in the region (Mitchell and Millard, 2007, p. 24).

The advent of the First and Second World Wars had a transformative impact on the global landscape (Miller and Wich, 2011), leading to widespread forced migration as thousands of people left their homelands and resettled elsewhere. After the Second World War, Europe experienced several waves of mass migration. The continent became a new home for numerous migrants who sought refuge due to poverty in different parts of the world and engaged in labour migration because of agreements signed in the 1950s and 1960s between European countries (Lavenex and Uçarer, 2002, p. 4). Despite stringent restrictions imposed by Northwest European countries in the 1980s, many individuals managed to establish their legal status through family reintegration and formation routes (van Mol and de Valk, 2016). However, with the conclusion of the Gulf War in 1991, Western Europe experienced yet another wave of mass migration, leading to a nearly twofold increase in the number of asylum cases between 1989 and 1992 (van Mol and de Valk, 2016). Geopolitical and environmental factors prompted thousands of individuals to leave their countries of origin and settle in other nations. Also, political conflicts in various regions, notably the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, have further increased the number of asylum cases. The situation has been exacerbated by the Arab Spring, which has compelled more individuals to flee their homelands and seek refuge elsewhere. According to de Hass et al. (2020), the number of asylum cases from Iraq alone has reached a staggering two hundred and eleven thousand instances.

The latest migration report highlights a significant increase in international migration since 2000, with the number of migrants reaching 272 million in 2020, compared to 150 million in 2000 (International Organization for Migrations, 2019). The report also provides data on migrant workers, refugees, displaced individuals, and stateless persons. However, it is worth noting that the report did not include migrant workers in 2020 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, there is a limited estimate of 3.9 million stateless individuals in 2022 (International Organization for Migrations, 2020). The exclusion of stateless nations from the report is a notable bias that affects the accuracy of the data presented (Table 1). Furthermore, the Global Trends Report (2021) indicates that by the end of 2021, the number of displaced individuals exceeded 89 million, including 27.1 million refugees and over 4.5 million asylum-seekers. These figures emphasise the global nature of migration, which is driven by various factors such as economic disparities, capital mobility, better opportunities, political conflicts, and famine.

Key facts and figures	2020	2022
Number of international migrations	150 million	272 million
Number of migrant workers	-	164 million
Number of refugees	14 million	25.9 million
Number of displaced persons	21 million	41.3 million
Number of stateless persons	-	3.9

Table 1: World Migration Report between 2000 - 2022.

Considering the limitations and biases in the World Migration Report between 2020 and 2022, it becomes evident that the statistics presented are misleading. The failure to account for stateless nations and individuals like the Kurds, Palestinians, and Yoruba undermines the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the data. In response to these shortcomings, section 2.4 of this chapter will delve into the history and experiences of the Kurdish community, providing a more comprehensive understanding of their migration patterns and challenges. Before moving forward, it is essential to establish a foundation by exploring the origin of the diaspora and clarifying key definitions related to this concept. This background information will provide a necessary framework for the subsequent sections of this chapter. By addressing these foundational aspects, the chapter ensures a solid context for a thorough examination of migration and sheds light on the unique experiences of communities often overlooked in conventional migration reports.

2.3 *Diaspora Definition and Origin*

The notion of diaspora is widely embraced and has gained significant attention across various domains, including academia, politics, and the public. Its significance is particularly evident in the humanities and the social sciences, encompassing disciplines such as political science, sociology, history, international studies, and ethnic and literary studies. Due to its rich focus, diaspora has become a firmly recognised area of research leading to the establishment of numerous research centres and journals dedicated to studying migrants and their communities (Kenny, 2013).

The term ‘diaspora’ finds its origin in the Greek word ‘diasporá,’ which combines ‘dia’ (meaning scattering or dispersing) and ‘speírein’ (to sow or spread) (Knott and McLoughlin, 2013, p. 27). Historically, for more than two centuries, the concept of diaspora was closely

associated with the Jewish community, signifying their forced displacement and exile (Cohen, 2008; Kenny, 2013; Story and Walker, 2015). However, as the twentieth century ended, the meaning of diaspora evolved from being a fixed model (Brah, 1996, p. 181) or an ideal type (Safran, 1991) attributed to specific individuals to becoming a versatile framework for understanding various groups and communities. Safran (1991, p. 257) asserts that being diasporic requires a particular kind of immigrant who can maintain connections to their homeland, preserve cultural practices, and uphold specific values and norms. Scholars have directed critique at this specific classification of diaspora. For example, anthropologist and historian James Clifford has challenged Safran's perspective, highlighting its limitations (Clifford, 1994). Clifford argues that Safran's qualifications are excessively restrictive and primarily applicable to a specific Jewish population, neglecting the diversity of Jewish and other communities. In other words, diaspora is no longer confined to a single group but has instead broadened to include numerous groups spanning different generations and interactions between them (Zezeza, 1994). Since the concept has transcended disciplinary boundaries and attracted significant research interest across multiple fields, such as cultural studies, sociology, psychology, and intercultural communication to name a few (Kenny, 2013).

The concept of 'diaspora' is characterised by a lack of universal characteristics, as noted in diaspora literature (Ogunyemi, 2020, p. 1). Over the past three decades, scholars have offered numerous contextualisation of diaspora, resulting in a multitude of definitions that aim to capture its essence. These definitions have introduced various criteria, including immigrants, migrating colonisers, merchants, and labourers, leading to inconsistencies and confusion in the understanding of diaspora. Despite the complexity and inconsistencies in these definitions, Kenny (2013, p. 11) argues against reducing the criteria to favour certain aspects over others, as this could result in biased, narrow, inadequate and unsatisfactory definitions. Considering Kenny's argument, it becomes essential for this thesis to explore diaspora from diverse perspectives while identifying commonalities that underlie the concept's significance.

According to the online Cambridge Dictionary, diaspora is defined as a collective of individuals who disperse from their original country to other countries, or the act of this dispersion (Brah, 1996, p. 181). This definition implies diaspora as a focal point, a centre or a home from which the scattering occurs. It suggests the notion of multiple journeys spanning various destinations. However, Brah (1996) contends that diaspora journeys are distinct from casual trips or temporary stays as they entail the establishment of new settlements and the cultivation of roots in different locations. In essence, diaspora refers to a community of people spread across two or more geographical locations, preserving, and transmitting their cultural heritage from one generation to the next. James Clifford explores the complexities of defining diaspora, highlighting the challenges therein. In his article, he introduces the concept of 'border' to

delineate between individuals residing in a state of border as opposed to diaspora. Clifford's utilisation of these terms underscores the interconnectedness and 'multiple localities' of individuals (Clifford, 1994, p. 304). However, it is crucial to acknowledge that 'borders' mainly refer to political and geographical boundaries (Agnew, 2008), whereas diaspora conveys notions of distance, segregation, and exile (Bullock and Paik, 2009; Clifford, 1994). Therefore, Clifford's examination of the concepts of border and diaspora and their intersecting nature, emphasises the difficulties inherent in maintaining exclusive frameworks when seeking to understand the development of transnational identities (Clifford, 1994).

Building upon Clifford's perspective on diaspora, Cohen (1997) conducted an analysis to assess the legitimacy of the diaspora concept, adopting the foundational principles of Safran's model. In his examination, Cohen formulated a series of classifications that determine the qualification of individuals or groups as the diasporic. He expanded upon existing categories, identified a set of shared characteristics, and introduced five distinct 'ideal types of diasporas' (Cohen, 1997, p. 16). Cohen's classification can be regarded as the primary criterion involved in defining a diasporic group. According to Cohen (2008, p. 17), diaspora encompasses the following elements:

- 1) Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions.
- 2) Alternatively, or additionally, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade, or to further colonial ambitions.
- 3) Collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history, suffering, and achievements.
- 4) An idealisation of the real or imagined ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety, and prosperity, even to its creation.
- 5) The [systematic] development of a return movement to the homeland that gains collective approbation even if many in the group are satisfied with only a vicarious relationship or intermittent visits to the homeland.
- 6) A strong ethnic group-consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a [shared] history, the transmission of a common cultural and religious heritage, and the belief in a common fate.
- 7) A troubled relationship with host societies suggests a lack of acceptance or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group.
- 8) A sense of empathy and co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement even where [a] home has become more vestigial; and

- 9) The possibility of a distinctive, [remarkable], creative, [and] enriching life in host countries [tolerating] pluralism.

Cohen (2008, p. 17) provides a framework outlining key elements associated with diaspora. The first two elements relate to dispersal and migration, encompassing both large-scale movements for socioeconomic reasons and colonial trade expansion. Subsequently, diaspora features pertain to the 'homeland,' including notions of memory, the past, and a nostalgic longing for return. Additionally, four additional elements come into play: the persistence of strong ethnic group consciousness over time, a sense of empathy for co-ethnic members in different locations, and a complex relationship with host societies offering opportunities for enrichment within the host community (Cohen, 2008). Cohen further categorises diaspora into five types: 'Victim, Labour, Imperial, Trade, and Deterritorialized' (Cohen, 2008, p. 18). These categories depend on the primary reasons for departure from the homeland. For instance, 'Victim' diasporas consist of individuals leaving due to ongoing political tensions (e.g., Jews, Syrians, Palestinians), while 'Labour' diasporas relocate in pursuit of improved economic opportunities (e.g., British individuals moving to countries like the US, Canada, and Europe). While Cohen's distinctions can be useful, they are based on current observations of the diaspora concept and these observations may change over time and across different geographical contexts. However, the features of the concept of diaspora and the categories used to include various migrant communities can be seen as incomplete and fixed. The understanding of diaspora is primarily rooted in the notion of a shared source or origin. My argument against Cohen's diaspora classification is supported by Brubaker (2005, 2017), who also views Cohen's categorisation as overly restrictive. As diaspora is inherently linked to dispersion and the desire to return to a homeland, it becomes difficult to incorporate alternative classifications.

Other scholars have recognised the evolving nature of the concept of diaspora. Butler (2001, p. 195) presents an enhanced framework that encompasses aspects such as dispersal, connections to both the homeland and the host country, relationships within the diasporic community, and comparative diaspora studies. Braziel and Mannur (2003, pp. 5-6) critique the essentialist perspectives of diaspora, noting that the term has transitioned from essentialist notions centred on 'homeland, national or ethnic identity, and geographical location' to embracing ideas of hybridity, métissage, or heterogeneity. In this context, the role of interculturality and intercultural communication becomes significant in understanding individuals' lived experiences and their diasporic journeys (Retis and Tsagarousianou, 2019, p. 240). However, I acknowledge that the migration process has undergone significant changes. Globalisation, advancements in transportation, communication, and personal aspirations have rendered permanent settlement less prevalent. Therefore, it is necessary to

shift away from viewing diaspora solely in terms of permanent residence. Instead, it should be understood as a continuous process of movement and engagement across different places and spatial positions or locations. Adopting a viewpoint that avoids essentialism in understanding diaspora has directed my exploration towards the idea of transnationalism.

In recent years, scholars, including Baser *et al.* (2017), Baser and Levin (2017), Vertovec (1999), Toivanen (2021) have engaged in debates concerning transnationalism. These discussions adopt a multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach (Vertovec, 1999), encompassing various discourses such as everyday practices (Innes, 2019), socio-cultural movements (Kearney, 1995), post-migration (Beauchemin and Safi, 2020), dual identity and citizenship (Klingenberg, Luetz and Crawford, 2021), among others. While diaspora and transnationalism share close connections (Toivanen, 2021), they are not synonymous. As discussed earlier, the concept of diaspora is frequently linked with religious or national communities living outside their perceived homeland, whereas transnationalism entails individuals crossing state borders or forming cross-border connections shaped by social, economic, and political considerations (Bauböck and Faist, 2010, p. 9). In this context, diaspora has expanded to encompass not only migrants but also the multidirectional flows of individuals, ideas, physical and cultural products and various forms of interaction, negotiation, and exchange (Tsagarousianou, 2004, p. 64). Tedeschi *et al.* (2022, p. 604) argue that transnationalism holds broader implications and possesses an inner processual and dynamic nature. They propose that effectively defining transnationalism necessitates a pragmatic, inductive approach that moves beyond existing explanations to develop a more comprehensive understanding and address specific situations (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). Similar perspectives have also been articulated by Bauböck and Faist (2010) and Beauchemin and Safi (2020).

Scholars often define transnationalism within the framework of globalisation, which encompasses various social, political, and economic activities fostering increased interaction and connectivity between different geographic regions, countries, and continents (Klingenberg, Luetz, and Crawford, 2021). Peck (2020, p. 138) emphasises that transnationalism involves the movement of people and civil society across borders, focusing on networks of mobility shaped by historical geopolitical connections rather than a uniform spread of connections worldwide. Distinct characteristics set transnationalism apart regarding individuals and civil society. Such characteristics include cross-border connectedness, the presence of both formal and informal activities and practices across borders, and the high intensity and extent of cross-border exchanges (Tedeschi *et al.*, 2022, p. 604). Therefore, it is crucial to adopt a comprehensive perspective when examining the concept of diaspora. This approach examines how diasporic communities adapt and shape their identities in diverse

contexts while navigating their cultural norms and values. It acknowledges that individuals do not have unitary identities but belong to distinct communities with fluid, multiple, and heterogeneous cultural identities. These communities integrate themselves economically, financially, and occupationally in the host country while maintaining a desire to preserve their cultural heritage from their country of origin.

As discussed in Chapter One, section 1.2, various alternative concepts can be used interchangeably with diaspora and (im)migrants, including settlers, colonisers, newcomers, foreigners, refugees, pilgrims, expatriates, sojourners, and more (Bergsten and Choi, 2003). These terms denote individuals living outside their country of birth but carry nuanced differences in meaning, each associated with specific groups and communities. The term ‘newcomers’ refers to individuals arriving in a new destination, whether a country or another location, and are unfamiliar with their new living situation (Bean and Brown, 2023). In contrast, settlers are those who arrive in a new land with the intent to reside there for a certain period, depending on their objectives and desires. ‘Refugees’ are people forced to flee their homes to save their lives during humanitarian crises like environmental issues or war, including Ukrainians, Syrians, Palestinians, and Kurds (Maley, 2016). Some undertake migration for religious purposes and are called pilgrims (Preston, 2020). In the contemporary world, many individuals move to another country for education, known as sojourners or international students. Sojourners usually have no intention of staying beyond their intended timeframe and return to their home country after completing their studies. Another alternative to diaspora is ‘coloniser,’ referring to those who establish control over a place for social, political, and economic reasons, which may or may not involve the arrival of settlers from the colonising country (Hall, 2000). For instance, France and Britain colonised the Middle East post the Ottoman Empire’s fall, leading to the division of Kurdistan based on Western paradigms and their interests due to the decision made by Mark Sykes and François Georges-Picot in 1916.

However, in this thesis, I will primarily utilise the terms (im)migrants and diaspora when referring to the Kurdish people. The former is used to identify those who have relocated to another country, either forcibly or in pursuit of a better life, while the latter can be employed inclusively to encompass a wide range of identities and is suitable for describing social forms and cultural production. Similar viewpoints have been expressed by Toivanen (2021, p. 31) and Wahlbeck (1999), both of whom concur that ‘diaspora’ can aid in comprehending the social space and organisation of exiled communities. Furthermore, the concept aids in understanding the social and transnational dimensions within the context of diaspora movements, how it assigns value to and devalues collective (identity) narratives of diaspora members and informs them about linguistic and cultural aspects related to their ‘homeland.’

In the following section, I will delve into the situation of the Kurdish diaspora, offering readers a broader perspective on the Kurds in general and providing a foundational understanding of the Kurdish situation as it relates to the experiences of the research participants in this study.

2.4 *Kurdish Diaspora*

Kurds constitute the fourth largest ethnic group and linguistic minority in the Middle East followed by Arabs, Turks, and Iranians (Russel-Johnston, 2006). They primarily reside in Kurdistan, a strategically significant region. Kurdistan encompasses substantial parts of Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Armenia (Figure 1) (Mahmud, 2018, 2024). Estimates suggest that approximately 34 million Kurds are dispersed worldwide across various countries and continents (McDowall, 2021, p. 4). Despite their widespread geographical presence, Kurdistan has been denied sovereignty for over six centuries. The initial formal division of Kurdish-inhabited areas occurred in 1639 after the Chaldiran war in 1514 between the Ottoman Turks and the Safavid Persians, with further fragmentation resulting from the Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916, where Britain and France played a role in redrawing the regional map (Meho, 1997; Zalme, 2020, p. 40). This division led to significant socio-cultural challenges, including the prohibition of the Kurdish language in many parts of Kurdistan for an extended period, and ongoing restrictions on the expression of Kurdish identity by ruling powers in the region such as Turkey, Iran, and Syria.



Figure 1: The location of Kurdistan geographically.

Figure¹ 1 provides a geographic representation of Kurdistan, highlighting its fragmented nature and the dispersion of Kurdish people across multiple countries. Notably, the study's participants hail from Iraqi Kurdistan, depicted by the green area on the map. This visualisation emphasises their diverse geographical origins while sharing a common Kurdish identity despite residing in different regions. Traditionally, Kurdish society had a strong tribal structure, but this has gradually diminished, especially after World War Two (McDowall, 2020). Significant changes in the political and socio-economic landscape, along with the advent of public education and mass communication, contributed to a more pronounced sense of Kurdish nationalism. For instance, over seventy-five percent of Iraqi Kurds now live in urban areas such as Erbil, Suleimani, Duhok and surrounding towns and villages. However, in the 1980s, a substantial number of Kurds voluntarily moved to central and southern Iraq for social and economic reasons, while others were forcibly displaced by the former Iraqi government, resulting in large-scale evacuations and state-sponsored terror (McDowall, 2020). Additionally, the Kurds' lack of internal unity has posed political challenges, and their destiny has become intertwined with the interests of regional and international powers. The existing social structure has also complicated their path to forging a cohesive national identity (Meho, 1997, p. 2).

The issue of statelessness and its far-reaching consequences, including migration, holds profound significance for individuals of Kurdish descent. The Kurdish community has experienced substantial migratory movements due to political upheaval and the absence of a recognised homeland. Koochi-Kamali (2003, pp. 36-42) provides a comprehensive examination of the political evolution of Kurds in Iran in his book 'The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran: Pastoral Nationalism.' He sheds light on the systematic and forced resettlement of Kurdish tribes in Iran, a process initiated in the 19th century. Furthermore, he delves into the aftermath of the Chaldiran War between the Safavid and Ottoman empires, a conflict that resulted in the partition of Kurdistan and the subsequent exile of many Kurds following the Ottoman triumph.

The 1960s witnessed a substantial wave of Kurdish migration (Baser, 2013). Many Kurdish intellectuals and students embarked on educational journeys to Western countries, initially with the hope of eventually returning to their homeland (Baser, 2013). However, the harsh

¹ Although maps are powerful medium for communicating the geographical borders of any country, they are problematic in nature. They can make things complicated especially for a stateless nation like Kurds. There is not an accurate depiction of Kurdistan; the constant political struggle of the courts around the borders has germinated in losing a considerable amount of their land to the neighbouring countries, and it is challenging to provide a responsible representation of the Kurds. Therefore, the map I use here is full visual representation only (see McDowall, 2020). The photo is derived from the Washington Kurdish institute. Available on <https://dckurd.org/2020/03/03/kurdistans-weekly-brief-march-3-2020/>.

realities of political and economic uncertainties shattered the dreams of numerous Kurds, preventing their anticipated homecoming. Consequently, even after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the onset of the Arab Spring, an increasing number of Kurds, particularly young individuals, opted to leave their homeland in pursuit of permanent settlement in Europe.

The experiences of Kurdish migrants provide a nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay between political contexts, the yearning for a homeland, and the pursuit of improved opportunities. This multifaceted narrative is shaped by historical legacies of forced settlement, coupled with contemporary political and socioeconomic factors. Together, these elements have profoundly influenced the migratory decisions and patterns of Kurdish individuals, resulting in the dispersion of Kurdish communities across diverse regions of the world.

The current body of literature on Kurdish migration has predominantly concentrated on what is often termed the 'conflict-generated,' 'exile,' or 'victim' diaspora, thereby placing a disproportionate emphasis on political dimensions (Baser, 2013, p. 7). However, this perspective tends to overlook earlier migration flows propelled by economic and environmental factors. It is essential to acknowledge that Kurdish diasporic communities have taken root in various countries and continents because of mass migration. These diasporas encompass not only political migrants but also individuals who left their homeland for reasons such as marriage, education or economic circumstances. This diversity is particularly evident among those who have departed Kurdish-inhabited areas within the past fifteen years.

Ayata (2011) and Baser (2013) have identified three distinct waves of Kurdish migration, shedding light on the complexities inherent in Kurdish migration patterns. The first wave, spanning from the mid-1950s to the late 1960s, was characterised by Kurdish students and young intellectuals seeking educational opportunities abroad. In contrast, the second wave, occurring during the 1970s, was driven by labour migration motivated by economic incentives. Primarily originating from Turkey, individuals migrated to Western countries, particularly Germany, attracted by the economic boom and active recruitment of Kurdish 'guest workers' (Paasche, 2020). The third wave, from the 1980s to 2000, marked a shift from 'guest workers' to asylum seekers due to state violence and conflicts involving Kurdish guerrilla movements and states in Iraq, Iran, and Turkey (Baser, 2013, p. 8; Eliassi, 2013). The Iraq-Iran war in the 1980s prompted many skilled and unskilled Iraqis, including Kurds, to flee the country, seeking refuge from internal violence and racial discrimination under the former Iraqi government (McDowall, 2004). The civil war and political turmoil in Iraqi Kurdistan during the 1990s, coupled with the emergence of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq after 2010, initiated a new wave of migration as Kurds sought asylum in neighbouring countries and Europe to ensure their safety and protection (Ayata, 2011). These distinct waves of Kurdish

migration underscore the interplay of various push and pull factors, including educational opportunities, economic conditions, political conflicts, and security concerns. Understanding the historical context and unique motivations underlying each wave contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse trajectories and experiences of Kurdish migrants. It highlights the multidimensional nature of Kurdish migration beyond its political dimensions, shedding light on the socioeconomic, cultural, and humanitarian aspects that shape the lives of Kurdish diasporic communities.

The significant presence of Kurds in Europe has raised concerns among Kurds from other countries, despite the presence of a semi-autonomous region in Iraqi Kurdistan (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2011; Wahlbeck, 1999). The political upheaval in Iraq following the US invasion has resulted in substantial loss of life and displacement, both internally and externally (Selim, 2015). However, acquiring precise and up-to-date census data on the Kurdish diaspora in Europe remains challenging. Official statistics pertaining to citizenship and country of birth offer some estimates. For example, Wahlbeck and Fortelius (2019) estimated the Kurdish population in Europe to be slightly over one million, while Arkilic (2022) provided a higher estimate of approximately 1.5-1.7 million Kurds residing in Europe (Table 2). These figures underscore the inadequacy of the World Migration Report, as discussed in section 2.2, in accurately representing stateless nations and groups like the Kurds. Despite their significant presence in Europe, Kurds often find themselves as an 'invisible diasporic community' (Demir, 2012, p. 815). When Kurdish refugees arrive in European countries, they are typically officially recognised and documented based on their nationality from the country they fled, such as Iran, Iraq, Syria, or Turkey (Baser, 2013; Demir, 2012; Zalme, 2017). This classification primarily identifies them as asylum seekers from these countries, often overlooking their specific Kurdish ethnic identity (Ayata, 2011; Demir, 2012, p. 815; Mahmud, 2016, p. 79).

Furthermore, the civil conflicts in Syria and Iraq that emerged after the Arab Spring have further contributed to the migration of Kurds to Europe. This has led to the continued growth of the Kurdish diaspora worldwide. These dynamics underscore the challenges and complexities faced by the Kurdish diaspora in Europe. Their experiences are shaped by political conflicts, displacement, and the need to navigate bureaucratic systems that may not adequately recognise their distinct identity and circumstances. Understanding the unique position of Kurds within the broader migration context enriches our comprehension of the multifaceted nature of migration and highlights the need for inclusive and accurate data collection methods to capture the realities of stateless nations and marginalised communities. The data presented in the table below offers an overview of the distribution of Kurdish individuals across European nations. According to the information presented, Germany hosts the largest Kurdish diaspora, primarily consisting of individuals from Turkey due to labour

recruitment programmes. France follows Germany in terms of the size of its Kurdish community. The United Kingdom, Sweden, and the Netherlands have significant populations of Kurds from Iraq (Institute Kurde de Paris, 2016). Moreover, notable Kurdish communities can also be found in Greece, Denmark, Italy, Norway, and Finland (Wahlbeck and Fortelius, 2019). In North America, there are over a hundred thousand Kurds residing. Zalme (2020, p. 61) estimated the number of Kurds residing in the United Kingdom as being between 200,000 and 250,000, with the majority originating from Iraq. However, according to the Office for National Statistics (2021), the number of Kurds estimated at 93,174 has increased by 43,333 compared to the same statistics in 2011. It is important to note that while this data provides valuable insights into the presence of Kurdish immigrants and their distribution across various geographic locations, it does not encompass the Kurdish population residing in countries such as Australia, Far East Asia, Russia, and other regions worldwide.

Number	Country names	Min	Max
1	Germany	325.000	665.000
2	France	50.000	120.000
3	Netherland	35.000	80.000
4	Switzerland	70.000	95.000
5	Belgium	10.000	60.000
6	Austria	20.000	60.000
7	Sweden	16.000	40.000
8	United Kingdom	20.000	50.000
9	USA	25.000	75.000
10	Canada	10.000	50.000

Table 2: The distribution of Kurds across Europe and North America.

Addressing the challenges associated with belonging to a stateless nation is crucial within the scope of this study. Membership in such nations often entails significant struggles in attaining basic rights and legal recognition, with individuals experiencing marginalization, discrimination, and rights violations (Rumbaut, 2004; Smith, 2013). In the United Kingdom, Iraqi Kurds constitute a visible and dynamic ethnic minority, classified as both diasporic and transnational due to a complex interplay of social, economic, and political factors (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2005; Wahlbeck, 1999). Despite these challenges, Iraqi Kurds often establish an 'imagined homeland' within their new sociocultural reality, reflecting their cultural richness and dynamics of interaction (Wayessa, 2022), illustrating the intricate and multifaceted

nature of their experiences. This study seeks to offer a detailed examination of the multifaceted reality experienced by Iraqi Kurds in the United Kingdom. It aims to illuminate the complex dynamics of migration, adaptation, and identity negotiation within the Kurdish diaspora. Through a nuanced exploration of their narratives and perspectives, I aim to gain deeper insights into the diverse challenges, aspirations, and accomplishments of this community (Portes, 2003). My research endeavors to contribute to existing knowledge and foster a more comprehensive understanding of the complex realities faced by stateless nations and communities. Having provided an overview of the diaspora in this section, the subsequent pages will examine and explore theories of migration and adaptation in greater depth (Vertovec, 2009; Castles et al., 2014).

2.5 *Diaspora and Adaptation*

In the previous section, I provided an explanation of the concepts of migration and diaspora and their relevance to the Kurdish population in section 2.2. I will now shift my focus to a discussion of diaspora and adaptation theories. While there is a prevailing belief among many that migration and displacement have detrimental effects on societies, and that migrants bring about various challenges (Gilligan and Ball, 2014), it is important to recognize that this perspective often arises from negative portrayals of migrants and their communities in media discourse. However, research has shown that the situation is more complex than this black-and-white view suggests. To deepen our understanding of adaptation processes, this study will explore various adaptation theories, beginning with Kim's Classical Adaptation Theory (1988), followed by Communication Adaptation (Coupland et al., 1988), and Differential Adaptation Theories (De la Graza and Ono, 2015). Through this exploration, I aim to clarify the significance of these theories in the study of migration and highlight their limitations. Additionally, in the section that follows, I will review relevant studies that address the complexities of migration and adaptation on a global scale before looking into key concepts and theories, establishing the theoretical framework for the thesis in the subsequent chapter, Chapter Three.

2.5.1 *Classical Adaptation Theories*

In this section, I will review the adaptation theory proposed by Kim (1988) and further developed by Kim and Robin (1988). By delving into this perspective, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the individual-level experiences of migrants and their adaptation processes within a new cultural context.

2.5.1.1 Cross-Cultural Communication

The Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory introduced by Kim in 1988, provides a groundbreaking approach to understanding how individuals adapt to new cultures. It sheds light on the structure of the adaptation process and the influential factors that shape individuals' ability to establish stable and functional relationships in unfamiliar cultural environments (Kim, 2001, p. 31). Kim's theory portrays migrants and sojourners as 'open systems,' emphasising that human adaptation is a dynamic process involving individuals living and interacting within foreign cultural settings (Kim, 2001). Notably, Kim's model, as highlighted by Cia and Rodríguez (1996), primarily emphasises long-term adjustment to cultural differences. Kim's Adaptation Theory follows a three-step process: stress, adaptation, and growth (Kim, 1988, 2001). This dynamic process reflects a continuous cycle of 'draw-back-to-leap,' where individuals undergo adaptive changes over time. Each new experience in the host culture contributes to personal growth, as individuals undergo adaptive changes over time. When individuals encounter situations where their familiar cultural patterns no longer apply, they might experience stress and confusion. Repeated exposure to environmental challenges, coupled with adaptive responses through new cultural learning, leads to increased functional fitness. This, in turn, allows individuals to establish effective relationships in their host environment (Kim, 1988, p. 56-57).

While Kim's Adaptation Theory provides valuable insights, it has limitations. It primarily focuses on individual-level adaptation, potentially overlooking broader structural factors, power dynamics, and social inequalities influencing migrants' experiences and integration opportunities. Additionally, the theory assumes a linear and progressive adaptation trajectory. This may not capture the complexities and variations in migrants' experiences and outcomes. Thus, further research and theoretical developments are needed to comprehensively understand the adaptation process among migrants. Individuals born and raised in their native culture are typically deeply enculturated with its norms, beliefs, and values. Consequently, when they migrate to a new culture, they may experience 'culture shock,' characterised by anxiety stemming from the loss of familiar signs and symbols of social interaction (Adler, 1987; Oberg, 1960). This can manifest as avoidance, hostility, or selective attention. On the other hand, individuals may undergo enculturation or acculturation (Berry, 1980), fully adapting to the life in the host country while mitigating the negative consequences of culture shock (Kim, 2001).

Acculturation Theory, initially proposed by Berry (1980), serves as a widely utilised framework in cross-cultural psychology. It examines the formation of immigrants' identity formation and experiences, focusing on the cultural changes that occur when individuals from different

backgrounds engage in prolonged and continuous contact. Acculturation, as delineated by Berry's comprehensive model, is a multifaceted process occurring at both the individual and group levels. At the individual level, it encompasses a profound shift in values, attitudes, beliefs, and identities as individuals navigate their interactions with the host culture. This intricate process involves not only adapting to and adopting elements of the new cultural environment but also retaining aspects of their original culture. These transformations in individuals' cultural orientations can manifest in various ways, encompassing shifts in language proficiency, preferences, behaviour patterns, and worldviews. Simultaneously at the group level, acculturation extends its influence, encompassing alterations in social and cultural systems resulting from the interaction between the host culture and the immigrant or ethnic minority culture. This dynamic interaction often gives rise to the emergence of new social norms, practices, and forms of cultural expression. Moreover, it involves the negotiation and reshaping of preexisting social structures, institutions, and intergroup relations, profoundly influencing the fabric of both cultures.

Berry's Acculturation model, as elucidated by AbiHanna (2014), is visually represented in a schematic diagram that illuminates the complex interplay between two cultures, aptly referred to as 'Culture A' and 'Culture B.' The flow and logic of the acculturation process within this model hinge on several pivotal factors, including the strategies employed for acculturation, behavioural shifts, and the acculturation stress experienced by the two interacting cultures. Acculturative stress, outlined by Berry (2006), constitutes a pivotal dimension in the context of acculturation. It denotes the myriad challenges encountered by immigrants or ethnic minorities during the process of adapting to a new culture. This dimension aligns closely with the concept of 'culture shock' originally introduced by Oberg (1960), emphasising that individuals may grapple with stress and difficulties as they navigate the intricacies of acculturation.

Berry's comprehensive model of acculturation incorporates two essential dimensions related to individual adaptation strategies. The first dimension encompasses the choice to either retain or reject one's native culture, while the second dimension pertains to the acceptance or rejection of the host culture. Based on these nuanced dimensions, four distinct acculturation strategies emerge, each with its defining characteristics: *assimilation*, *separation*, *integration*, and *marginalisation*, as articulated by Berry (1980). Assimilation characterises the path wherein individuals embrace the host culture while discarding or minimising their heritage culture. They prioritise integration into the dominant culture while distancing themselves from their own cultural background. In contrast, Separation involves individuals rejecting the host culture in favour of preserving their heritage culture. They actively seek to maintain their cultural identity while avoiding the adoption of aspects of the new culture

(Berry, 1980). Integration represents a distinct acculturation strategy wherein individuals not only embrace the host culture but also maintain a connection with their heritage culture. Striving for a harmonious coexistence of both cultural dimensions, they actively incorporate elements from each into their evolving identity. On the contrary, Marginalisation involves individuals who reject both their heritage and host cultures, often experiencing a profound sense of disconnection from both cultural contexts (Berry 1980).

Empirical research has consistently highlighted integration as the most frequently employed acculturation strategy among migrant communities (Berry, 2006; Schmitz, 1992; Wei *et al.*, 2010). This strategy is characterised by the simultaneous adoption of aspects from both the host and heritage cultures, enabling individuals to preserve their cultural roots while effectively adapting to the new cultural context. The application of acculturation theory by researchers provides invaluable insights into the experiences of (im)migrants as they navigate the intricate interplay between different cultural contexts. It serves as a robust foundation for investigating the multifaceted dynamics of cultural change, identity negotiation, and social integration. By delving into the complexities of immigrant experiences in diverse cultural settings, researchers contribute to a more profound understanding of the nuanced facets of cultural adaptation. It is noteworthy that most studies focusing on acculturation theory in relation to migrants and their communities have predominantly employed quantitative research methodologies. To enrich our understanding further, there is a growing need for complementary qualitative approaches. Such qualitative investigations can yield unique and nuanced outcomes, offering deeper insights into the intricacies of the acculturation process and its impact on individuals and communities alike.

Previous research has frequently underscored that the majority population within the host culture often remains steadfast in their cultural practices, placing the onus of adaptation squarely on (im)migrants. For newcomers, this presents a dual challenge involving both enculturation and deculturation. They must learn and incorporate new cultural elements while concurrently shedding certain aspects of their original cultural traditions. Nonetheless, this adaptation process may not be seamless, and (im)migrants may find themselves in a state referred to as 'self-shock,' a concept introduced by Zaharna (1989). This 'self-shock' experience is marked by heightened self-awareness of multiple identities and the formation of an intermediate or hybrid cultural identity. Having explored classical adaptation theories, the following section will delve into critiques of Berry's Acculturation Model.

2.5.1.1.1 Criticism of Traditional Adaptation Theory

Numerous scholars have voiced critiques against cross-cultural adaptation and acculturation theories, citing their inherent limitations and narrow focus (Chirkov, 2009; De la Graza and

Ono, 2015; Holliday, 2019; Rudmin, 2003; Waldram, 2009). Among others, De la Graza and Ono (2015, p. 273) contend that these established adaptation theories grapple with a fundamental tension between ‘universality and specificity’. They argue that these theories must navigate a delicate balance between ‘individual and societal factors.’ Traditional adaptation theories tend to generalise the immigrant population, centring on the ‘ideal’ immigrants who voluntarily migrate and aspire to complete assimilation into the new culture. This approach assumes that these individuals will inevitably adapt and achieve cultural alignment. However, this classical adaptation theory overlooks the experiences of those compelled to leave their homelands due to geopolitical changes.

Furthermore, De la Graza and Ono (2015) argue that traditional adaptation theory constrains migrants’ choices regarding their identity, compelling them to forsake their heritage and adopt new identities. They advocate for a more bi-directional perspective on adaptation, emphasising that both migrants and non-migrants bear responsibility for cultivating an environment conducive to successful adaptation and transformation. In certain scenarios, non-migrant groups may also need to adapt to accommodate the immigrants’ culture and expectations, fostering a mutually beneficial living environment. According to classical adaptation theory, culture is perceived as ‘discrete,’ ‘separate,’ ‘independent,’ and ‘unchanging’ (De la Graza and Ono, 2015, p. 275). However, this perspective fails to acknowledge the dynamic nature of culture and the profound impact of globalisation and intercultural encounters. Cultures inevitably undergo change over time, and the amalgamation and harmonisation of diverse communities have become increasingly prevalent. Expecting cultures to remain isolated and impervious to external influences while retaining their indigenous qualities is unrealistic.

2.6 Intercultural and Differential Adaptation Theories

Scholars have recognised Kim’s influential Cross-cultural Adaptation Theory from 1998 (Kim, 1998), but they have also raised valid critiques, particularly regarding its limited consideration of communication-related aspects. Cia and Rodríguez’s (1996) model not only complement earlier frameworks but also illuminates several key dimensions of cross-cultural adaptation. This encompasses understanding the challenges encountered during this process and the significant role of personal experiences in shaping adaptation strategies. It also involves the profound sense of ‘otherness’ experienced by individuals, particularly in language exchanges. Specifically, they argue that while Kim’s focus is on individual psychological adaptation, the theory overlooks how negative experiences can impede the communicative interaction between intercultural partners (Cia and Rodríguez, 1996, p. 32). In response, they propose a Cross-cultural Interaction Adaptation framework. Their model places considerable emphasis

on the role of goals in driving the adaptation process and highlights how personal experiences significantly influence the effectiveness of interpretability strategies. According to their model, intercultural adaptation involves adjusting behaviour to avoid misunderstandings in interactions across different cultures (Cia and Rodríguez, 1996, p. 34). This model not only extends previous approaches to elucidate the challenges individuals encounter in cross-cultural adaptation but also underscores the critical importance of experiences in implementing adaptive strategies.

In their model, Cia and Rodríguez (1996) emphasise how adaptation is influenced by perceptions of conversational partner foreignness (Cia and Rodríguez, 1996, p. 38) since adaptation experiences vary notably between individuals from the same cultural background and those from diverse cultures, with the latter often requiring greater effort to adapt and prevent misunderstandings (Gumperz and Tannen, 1979). Positive and negative experiences both play crucial roles in determining the success or failure of adaptation efforts (Cia and Rodríguez, 1996, p. 35). Negative experiences in cross-cultural encounters can lead to anxiety and uncertainty (Duronto, Nishida, and Nakayama, 2005; Logan, Steel, and Hunt, 2014). Importantly, an extension to their theory suggests that positive intercultural communication enhances adaptation experiences and contributes to overall well-being. Embracing positive interactions enables individuals to create a more conducive environment for successful cross-cultural adaptation. The relationship between perceptions and experiences at different stages of cross-cultural adaptation can be summarised into several key propositions in the following table (Table 3).

Perceptions during first utterances (Time 1)	The role of experiences (Time 2)
Proposition 1: As perceived foreignness increases, perceptions of shared knowledge decrease.	Proposition 4: When experiences with adaptation are positive, effective adaptation increases.
Proposition 2: As shared knowledge decreases, the probability of miscommunication increases.	Proposition 5: As effective adaptation increases, miscommunication decreases.
Proposition 3: As miscommunication increases, understanding decreases.	Proposition 6: As miscommunication decreases, understanding increases.
	Proposition 7: When experiences with adaptation are negative, effective adaptation decreases.
	Proposition 8: As effective adaptation decreases, miscommunication increases.
	Proposition 9: As miscommunication increases, understanding decreases.

Table 3: Cia and Rodríguez (1996, p. 35) proposition explains the proposition during first utterances (Time 1) and the role of experiences (Time 2).

Proposition 1, as perceived foreignness increases during initial interactions (Time 1), there is a corresponding decrease in perceptions of shared knowledge (Proposition 1). This reduction in shared knowledge, in turn, raises the likelihood of miscommunication (Proposition 2), leading to decreased understanding (Proposition 3). On the other hand, when individuals have positive experiences with adaptation (Time 2), it enhances their effective adaptation (Proposition 4). Effective adaptation, in turn, reduces miscommunication (Proposition 5), ultimately resulting in increased understanding (Proposition 6). Conversely, negative experiences with adaptation (Time 2) lead to a decline in effective adaptation (Proposition 7), increasing the chances of miscommunication (Proposition 8), and subsequently decreasing understanding (Proposition 9). These propositions highlight the intricate relationship between perceptions, experiences, and the dynamics of cross-cultural adaptation.

While the Intercultural Adaptation Model presents a robust framework, it also has its limitations. One such limitation is its oversight of the impact of pre-existing intimacy in intercultural encounters. Despite the model's emphasis on goal-driven adaptation, effective communication, as underscored by Giles and Ogay (2007, pp. 32-38), plays a pivotal role in shaping one's self-image and social identity. Regardless of whether individuals are adapting or resisting, effective communication is essential in preventing cross-cultural conflicts. Communication breakdowns that result in a negative self-image can lead to feelings of powerlessness. Building upon Cia and Rodríguez's theory (1996), I highlight the significant roles of power and agency in shaping positive cross-cultural relationships, as they profoundly influence identity negotiation (De la Graza and Ono, 2015). The emergence of De la Graza and Ono's (2015) Differential Adaptation Theory was a response to the limitations of Kim's and Cia and Rodríguez's adaptation models, aiming to address the shortcomings of previous adaptation theories. This theory emphasises the fluidity of identity, moving beyond rigid categorisations and stereotypes. It reveals varying levels of adaptation and showcases migrants' agency in the process of transformation (De la Graza and Ono, 2015).

Several factors, including culture, politics, economics, and individual willingness, contribute to this intricate process. The theory, as articulated by Cia and Rodríguez (1996), emphasises the importance of immigrant-community relationships in preserving cultural continuity and traditions beyond established norms. It offers a nuanced understanding of migrants' adaptation, highlighting the complexities of identity formation and cultural negotiation. Recognising the tension between native and immigrant populations resulting from cultural shifts, the theory acknowledges the balancing act immigrants face in adopting new elements while retaining their own cultural norms. This dual challenge can constrain their freedom and lead to emotional distress, underscoring the importance of robust social support in enhancing migrants' overall well-being and fostering a positive self-image. De la Graza and Ono (2015)

stress adaptation as a collaborative process between migrants and hosts, requiring both to navigate cultural differences and create a harmonious environment. Multidimensional strategies are key in this negotiation, with successful adaptation hinging on individuals' willingness to bridge cultural gaps while maintaining their integrity. Migrants' adjustments can positively impact the host community, fostering reciprocal cultural changes. Recognising migrants' agency shifts the perspective from a burden of change to their active role in shaping the cultural environment. This alleviates the pressure to conform to cultural expectations. Successful migrant assimilation and genuine acceptance from the host community can catalyse positive transformations that enrich the host society's norms and values. Embracing diversity and acknowledging immigrants' agency in shaping their cultural interactions can foster inclusive environments beneficial to both hosts and migrants.

Dela Graza and Ono's (2015) differential adaptation theory provides insights into migrants' adaptation experiences, emphasising cultural negotiation and empowerment within diverse communities. Assimilation and integration, which are closely tied to adaptation, significantly impact migrants' journeys. Well-assimilated individuals often experience contentment, security, and a sense of belonging (Rogers-Sirin, Ryce and Sirin, 2014). Challenges to self-concept require strong support systems to facilitate positive change in the host country, reinforcing individual and collective identities, and contributing to societal enrichment. Understanding power dynamics is pivotal within the differential adaptation theory since it underlies immigrant experiences and relationships (Dela Graza and Ono, 2015). Power disparities can hinder adaptation, with hosts unintentionally imposing new cultural norms on migrants, often disregarding their preferences (Dela Graza and Ono, 2015, p. 279). Migrants may resist assimilation due to challenges like stereotypes, racism, discrimination, and language barriers, impacting their self-esteem and adaptation efforts. Addressing power dynamics, reducing discrimination, and fostering inclusivity are vital for enhancing adaptation and creating an understanding environment that recognises diverse identities and experiences. This perspective underscores the importance of a balanced power dynamic that supports migrants' agency in shaping their adaptation journey.

2.7 Diaspora in Different Contexts

In the preceding section and its subsections, the concept of diaspora and its relevance in understanding the Kurdish migrants was discussed. In this section, various studies shedding light on the lived experiences of diverse migrant groups will be explored.

Migration studies, encompass a wide array of topics and areas of inquiry. These topics include culture and identity (Adegbola, Labador, & Oviedo, 2018; Mahmud, 2018; Rabiau, 2019),

identity and language acquisition (Buchanan et al., 2018; Norton, 2013; Regan, Diskin, & Martyn, 2015; Yilmaz, 2018), enculturation and adaptation processes (Ciocan & Hususan, 2020; van Essen, 2020), othering and well-being, intercultural communication, and material culture and mobility, among others (Basu, 2008; Mahmud, 2024; Trabert, 2020). These studies, conducted by various researchers, have made significant contributions to the growing body of literature on migration and offer valuable insights into the experiences of individuals adjusting to a new environment away from their homeland.

Human mobility has been a constant phenomenon throughout history, driven by various socio-cultural and geopolitical factors. These movements across different regions have led to the blurring of traditional boundaries between cultures, ethnicities, religions, and languages. The exploration of migration and migrant communities presents numerous avenues for investigation, attracting scholars who are eager to understand the diverse experiences of these communities. However, moving to a new place is not without its challenges; migrants often encounter unexpected obstacles and face certain expectations. Those who choose to migrate must be prepared to embrace the changes that come with their journey and adapt to new environments. Successfully navigating this process requires a nuanced understanding of interactions between newcomers and the local population within diverse intercultural contexts. While previous research in migration studies has been influenced by social, psychological, and political perspectives (Berry, 1980; Fawcett, 1985; Huysmans, 2002), there has been a gradual shift towards examining how immigrants construct, negotiate, and navigate their identities. Scholars from various disciplines in the social sciences and humanities have explored how migrants adapt to new environments and operate in their everyday lives. They consider diverse linguistic, cultural, ethnic, religious, geographical, local, and national contexts. In the following pages, we will delve into studies on migration and migrant communities across different disciplines to gain insight into migrants' lived experiences and the challenges they face while adapting to new social and cultural environments.

2.7.1 Intercultural Communication, Identity Narratives, First- and Second-Generation Migrants

Upon their arrival, migrants are confronted with the formidable task of integrating into the host society, a process that entails navigating various societal and cultural dimensions to achieve successful adaptation. Central to this endeavour is the acquisition of the host culture's language and securing suitable employment. Extensive research has been dedicated to understanding the challenges associated with migration. There is a particular emphasis on intercultural communication and cross-cultural interaction (Greenbank and Marra, 2020; Holmes, 2015). Holmes (2015) examines these challenges in her study on the intercultural experiences of newly arrived migrants in the New Zealand workplace. She underscores the

significance of language education and intercultural understanding in fostering successful integration. Holmes highlights the pivotal role of effective communication in either facilitating or hindering intercultural interaction. Her research reveals that merely providing migrants with a standard programme to enhance their employability skills and address social and legal matters is insufficient for achieving successful integration and adaptation (Holmes, 2015, pp. 112-113).

Holmes (2015) extensively explores the challenges confronted by migrants as they enter new cultural environments and commence work. Her research emphasizes the importance of communication skills in providing equal job opportunities regardless of cultural or linguistic differences. Conversely, a lack of familiarity with workplace norms can engender a sense of vulnerability in interactions with colleagues, thereby constraining individuals' agency and impeding their full participation in workplace dynamics. This vulnerability may hamper migrants' ability to contribute effectively (Holmes, 2015). Moreover, the study underscores the essential role of language proficiency in the successful integration of migrants. Individuals who lack full command of the target language, including socio-pragmatic competence, may face disadvantages in the workplace. Proficiency in the host culture's language facilitates effective communication, comprehension of social cues, and negotiation of various work-related interactions (Roberts, 2012).

Holmes (2015) also addresses the presence of racism in New Zealand's workplace environment, where skilled migrant interns are often treated as visitors rather than residents or citizens, creating barriers to their full participation. This treatment underscores the inadequacy of basic skills programmes established by the New Zealand government and signals the need for improvement. To tackle these challenges, Holmes proposes the implementation of an agenda aimed at enhancing migrants' employability skills and fostering intercultural contact. For instance, a well-designed language course focusing on communication strategies in the target language could effectively mitigate issues such as racism, discrimination, language barriers, and other social and cultural problems. Ultimately, these initiatives could contribute to improving migrants' quality of life, reducing crime rates, and boosting self-esteem among migrant communities.

Additionally, Gómez-Estern and Benítez (2013) conducted research exploring how migrants construct their identities through narratives, specifically emphasising the significance of home and homeland for both native and migrant populations. The study revealed distinct discourses surrounding the concepts of home and homeland, with the participants expressing positive emotions and attaching high value to the idea of home. The duration of their stay influenced their perceptions of home, with migrants demonstrating a stronger connection to their home

and homeland compared to non-migrant groups. Personal histories and migration experiences played a significant role in shaping individuals' cultural identities, as emotions such as commitment and nostalgia for the homeland influenced their sense of self (Gómez-Estern and Benítez, 2013, pp. 361-363). The study also found that non-immigrant group members exhibited weaker emotional attachment to their place of birth compared to non-migrant groups. They employed decontextualised discursive tools in their discussions and referred to migrants and other minority groups as 'other communities' (Gómez-Estern and Benítez, 2013, p. 355). These findings suggest that the cultural identity of individuals who have experienced displacement is highly influenced by their place of origin. By examining these aspects of identity construction and the challenges faced by migrants in the workplace, scholars gain a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate processes involved in the successful integration and adaptation of migrant populations. The findings from these studies underscore the importance of implementing inclusive and intercultural programmes to create a more supportive environment for migrants and foster a cohesive and diverse society.

Another study conducted by Gómez and Vannini (2017) delved into the concept of home and the feeling of belonging among migrants from three different regions: North America, the US-Mexico border, and the South. Adopting a participatory photography method, the researchers aimed to gain insights into how migrants perceive home and their sense of belonging. The study's results revealed that migrants hold diverse understandings of home and their sense of belonging varies. For some participants, home is closely associated with their country of origin and the place they originally came from. Others consider their destination upon arrival as their home, while some define home as wherever they currently reside. These studies shed light on the complexity of identity development among migrant populations and emphasise the role of ethnicity and the concept of home in shaping individual' perceptions of self and belonging. By understanding these intricate dynamics, researchers and policymakers can better design interventions and initiatives that support the integration and well-being of migrants in their host societies, fostering a more inclusive and harmonious multicultural environment.

In a similar vein, Fathi (2022) examines the concept of home and the sense of belonging among young unmarried male migrants in Ireland. Her study examines the temporal aspect between the migrants' current living spaces, referred to as the 'real' home, and their envisioned future home, which they may establish when they start a family. The objective is to provide insights into the process of creating a home within the migrants' present domestic environments and how these spaces transform into their desired future homes. The study finds that the understanding of home for migrant men is dynamic, influenced by various interconnected factors, including spatial, temporal, emotional, interpersonal, and structural components. Moreover, the research emphasises the traditional gendered perception of the

home as a feminine domain, which adds complexity to the interaction between gender and space in the migrants' conception of home. Ultimately, the meaning of home evolves and is shaped by a variety of sociopsychological, cultural, temporal, and spatial influences.

The development of an individual's identity, particularly for migrant groups, is significantly influenced by race or ethnicity, which has been extensively studied across various disciplines. One such study conducted by van Bochove et al. (2016) examined the influence of the interviewer's ethnic identity on participants' self-perception, self-worth, character, and overall identity. The researchers proposed two theoretical frameworks, namely the Cross-ethnic-Accommodation Hypothesis and the competing Ethnic-affirmation Hypothesis, to explain the role of ethnic identity in this context (van Bochove *et al.*, 2016, p. 653). The study's results indicated that the ethnic identity of the interviewer plays a crucial role in how research participants identify themselves. The participants interviewed by a Dutch interviewer demonstrated a strong sense of belonging to the Dutch community and expressed their Dutch identity. Conversely, those interviewed by a non-Dutch interviewer tended to associate themselves more closely with their country of origin, leading to the assigning of a minority identity. These findings provide support for the cross-ethnic-accommodation hypothesis, which highlights the significant impact of the interviewer's ethnicity on respondents' self-identification rather than the Ethnic-affirmation Hypothesis.

Language learning and educational disparities among first-generation and second-generation migrants have been topics of interest in research. Gries, Redlin, and Zehra (2022) conducted a study that compares educational outcomes between these two groups and individuals without a migration background. The findings reveal significant differences between first-generation migrants, who migrated at an older age and tend to have fewer years of schooling, and native-born Germans. Consequently, first-generation migrants often possess lower levels of education and fewer educational qualifications. Migrants from Eastern Europe and war refugees show the lowest academic achievement. On the other hand, the educational gap between native-born Germans and second-generation migrants, who experienced migration at an early age, is relatively small. These studies contribute to a deeper understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by migrants in different aspects of their lives, including education and the conceptualisation of home. Such insights can inform policies and interventions that promote educational equity and support the well-being and integration of migrant populations in their host societies.

Another study by Kilpi-Jakonen and Alisaari (2022) examines the impact of home language on children's reading scores and educational expectations in Turkish and Yugoslavian families across six European countries. The participants were categorised into three groups based on

language usage at home: group one used their native language, group two used the language of instruction, and group three utilised both languages. The study revealed that children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to use their native language with their parents at home, and this was associated with lower reading scores. Transitioning to the second language (L2) was generally linked to higher reading scores in most of the countries examined, while using both the native language (L1) and L2 correlated with lower educational outcomes for Turkish and former Yugoslavian children. The researchers emphasised the importance of a positive school climate and linguistically responsive teaching practices in enhancing the education of all young individuals, especially newly arrived migrants.

Younis and Hassan (2019) conducted a study focusing on the identity narratives of second-generation young Muslim adults in Europe and Canada. They explored how personal experiences shape social identity and the level of engagement with these identities in the process. The study encompassed key concepts such as ‘acculturation’ (Berry, 1980) and ‘biculturalism’ (Toomey, Dorjee and Ting-Toomey, 2013). According to Younis and Hassan (2019), individuals gain a deeper understanding of social values throughout their lives, including those contributed to society through their work, such as supporting the local economy or providing education. The study by Younis and Hassan (2019) delved into the significance of Muslims and the components of Muslim identity in relation to personal experiences and social values. The participants in the study sought guidance from more experienced individuals on what constitutes a ‘Muslim social identity’ (Younis and Hassan, 2019, p. 1163) and how their life choices would impact their decision-making processes. The responses from the participants regarding self-labelling and conflicting self-images in relation to their Muslim identity were unclear. Some of the participants believed that a true Muslim should engage in religious practices, express their authentic selves, and combat Islamophobia. However, there seemed to be a disparity between what they professed and what they practised. This raises questions about the contradictions between Islamic beliefs, their implementation, and the development of Muslim identity. The study also highlighted that most participants avoided cultural frame-switching², limiting their understanding of their social identity due to a lack of knowledge or experience in navigating different aspects of their identity.

These studies contribute valuable insights into the complexities of language usage, education, and identity formation among migrant populations and second-generation individuals. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for designing effective policies and support systems

² Cultural frame-switching is the process of adapting one’s behaviour and communication style to fit the cultural norms of a specific context. It involves shifting between different cultural perspectives to enhance interaction with people from diverse backgrounds (Gudykunst, 2003).

that foster positive educational outcomes and promote a sense of belonging and well-being for diverse communities.

2.8 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, the exploration of the historical development of concepts of diaspora and transnationalism has been thorough. The discussion began with a comprehensive overview of the concept of diaspora, tracing its origins and outlining its key characteristics. The focus then narrowed to specifically examine this within the context of the Kurdish community. Throughout this chapter, emphasis has been placed on the multifaceted nature of migration experiences, highlighting the complexities and challenges faced by migrants. The argument presented is that successful migration hinges on the right mindset and the ability to navigate interactions and exchanges, fostering a sense of in-betweenness between the country of origin and the new socio-cultural environment. Furthermore, the chapter has acknowledged the motivations behind migration, with individuals leaving their homeland in pursuit of a better future for themselves and their families, whether within the diaspora or back in their home country. However, the process of integration, language acquisition, and adaptation poses numerous difficulties that migrants must overcome. Despite the time-consuming nature of language acquisition, adaptation, and integration challenges, they can ultimately lead to rewarding outcomes.

Based on social, economic, and political factors, Kurdish people in Europe and worldwide can be classified as both diasporic and transnational, which aligns with the existing literature. This thesis specifically focuses on how a group of Iraqi Kurdish migrants negotiate and redefine their cultural identity upon relocating to the UK. The subsequent Chapter Three will delve into the theoretical foundations of the study, exploring concepts such as 'culture,' 'identity,' 'hybridity,' 'third space,' 'in-between,' 'othering,' 'material culture,' 'home,' and 'belonging.' These concepts will be employed to illustrate how cultural identity of the research participants were reconstructed within the tensions of belonging, location, and culture. The argument posits that this reconstruction occurs in a third space, situated between the imagined homeland of Kurdistan and the desire to establish a home in the UK.

3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the comprehensive theoretical framework upon which the entire study is built. By delving deeply into this theoretical bedrock, the study aims to establish a robust foundation that illuminates the various dimensions of the research topic.

In the realm of academic research, theoretical frameworks play a pivotal role providing essential structure to research endeavours. They assist researchers in effectively categorising data and establishing meaningful connections with the subject matter, offering a valuable lens through which to interpret their findings (McCarthy, 2015, p. 9). Within the scope of this thesis, the theoretical framework functions as an indispensable instrument, facilitating a deeper understanding of various phenomena. As detailed in the introductory chapter, Chapter One, this thesis is framed by perspectives from postcolonial (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1991; Said, 1978), and nonessential (Holliday, 2011, 2013) standpoints. The chapter undertakes an exhaustive review of existing literature, aiming to explore and elucidate fundamental concepts and theories pertinent to the focal area. Employing an *interpretive and constructivist* approach, it seeks to identify gaps in comprehending the process of negotiating and navigating identity within the studied population. The exploration encompasses socio-cultural theories, including concepts like ‘cultural identity,’ ‘identity negotiation and navigation,’ ‘hybridity,’ ‘third space,’ ‘othering,’ ‘home and a sense of belonging,’ and ‘material culture and materiality.’

This chapter is divided into five distinct sections, each contributing to the elucidation of the research’s theoretical framework. It serves as a guiding framework for readers, ensuring a logical progression of ideas and facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. In the initial section 3.2, the focus shifts towards cultural identity. Here, I dissect individual notions of ‘culture’ and ‘identity’ before revealing their intricate interplay in subsection 3.2.3. Following this, in section 3.3, I explore the idea of identity negotiation and navigation. This is followed by an examination of concepts such as ‘hybridity,’ ‘in-between,’ and ‘third space.’ Subsequently, section 3.5 looks at the concept of ‘othering,’ which holds significant importance within the context of this study, closely tied to the real-life experiences of the participants. The section that follows will address adaptation, human interaction, and power. Finally, the last two sections emphasise the notions of ‘home’ and ‘belonging,’ along with ‘material culture and materiality.’

Each section offers a comprehensive outline of these terms, their underlying theoretical principles and the definitions employed in this study. Exploring these concepts is crucial, as

they help us to understand how cultures blend, how identities navigate between different influences, and how new cultural meanings emerge as a result of that in diverse societies.

3.2 Cultural identity

This section is dedicated to exploring the concept of cultural identity. It involves an extensive review of relevant literature to gain deeper insights into this notion and to address the challenges and criticisms it faces in the post-modern era. Cultural identity comprises two essential yet conflicting components: ‘culture’ and ‘identity.’ These foundational elements collectively shape an individual’s cultural identity. Therefore, it is essential to examine culture and identity separately to foster a holistic comprehension of this concept. By analysing these components individually, diverse philosophical perspectives can be integrated, ultimately leading to a suitable definition of cultural identity, tailored specifically for this study.

Culture as communication

According to William (1976), culture is a multifaceted concept deeply embedded in the English language. Its linguistic roots can be traced back to the Latin term ‘cultura,’ originally denoting the cultivation of soil or land (Cote, 1996; Online Etymology Dictionary, 2020). Over time, this metaphorical meaning extended to encompass human societies, particularly during the 18th and early 19th centuries. Historically, culture was associated with an individual’s pursuit of refinement, involving intellectual and spiritual growth within oneself and society. A notable figure, Mathew Arnold (1865, p. 15), defined culture as the quest for beauty, truth, and perfection, asserting that cultured individuals possessed familiarity with the finest ideas and expressions. As the 19th century progressed, the concept of culture gained prominence in Europe and became closely intertwined with the progressive nature of the modern world (Cote, 1996, p. 90). However, by the late 19th century, there were a notable shift in the perception of culture. This foundational interpretation of culture endures in specific contemporary contexts and is somewhat mirrored in the concept of ‘acculturation’.

Acculturation, in its broadest sense, pertains to the psychological and cultural transformations that occur when individuals or groups adopt the cultural values of diverse societies and social influences (Gibson, 2001). These transformations may encompass various aspects, including rights, freedoms, rules, legislation, economic dynamics, or changes in group customs (Haferkamp and Smelser, 1992). Conversely, the psychological changes relate to shifts in an individual’s attitudes toward the acculturation process, their cultural identity, and their social behaviour in relation to the encountered group (Berry *et al.*, 2010, p. 17). These transformations can arise from various forms of intercultural contact, including globalisation and international migration.

Culture can be understood not as an inherent or inherited trait but as an emergent phenomenon that relies on the interactions of individuals within a society, as highlighted by Spencer-Oatey (2012). She underscores that culture is intricately tied to differences in language, behaviours, knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and customs. This perspective encapsulates the idea that individuals actively participate in creating and embodying a culture, rather than culture unilaterally dictating people's conduct. This perspective is grounded in the recognition that culture is a multifaceted construct encompassing various facets of human experience. Moreover, a comprehensive understanding of culture necessitates acknowledging the diversity among its elements and the interconnectedness of language, behaviours, knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and customs. This emphasises the importance of considering a wide array of factors when exploring cultural dynamics and interactions. To gain a deeper comprehension of culture and before presenting my own definition of the concept, it is essential to consider the key elements that characterise and define it, namely norms, values, and beliefs.

Cultural values hold immense significance as they are deeply ingrained in the transmission and dissemination of a culture's beliefs. They serve as guiding principles that shape individuals' daily lives (Jackson, 2014, p. 54). Values are abstract concepts encompassing moral principles widely upheld within a society. They include notions of acceptability and unacceptability, right and wrong, fairness and unfairness, importance, and unimportance, among others (Adler, 1956; Mead, 1934). Additionally, all cultures encompass embedded beliefs that help individuals make sense of themselves and the world around them, as well as shape their expectations of life. For instance, religious views, ideas about health and disease, or attitudes towards food choices that impact well-being and daily life can significantly influence their outlook on life. While cultural beliefs and values tend to remain stable, some may evolve over time due to education and personal experiences.

Cultural norms, as outlined by Chong (2000), hold a pivotal role in shaping relationships and social interactions, as they establish anticipated behaviours and standards. These norms act as directives influencing the conduct, attitudes, and values of a society or social group. Adherence to cultural norms provides a foundation for mutual understanding and facilitates interactions among individuals from diverse cultures (Ekmekci and Arda, 2017). The acquisition and comprehension of norms from different cultures enable us to embrace and value diversity, a key factor in community development and the fostering of improved relationships with others. Furthermore, this understanding aids in mitigating stereotypes and divisions rooted in ethnicity and race, which can be detrimental to societal cohesion (Cantle, 2008). Exposure to cultural norms stimulates individuals' minds, broadening their perspectives and reducing ethnocentrism. It is essential to acknowledge that cultural norms,

values, and beliefs are not static but undergo gradual changes over time. This evolution is crucial for societal progress and the acceptance of others, irrespective of their differences, allowing individuals to adjust their behaviour, assimilate new cultural patterns, and align with evolving values. Therefore, appreciating the significance of these cultural elements in any given society is invaluable for a comprehensive understanding of culture.

The concept of culture varies across different academic disciplines and individual perceptions, as noted by Spencer-Oatey (2012). Culture can be delineated in relation to various geographical contexts, spanning from nations (e.g., France) and continents (e.g., Asia) to urban centres or regions (e.g., London or Scotland). Moreover, it can intertwine with political affiliations or a blend of multiple identities (e.g., Kurdish, British, or African American). In some instances, culture is intertwined with a particular religion (e.g., Muslim, Jewish, Christian), or it may be linked to linguistic heritage and mother tongue (e.g., Arabic, Hispanic, English). These divergent viewpoints are not trivial but reflect disparities in the overall discourse on culture and individuals' thoughts and interpretations of the concept.

Given the intricate nature of this concept, I will present various definitions of culture below. These definitions will assist me in formulating a precise and consistent definition of the concept, while also enhancing my comprehension of the notion of identity, given their inherent interconnectedness. The resultant definition of culture will then be integrated with the concept of identity to establish the analytical framework of the study. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952, 1963) meticulously examined culture concepts, accumulating 156 definitions. Their formulated description, seen as the 'central idea,' gained notable recognition (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952, p. 47), and according to them:

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for [behaviour] acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action.

In my interpretation of Kroeber and Kluckhohn's view, culture encompasses social behaviours, artefacts, symbols, values, and meanings formed by people's lived experiences. However, their definition poses an issue by portraying culture as a fixed entity, aligning with essentialism (Berry *et al.*, 2010). The presented definition falls short of a universal culture theory, resembling Edward Burnett Tylor's initial notion. Tylor (1871, p. 1) defines culture as the

‘complex whole’ encompassing knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, and more. While some view Tylor’s definition as outdated, it retains relevance in post-modern societies. Tylor’s insight describes culture’s visible aspects—social behaviour, attire, food, and customs regularly observed by individuals—providing valuable understanding despite evolving perspectives on culture.

Scholars such as Hofstede offer a more limited perspective on culture, challenging the agency of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds by attributing specific characteristics to them, such as ‘individualism’ versus ‘collectivism.’ According to Hofstede et al. (2010, p. 24), culture is referred to as ‘the software of the mind,’ depicting it as a cognitive framework that shapes our behaviour, rather than a social phenomenon shared by a group of people within their respective ‘small cultures’ (Holliday, 1999). From my perspective, Hofstede’s viewpoint implies that individuals have little or no agency in their decision-making as they are expected to conform to predetermined cultural norms. However, I argue that this emphasis on power and structure diminishes the role and agency of individuals in actively choosing which cultural norms to adopt or challenge (Holmes and Corbert, 2022). Although Hofstede’s perspective holds significant influence in various areas of study and research, it faces criticism from scholars in intercultural communication, such as Bauman (2004), Holliday (1999, 2013), and Pillar (2017), who extensively discuss the fluid nature of culture.

The exploration of the subject matter thus far has unveiled the intricate and multifaceted nature of culture. It has become evident that culture cannot be examined or defined simplistically. Therefore, it is necessary to elucidate what culture means in relation to the objectives of this study and establish a working definition that aligns with the study’s purpose. I acknowledge that the concept I endorse here is rooted in sociological traditions, influenced by Holliday (1999) and Bauman’s (2004) perspectives on the fluidity of culture. I identify culture as not a solid or fixed entity but rather as ‘liquid’ (Bauman, 2004), subject to constant negotiation (Holliday, 2013, 2019). Expanding on this viewpoint, Hall (1997, p. 2) asserts that culture encompasses the ‘best that has been thought and said’ within a society. He goes on to establish a connection between culture, language, and identity, proposing that culture is expressed through language, which serves as a representational system encompassing all the elements present within a culture.

Considering these factors, I intend to adopt Pillar’s (2017) perspective on culture. She conceives culture as an active engagement, a ‘performance,’ rather than a passive attribute, ‘a trait’ (Pillar, 2017, p. 10). This suggests that culture is an ongoing development, shaped and negotiated by individuals, within a specific cultural environment. Embracing a viewpoint that regards culture as a dynamic interplay of performance and negotiation helps in avoiding

essentialist notions associated with this concept, as previously argued by Hofstede (1980, 1991) and Hofstede et al. (2010).

To investigate culture as a dynamic process and analyse how individuals navigate within a society's cultural landscape, it is necessary to deeply comprehend the significance of Holliday's (1999) concept of 'small culture.' This is particularly relevant when examining a cohort of Iraqi Kurdish migrants. The 'small culture' paradigm, unlike the 'top-down' essentialist approach (Sobre-Denton and Bardhan, 2013, p. 102), scrutinises individual experiences from a 'bottom-up' perspective (Hall, 1991). The upcoming section will explore the nuances of the 'small culture' paradigm.

3.2.1 Small culture formation on the go (Holliday, 1999)

In the previous section, I introduced a distinctive perspective on culture and presented the definition that will be used throughout this thesis. This section delves into Holliday's concept of 'small culture,' with the aim of enhancing our understanding of culture's fundamental aspects and its interconnection with the focus of this study. As mentioned earlier in the context of Hofstede's framework, culture is typically examined in terms of ethnic, regional, and national behavioural traits. Hofstede (1991) suggests that analysing and comparing cultural tendencies among countries helps in understanding misunderstandings in intercultural relationships. He identifies six cultural value dimensions: *individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, masculinity-femininity, long and short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint* (Hofstede, 1980). According to Hofstede, these value dimensions significantly influence behaviour across all cultures, regardless of variations in individual characteristics between and within cultures.

I personally find Hofstede's work problematic due to his heavy emphasis on the nation-state as the primary determinant of culture, disregarding other factors that contribute to the establishment of individual and community cultures. Furthermore, his reduction of culture into six dimensions, referred to as 'value dimensions' (Hua, 2011) or 'value orientations' (Piller, 2017), leads to intuitive but overgeneralised and essentialist assumptions. This point brings us back to Holliday's (1999) concept of 'small culture' as a response to Hofstede's value dimensions. In his grammar of culture theory (Figure 2), Holliday challenges the dominance of the nation or ethnicity as the primary units of comparison (Holliday, 1999). He draws attention to understanding culture from 'bottom-up' or micro-level perspectives, originally proposed by Hall (1991). Holliday presents a thought-provoking perspective on culture, highlighting the importance of viewing culture from the micro rather than the macro level (Mace and Jordan, 2011; Schwartz and Mead, 1961). He argues that culture can easily lead to

essentialism by reducing people to solely being defined and constrained by their cultural backgrounds, thereby reducing individuals to stereotypes (Holliday, 2010, p. 4).

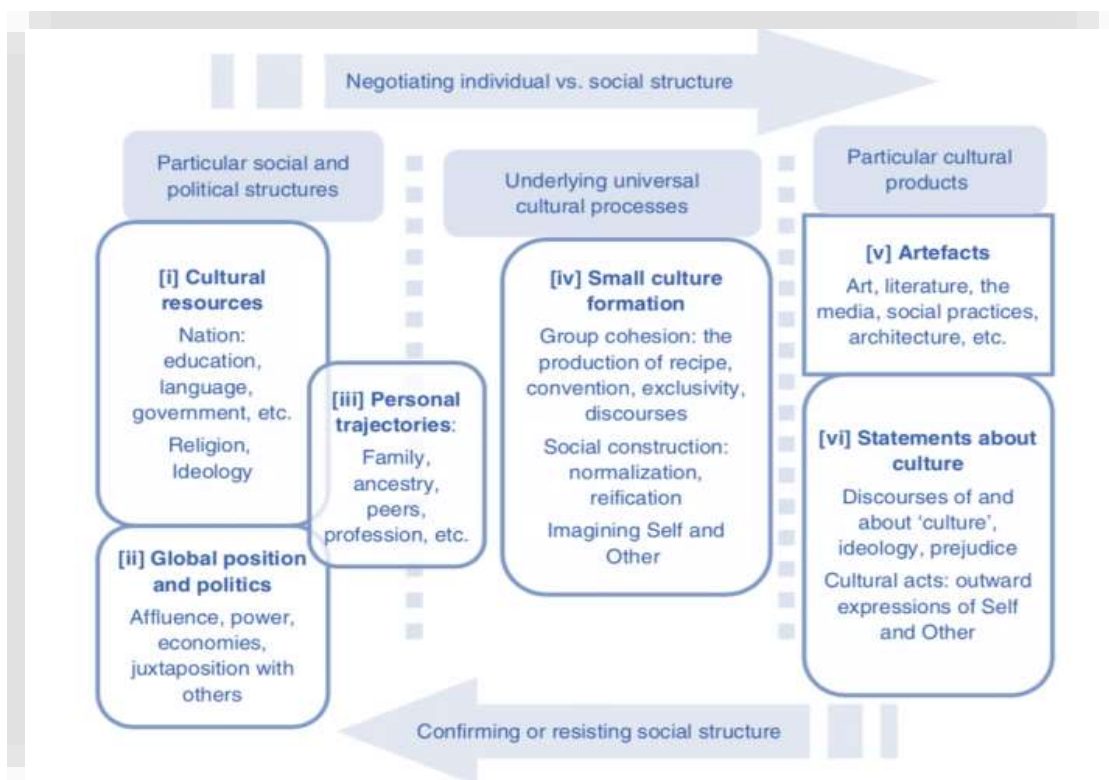


Figure 2: Hollyday’s (2010) Grammar of Culture driven from Intercultural Communication and Ideology. Sage, p. 131.

In the diagram above, two arrows are positioned at the centre, shown both at the top and bottom. These arrows symbolise the significance of the underlying ‘universal cultural process’ (Holliday, 2010). This process encompasses the skills and strategies that individuals recognise and employ, irrespective of their backgrounds, alongside the influence of specific cultural realities shaped by national structures. In the middle of the diagram, Holliday underscores the importance of spontaneous small culture formation. Small cultures are defined as cultural environments existing in close proximity to the individuals involved (Amadasi and Holliday, 2018). According to Holliday, small social groups, such as families, leisure groups, and work groups, exhibit cohesive behaviours and establish rules that bind them together. Therefore, small cultures serve as the fundamental cultural entities from which all other cultural realities emerge (Amadasi and Holliday, 2018, p. 1). Holliday also posits that humans possess the innate ability to initiate or create small cultures, which he considers a fundamental aspect of human existence (Amadasi and Holliday, 2018). Shifting to the left side of the grammar of culture diagram, the personal experiences, history, and origins of individuals become influential. These individual trajectories intertwine with specific social and political contexts, resulting in the emergence of interactions between a particular cultural domain and the

external world. This interaction occurs through the activation of subtle boundaries that connect to the underlying universal cultural processes.

On the right side of the diagram, Holliday emphasises the significance of cultural products in shaping an individual's positionality within a specific cultural domain. The initial cultural activity pertains to the role of artefacts, encompassing cultural practices, art, literature, and architecture, that are distinct to a particular culture or national culture. These cultural activities vary within society, even among small groups within a specific society or community, and individuals engage with them in diverse ways. This leads us to an observation about culture, which, according to Holliday, is considered 'the most complex of all domains to comprehend' (Holliday, 2013, p. 4). This observation relates to the way we present ourselves, and the choices we make in identifying 'our culture' (Holliday, 2013, p. 4). In the following statement, Holliday highlights the idea that our expressions and objects of focus may not necessarily reflect objective reality but rather our desires, hopes, and the impression we wish to convey to others.

What we choose to say and object, may not actually represent how things are, but rather our dreams and aspirations about how we would like them to be or the spin we place upon them to create the impact we wish to have on others. This is not to do with lying or deceiving but with [the] genuine presentation of self, which involves a sophisticated manipulation of reality.

In the culture statement, Holliday (2011) also emphasises the role of discourses in culture, ideology, and prejudice. He asserts that discourses are vital in representing our cultures through them (Holliday, 2011), and through these 'cultural acts,' individuals project a positive self-image to others about the culture(s) they belong to, positioning themselves and positioning others, often unconsciously (Holliday, 2011). From my perspective, Holliday's concept of 'culture' within the grammar of culture and the ideology of the 'looking-glass self' proposed by Cooley (1902) are intertwined to some extent. While Holliday delves into cultural practices that encompass both self-expression and empathy towards others, Cooley (1902) examines the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. Cooley's theory explains how the self develops through social exchange and the role of socialization in this process (Cooley, 1902, 1918, 1998). According to Cooley, individuals genuinely develop their human identity through engagement and social interactions (McIntyre et al., 1998; Cooley, 1902). The concept of the 'looking-glass self' highlights our inclination to understand ourselves based on how others perceive us. This can be achieved through the cultural 'blocks' and 'threads,' two important concepts articulated by Holliday (2016).

In Holliday's view, 'cultural threads' refer to the influences and experiences that shape an individual's cultural identity (Holliday, 2016, p. 320). These threads include personal experiences, exposure to different cultures, and interactions with diverse social groups (Holliday, 2016). Similarly, the 'looking glass self' theory by Cooley posits that our self-concept is formed through interactions with others. According to this theory, individuals see themselves through the eyes of others, and their self-image is influenced by the feedback and perceptions they receive from those with whom they interact within their smaller circle or small culture (Cooley, 1902). Furthermore, 'cultural blocks' represent fixed and rigid assumptions and stereotypes that can hinder a person's ability to understand and interact effectively with individuals from different cultures (Holliday, 2016, p. 319). These blocks can be perceived as negative feedback or 'others' perceptions in the 'looking glass self' theory. When individuals encounter cultural blocks, they may receive feedback that distorts their self-concept, leading to misunderstandings or misinterpretations of their cultural identity.

In summary, self-definition and identity play crucial roles in our interactions with individuals from the small cultures we engage with. Understanding our own identities can facilitate the process of finding our place within a culture. In essence, identity and culture are intertwined. Culture acts as a defining element of our identities, enabling us to comprehend our positioning, construct and negotiate our sense of self, and undergo the process of personal growth. Therefore, culture serves as a valuable lens for understanding the lived experiences of the Kurdish diaspora in the UK. In the following pages, I will delve into exploring how individuals navigate and negotiate their identities. The aim is to conceptualise the notion of identity, gain a comprehensive understanding, and develop a nuanced perspective specific to the population under study.

3.2.2 Identity quest

In academia, identity is a widely explored concept, serving as a broad term employed across various disciplines within the social sciences and humanities to encompass an individual's understanding and expression of their unique qualities (e.g., Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Younis and Hassan, 2019). Owing to its popularity, the scope of the identity concept has undergone transformation, gaining substantial interest as a focal point of vibrant discussions within applied linguistics and intercultural communication (e.g., Holliday, 2010; Mahmud, 2018; Norton, 2013; Yilmaz, 2018). Consequently, scholars have approached identity from diverse perspectives, including national, political, cultural, and others. Over the past three decades, numerous theories have emerged to explore intercultural and interracial dynamics, such as Cultural Identity Theory (Hall and Du Gay, 1996; Urrieta and Noblit, 2018; Usborn and Taylor, 2010), Identity Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005), Identity Management Theory

(Imahori and Cupach, 2005), and Cultural Identification Theory (Collier, 2005; Toomey *et al.*, 2013).

The concept of identity, as argued by Taylor (1989), was virtually inconceivable and illogical before the sixteenth century, particularly during Europe's pre-modern feudal era (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006, p. 6). It began to gain prominence in the 18th century and has more recently evolved into a widely accepted and independent field of inquiry across numerous disciplines. The term 'identity' finds its origins in (late) Latin, specifically 'identitas,' which signifies 'sameness' (derived from 'idem'), akin to the notions of 'likeness' ('similitas') and 'unity' ('unitas') (Walker and Leedham-Green, 2010, p. 13). Over time, this concept has become fertile ground for understanding collective behaviour, personal experience, and the interplay between self and society (Stryker *et al.*, 2000, p. 93).

Sigmund Freud initially introduced the term 'identity' in his exploration of his connection to the Jewish people and the impact of the subjugation of Jews in Western culture on his 'clear consciousness of inner identity' (Trosman, 2013, p. 107; Verkuyten, 2005, p. 41). Since then, there has been a significant shift in understanding the concept. Today, identity encompasses an individual's sense of self, including their beliefs, values, and social positioning. Much like culture, there is no universally accepted definition of identity, but rather a range of competing interpretations. Identity is a complex and multifaceted concept, comprising numerous attributes that cannot be easily encapsulated in a single phrase or sentence. Consequently, the notion itself remains an intriguing and challenging puzzle, as emphasised by Verkuyten (2008, p. 30), who delves into more intricate inquiries beyond the simplistic understanding of identity, addressing questions like 'Who you are.'

That I am somebody, somebody who is distinguishable from others, is obvious, but who am I? Is my identity located in my deepest wishes and desires or, rather, in the fact that I live in a particular country or belong to a social class? What matters when it comes to knowing who I am and where is the limit with *what* I am and *how* I am? The term identity is used in all these different ways.

This exploration of identity reveals its multifaceted dimensions, resisting easy reduction or simplification. It prompts individuals to consider both 'who I am' in terms of individual visibility and 'what I am' concerning the social categories they identify with. Addressing these questions enables individuals to position themselves within specific social classifications and groups, fostering a sense of belonging that shifts the focus from what sets them apart from others to shared characteristics (Verkuyten, 2005). Scholars have proposed various definitions of identity, shedding light on the social dimensions of cultural identity discourse among

migrants. Hogg and Abrams (1988, p. 2) define identity as individuals' concepts of their own identity, encompassing the kind of people they are and how they relate to others. This definition, widely adopted across disciplines, emphasises that identity operates at both personal and social levels, involving the interplay between an individual's private self and the broader social context. Objectively, identity represents a position or location within a particular world and can only be subjectively embraced within that world. Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 132) elaborate on this, explaining that a coherent identity entails internalised roles and attitudes within a specific context, requiring individuals to accept and adhere to a set of values, norms, and attitudes to establish a clear and healthy identity within their social surroundings. Jenkins (1996) takes a sociological perspective, defining identity as the relationship between individuals and the collective whole in social settings. According to Jenkins (2004, p. 5), identity involves the human capacity, rooted in language, to understand 'who' and 'what' questions, encompassing self-knowledge, knowledge of others, and others' knowledge of oneself. This multidimensional understanding of the human world, as both individuals and members of social groups, constitutes identity.

In the realm of political science, Wendt (1995) defines identity as relatively stable understandings and expectations about oneself specific to different roles, emphasising firm and enduring identities consisting of beliefs that require a distinct and precise understanding of one's identity. Katzenstein (1996, p. 59) proposes another definition, suggesting that identity involves mutually constructed and evolving perceptions of self and others, emerging through interactions shaped by shared understandings, accepted norms, and social agreements. Taylor (1989), in the political context, views identity as defined by commitments and affiliations that provide a framework for determining what is good, valuable, and morally justifiable, linking it to personal convictions and qualities that guide decision-making and moral judgments across diverse circumstances. This array of definitions enriches our comprehension of the complex and multifaceted nature of identity.

Upon reviewing the definitions and criticisms examined thus far, a common thread emerges: the intricate connection between identity and an individual's relationship with their social context. This encompasses how individuals project themselves and how they are perceived by others, both aspects shaped by an individual's social and cultural experiences. However, criticisms have surfaced concerning the operationalisation and conceptualisation of identity within scholarly contexts. Sfard and Pruska (2005) assert that many approaches to identity suffer from a lack of theoretical clarity regarding their ontology and epistemology, thus constraining their usefulness. Likewise, Rampton (in press) argues that identity may not serve as a valuable analytical concept when scrutinising interactional data, as our interactions are embedded within the specific 'here and now' context with individuals, rather than

generalisable abstractions. In essence, identity often assumes a secondary or tertiary role, bridging social science literature and public discourse without directly addressing the fundamental question of ‘so what?’

Considering the array of definitions and criticisms presented, it is apparent that there is no single, all-encompassing definition capable of perfectly encapsulating the diverse population under scrutiny. It is imperative to acknowledge the constraints inherent in certain descriptions. For instance, Wendt’s (1995) definition aligns with an essentialist viewpoint on identity, depicting it as a static construct rather than a flexible trait. In contrast, the nonessentialist perspective of identity encompasses a multitude of characteristics. To gain a more comprehensive grasp of this concept, an exploration of various dimensions and factors contributing to identity formation is warranted.

As previously mentioned, identity is a multifaceted social phenomenon, implying that its construction involves the involvement of other agents and communication processes. For instance, Appiah (1994) distinguishes between collective and personal identities. Collective identities encompass the traits that identify an individual as a member of a specific group, whether social or cultural. These attributes include gender/cisgender, social class, age, ethnicity, nationality, language, and religion. Conversely, personal identity relates to individual aspects such as one’s name, interests, and physical attributes like skin and hair colour (Walker, 2022). Individuals develop and recognise various personal attributes, activating pertinent ones when interacting with the wider community. This process nurtures a sense of belonging and facilitates the emergence of new identities beyond the individual self. In specific scenarios, an individual’s attachment to and identification with a group can become so profound that the group’s identity supersedes their individual identity. Consequently, it is crucial to acknowledge that identities do not exist in isolation; they interact with one another in a complex web of social and cultural connections.

The dynamic interplay among personal, social, and cultural dimensions plays a pivotal role in shaping the comprehensive development of an individual (Valentine *et al.*, 2007). These identities do not exist as isolated entities but rather as interdependent phenomena (Collins, 2015). An individual’s personal and collective identities manifest prominently during interactions with others, a concept underscored by Erving Goffman (1959) in his work, ‘The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.’ Goffman conducts a micro-sociological analysis of the intricate nuances of daily interactions and their underlying meanings. His exploration encompasses unconventional themes such as individual identity, group dynamics, environmental influences, and the communicative significance of information. Goffman perceives these interactions as ‘performances,’ intricately shaped by contextual factors and the

presence of an audience. Individuals strive to craft specific impressions in alignment with their social objectives (Goffman, 1959, p. 17). Goffman's fundamental proposition asserts that an individual's identity or persona emerges through these interactions, thus refining our comprehension of identity and behaviour through the exchange of information.

Similarly, Taylor (1994) contends that our environment and those around us can significantly influence our behaviour and guide our choices regarding identity. When we encounter unfamiliar individuals in new settings, we adapt our actions and may even adjust elements of our language, including syntax, grammar, and phonology. Discourse serves as a medium for exploring our self-perception, and through specific expressions, we exchange meaning with those with whom we interact. These linguistic exchanges foster introspection and self-reflection, facilitating contemplation of our identity.

Communication takes various forms, encompassing verbal and non-verbal modalities, including artistic language and forms of expression. Furthermore, our love and compassion contribute to our sense of belonging as we transmit personal, social, and cultural codes to our surroundings. This process embodies the dialogical character, a foundational aspect of identity formation and exploration (Taylor, 1994, p. 32). Taylor's insights find resonance with other identity scholars, such as Appiah, who accentuates the significance of contemporary political and social issues in recognising and affirming individuals' rights and authenticity. Appiah (1994, p. 149) raises thought-provoking questions about the authenticity of one's true self within the broader social and cultural frameworks that shape individuals, including considerations of gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality.

As a result of reading key literature and incorporating insights from various disciplines, I propose that individual identities can be regarded as foundational units. By likening these units to building blocks, I emphasise the layered nature of identity. I posit that essential aspects of one's identity can be both constructed and unveiled through the concept of the 'front' (Goffman, 1959). The 'front' can be described as the facet of an individual's performance that consistently shapes the situation for observers (Goffman, 1959, p. 22). Furthermore, through the process of 'dramatic realisation,' individuals are compelled to embody the responsibilities of social roles and consistently convey the activities and traits associated with these roles to others (Goffman, 1959, p. 30). Based on these understandings, I will define identity as:

Identity is a complex construct, encompassing a constellation of definitive characteristics contributing to an individual's sense of authenticity. It functions as a valuable resource for individuals to communicate and express various facets of themselves, shaped through dynamic processes of social

and cultural construction. This construction of identity unfolds within the contexts of local and intercultural interactions, where individuals engage with others from diverse cultural and social groups, negotiating and navigating their identities in relation to these collective frameworks.

The above definition portrays identity as an ongoing process manifested through social practices, aligning with the perspective put forth by De Fina et al. (2006) and Goffman (1959). I describe identity as a ‘complex construct encompassing a constellation of definitive characteristics.’ This emphasis highlights how individuals communicate and express various facets of themselves as part of their identity, shaped by social and cultural processes. This closely resonates with Goffman’s notion of the ‘front,’ which involves presenting a particular image to observers. Moreover, Goffman’s concept of ‘dramatic [realisation]’ finds similarity in my description of how identity is intricately shaped through dynamic processes of social and cultural construction. In this process, individuals engage with collective frameworks to express and establish their identities. By understanding identity as a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon, I avoid the essentialist trap that portrays identity as a fixed and unchanging concept, as initially proposed by Erikson (1968). This perspective enables a more flexible approach to identity development, acknowledging its dynamic nature shaped by relevant social interactions. Additionally, it recognises the individual’s connection to the world and the construction of that relationship over time and space (Norton, 2000). Therefore, the temporal aspect plays a crucial role in the construction and negotiation of identity for migrants, who often face the expectation of forming a coherent sense of self and being present in various temporal and spatial contexts (Solomon, 2014). In the following section, I will explore the attributes that define one’s identity.

3.2.3 A jelly on the beach: Identity characteristics

The concept of identity is intricate and multifaceted, often leaving us bewildered. Kossman (1996, p. 67), a Dutch historian, cleverly likened it to a jellyfish, urging us to approach it with caution, scrutinise it from all angles, and avoid rigid definitions. His analogy encourages us to view identity much like a substantial jellyfish stranded on the seashore. This comparison vividly highlights the ever-evolving nature of identity, characterised by its fluidity, fragmentation, contradiction, ambiguity, and variability (Verschueren, 2008, p. 29). Identity, far from being static, is an ongoing process of transformation—a dynamic phenomenon continuously moulded by various contexts, allowing individuals to embody different facets (Verschueren, 2008, p. 26). These facets find expression through both verbal and nonverbal means, such as language use, accent, or clothing choices. For instance, a woman may identify as white, young, and professional in her workplace, but as she navigates different social

settings, new facets of her identity come to the fore. This fluidity and multiplicity challenge the traditional, fixed view of identity as something set in stone. Importantly, multiple identities do merely accumulate; they generate distinct and unique experiences. In essence, our identity takes shape through discursive communication, influenced by sociocultural knowledge, practices, and the interactive processes that occur in our lives (McCall and Simmons, 1966, p. 47). These processes construct the intricate layers of who we are as individuals.

Furthermore, individuals' identities are not solely shaped by their own self-construction; they are also influenced by how others perceive and attribute roles to them. The identity one consciously embraces is the self-chosen identity, while ascribed identities are those assigned by others based on social and cultural factors (Jackson, 1999, p. 23). For instance, when interacting with more experienced colleagues in my institution, I might see myself as a novice researcher, new to the field, and at the introductory stage of my research journey. However, among my friends, I present myself as a Ph.D. researcher who has undergone advanced education and training, actively engaged in original research as part of my doctoral studies. In both situations, my self-perceived identity varies based on how I define myself in response to external perceptions, highlighting the interplay between personal choices and external views.

Certain sets of characteristics hold varying degrees of significance within one's identity. The prominence of a specific identity is influenced by an individual's self-awareness, emotional state, and behaviour within social groups or 'small cultures' (Holliday, 1999) they belong to (Forehand *et al.*, 2003; Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock, 1996). Occasionally, individuals may encounter challenges to their identity, leading to a need to confront and accept their identity or explore alternative self-definitions. The construction and expression of both existing and new identities can occur at both individual, social, institutional, and cultural levels, as argued by scholars such as Bhabha (1990), Lemke (2008), and McCarthey and Moje (2002). This relational perspective on identity leads to differentiation based on attributes such as gender, class, ethnicity, and profession. Identities also function as markers of social rank, validating an individual's position within intersecting systems of hierarchy and stratification. We tend to assert identities that are valued and disavow those that discredit us. The significance and relevance of a particular identity may vary depending on the context and situation.

With these considerations in mind, I perceive identity as a complex and multi-layered construct shaped by our self-perception, external perceptions, and the social dynamics at play. Drawing on the analogy of a kaleidoscope, an individual's identity can be likened to a tube containing mirrors and pieces of colourful glass or paper. As we turn the kaleidoscope, new patterns and designs emerge, reflecting the dynamic nature of our identities and the shifting

positions of the various components we engage with. This dynamic process contributes to the uniqueness of each person's identity.

In specific scenarios, defining identity can pose challenges, regardless of an individual's background. The Kurdish people exemplify this, lacking control over key collective facets, including national and ethnic affiliations. They're often linked to Iraq, Iran, Syria, or Turkey (see Chapter Two, section 2.4). During migrations, challenges persist, and ascribed identities endure. Migrant identity is not solely from inherited, ascribed, or achieved statuses. It is maintained as they integrate with 'strangers' in a specific place and time (Hack-Polay *et al.*, 2021, p. 1). Like other groups, migrants possess attributes that define their cultural affiliations. They are often labelled immigrants, minorities, settlers, or newcomers. This is not just in Europe; it is a universal phenomenon. On arrival, some identity facets may be threatened. They aim to retain personal, social, and cultural elements while adjusting to the new environment. When uncertainty surrounds an individual's asserted and ascribed identities, they engage in negotiation between different personas. This can lead to an identity dilemma, where certain aspects of identities conflict due to normative expectations that clash (Charmaz, 1994). For migrants, these identity dilemmas can be more pronounced owing to the socio-cultural challenges they encounter. Failing to navigate between different identity attributes can result in an 'identity crisis' (Gladden, 2017), or an 'identity moratorium' (Marcia, 1966, 1980).

The identity crisis signifies a critical phase where individuals navigate their asserted identities and address questions about their self-concept and aspirations. Here, one's sense of self and place in the world might be questioned. This stage may also trigger socio-psychological issues like depression and anxiety due to changing self-beliefs. Identity dilemmas are more apparent in the socio-cultural context of individual migrants. Traditionally, an identity crisis is seen as a challenging phase where individuals grapple with defining their identity and finding their direction. However, an identity crisis can ultimately be constructive, marking the start of one's identity exploration and decision-making journey. Here, individuals are expected to make choices and explore options within their social contexts, leading to the emergence of new identity traits.

After thoroughly examining existing research and ongoing discussions in the field, I have formulated my understanding of cultural identity. Aligned with perspectives presented by scholars like Hall (1990), I perceive cultural identity as a dynamic process involving both 'becoming' and 'being.' Rather than a fixed state, cultural identity is shaped through individuals' engagement with and participation in a shared culture. It is a continuous journey of navigating one's connection to a specific cultural context, embracing its traditions, beliefs,

values, and practices. In this regard, cultural identity is not merely a passive state of belonging, but an active construction that evolves and adapts over time. Therefore, I define cultural identity as:

Cultural identity encompasses an individual's emotional connection and affiliation with a specific cultural group, marked by socio-cultural classifications like nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, language, and religion. These classifications are not fixed or static; instead, they continuously evolve through co-construction, negotiation, reinforcement, and modification during interactions with others. These categories can operate independently or in conjunction with other personal and social traits, contributing to the fluid and dynamic nature of an individual's self-concept and personal development.

The choice of cultural identity categories should align with societal norms and cultural practices since cultural identity is subject to temporal changes that transcend time and space. Managing multiple identities becomes crucial when individuals navigate various cultural realities, leading to identity negotiation. Successful negotiation aids in effectively navigating one's identity journey. This research positions cultural identity as an interpersonal and intersubjective process that investigates how identity is negotiated in transitional spaces and contexts. To gain a comprehensive understanding of Cultural Identity Theory, it is essential to explore the concepts of 'negotiation' and 'navigation,' which will be the central focus of the following section.

3.3 Identity in action: identity negotiation and social validation

Expanding upon the premise that identity evolves through ongoing interactions within social contexts, I now direct my focus to the complex interplay between identity and communication, recognising their profound interconnectedness and significance in shaping one's cultural identity, particularly looking at the notion of identity negotiation.

The theoretical underpinnings of identity negotiation within communication studies emerged in the late 1980s, largely attributed to Ting-Toomey, a prominent communication scholar (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey, 2015). Ting-Toomey's scholarship introduced the 'Discourse of Identity Negotiation' framework, which offers valuable insights into the complex processes through which individuals navigate and manage their identities within diverse social and cultural milieus. This framework encompasses a theoretical perspective that underscores

the intricate nature of identity management across various social and cultural contexts (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Swann and Bosson, 2008).

Identity negotiation, as articulated by Ting-Toomey, is a multifaceted process through which individuals in their respective social contexts come to agreements regarding their identities. This process involves deliberate adaptability, as individuals strategically choose when, where, and with whom to express specific traits. Central to effective engagement in this negotiation is an appreciation of the role of 'discourse,' which encompasses ongoing dialogues, interactions, and communicative exchanges that contribute to the construction of individual identities (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey, 2015). This theoretical framework, epitomised by Ting-Toomey's face/identity negotiation theory, enriches our understanding of intercultural communication dynamics, particularly in contexts fraught with conflict or sensitivity.

Identity negotiation encapsulates the intricate process through which individuals navigate their self-identity amidst diverse cultural contexts, engaging with cultural norms, expectations, and social dynamics (Gudykunst, 2005). This theoretical framework highlights individuals' skilfulness in presenting different facets of their identity to uphold a positive self-image and promote harmony, emphasising the equilibrium between individual expression and adherence to cultural norms (Ting-Toomey, 2015). Effective intercultural communication plays a pivotal role in nurturing robust relationships, as individuals participate in verbal exchanges to compare, negotiate, affirm, and challenge their cultural identities (Collier and Thomas, 1998), confronting and reconciling stereotypes, norms, and values from various cultural perspectives. The success of identity negotiation hinges upon individuals' willingness to compromise and make concessions, ultimately enriching their cultural identity through agreements forged among culturally diverse parties (Collier, 1988).

The acknowledgment or imposition of various identities, coupled with the intricate process of transitioning between them, underscores the complexity inherent in the process of identity negotiation. The amalgamation of 'avowed' and 'ascribed' identities (Jackson, 2014) can often precipitate identity crises (Jim, 2006), wherein individuals struggle with the daunting task of determining which identities to embrace or relinquish. This internal struggle frequently arises from an underlying identity dilemma (Charmaz, 1994), characterised by conflicting aspects of one's identity or societal expectations. This can result in uncertainty and inner conflict. In navigating such circumstances, individuals may find themselves confronting fundamental questions regarding their sense of self and endeavouring to establish coherent or authentic identities. Hence, the interplay between identity dilemmas and ensuing crises can vary, with the former sometimes preceding or coinciding with the latter as individuals navigate the

multifaceted processes of self-discovery and identity formation within the dynamic landscapes of their social and cultural contexts.

Ting-Toomey (2015) emphasises the dynamic nature of identity, challenging the notion of fixed identities by highlighting their continual evolution through interactions within social contexts. While possessing multiple identities offers versatility, it also poses challenges as individuals navigate the complexities of determining which aspects to reveal or conceal. This multifaceted venture involves delicately balancing interaction objectives with identity-related aspirations, such as the pursuit of autonomy, social connection, and psychological coherence (Swann and Bosson, 2008, p. 449). Central to this concept is the dynamic interplay between cultural identity and self-image, as individuals engage in interactions and manoeuvre through various identities to attain desired outcomes. Such complexity underscores the significance of intercultural competence, which involves the cultivation of skills, attitudes, and effective communication across diverse cultural contexts (Bennett, 2015; Ting-Toomey, 2015).

Amidst the domain of identity negotiation, language emerges as a potent instrument for expressing affiliations, values, and personal narratives, thereby contributing to the construction and portrayal of identities. This linguistic interaction encompasses the utilisation of specialised lexicons, distinct speech patterns, and linguistic markers affiliated with specific social groups. Language serves as a versatile medium of communication, fostering interaction and cohesion within communities (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). Giles (2008) highlights speech nuances within in-groups as symbolic of ethnic identity and cultural solidarity. Labov's seminal research during the 1960s and 1970s delved into the correlation between linguistic features and social categorisations such as class, gender, and age. For instance, Labov observed that the retention or omission of the 'r' sound in pronunciations could denote social stratification — lower-class individuals tended to retain it, while upper-class individuals omitted it (Labov, 1972a). Despite critiques directed towards Labov's work (Rampton, 1995; Depperman, 2007), it underscores the pivotal role of language in identity formation. Hence, language assumes a critical role in enacting and negotiating identity (Mahmud, 2018).

In academic discourse, akin to language itself, resides a multifaceted domain distinguished by varied interpretations and expressions. Discourse, as the vehicle for conveying and exchanging ideas through language, encompasses both overarching concepts and specific instances of communication. Weedon (1997) suggests that discourse transcends mere knowledge creation, encompassing broader social practices, subjective formations, and the embedded power dynamics inherent in disseminating knowledge. Within the realm of identity enactment and negotiation, discourse assumes a pivotal and overarching role (De Fina, 2006), governing permissible thoughts, speech authority, and the contextual framework for expression. Skilful

employment of appropriate discourse aids in garnering acceptance within social and cultural circles, thereby facilitating the process of self-construction and expression. While verbal exchanges undeniably contribute significantly to identity negotiation, it is essential to acknowledge the substantial influence wielded by non-verbal elements, such as material artifacts. For instance, clothing choices serve as potent non-verbal agents in negotiating identity across diverse contexts, effectively blending linguistic and non-linguistic dimensions within the framework of identity negotiation.

Identity negotiation presents a formidable challenge, particularly for individuals hailing from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds. Minorities often possess distinctive attributes, be they physical (such as appearance) or non-physical (such as language), that differentiate them from the dominant societal fabric, thereby complicating the process of identity negotiation. Successful negotiation of identity entails adept adaptation, despite its inherently non-linear nature and fluidity in self-definition.

Migrants, confronted with significant life changes during relocation, encounter heightened hurdles in this regard. Such transitions reverberate through various facets of life, including family dynamics, sense of belonging, and access to opportunities, consequently shaping how migrants articulate their identities. Factors such as race, ethnicity, and gender further contribute to this intricate process. This complex interplay underscores the profound relationship between identity negotiation, discourse, and the complex dynamics of social integration within scholarly discourse.

Successful negotiation of identity yields profound benefits in terms of self-perception and adaptability, contributing to an enriched sense of self. Esteem and validation received from diverse social circles positively influence individuals, augmenting their self-perception and adaptability (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Conversely, encountering negative feedback about one's identity can deeply impact self-image. This phenomenon is evidenced in Mude and Mwarni's (2020) study on African youths in Australia, where navigating multiple identities against unequal opportunities between Africans and Australians influenced their sense of purpose, identity, and belonging. Post-migration challenges, including the loss of social networks and cultural disparities, further shaped their experiences (Mude and Mwarni, 2020). Failure to effectively navigate identity facets can result in a state of 'othering³, wherein individuals are assigned outsider status, perpetuating stereotypes (Holliday, 2013).

Unjust labels can impede adaptation and foster isolation, particularly for unique minority identities (Nelson, 2009), thus hindering social cohesion. Bennett (2015) asserts that

³ The notion of othering is explored in detail in section 3.5.

(im)migrants must develop adaptive and creative skills to negotiate between different thematic poles during their identity negotiation process, depending on the circumstances they encounter. I align with Bennett's perspective based on my personal experiences as an (im)migrant. I firmly advocate that, to integrate into a new sociocultural milieu and avoid being marginalised as the 'other,' migrants must actively engage in mindful identity negotiation. This involves enhancing their knowledge and attunement levels while critically evaluating their group membership and identity issues. By possessing such attributes, migrants can effectively assimilate within the host culture and cultivate an *in-between* or *hybrid* cultural identity (Bhabha, 1994). These two concepts are further explored in the subsequent section.

3.4 *Hybridity, in-betweens, and third Space: Negotiating the stairwell*

The concepts of 'in-betweenness' and 'hybridity' are two complex and contested phenomena; they hold significant relevance in this research. Hybridity, a term that has sparked extensive debates within postcolonial theory, holds profound symbolic value in the twentieth century (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2000; 1998, p. 118). It is intricately linked to the concept of cultural identity and offers a means to transcend dualistic thinking. This concept allows for the recognition of agency among marginalised individuals and has the potential to subvert existing power structures (Prabhu, 2005, 2007, p. 1). Initially rooted in biology for describing the offspring of cultural mixing (Stoddard and Collins, 2016), hybridity has evolved through interdisciplinary research in various fields and led to an expanded and transformed understanding. The concept has emerged as a central theme in cultural research, theory, and criticism, giving rise to various related terms like 'creolization,' 'mestizaje,' 'syncretism' (Kraidy, 2005, p. 2), and 'transculturation' (Prabhu, 2007, p. 1). The term itself is extensive and encompasses diverse intercultural mixtures and objects, as highlighted by Kraidy (2005, p. 1). In this context, the terms 'in-between' and 'hybridity' are used interchangeably due to their shared meaning and usage.

While there are differing interpretations of hybridity, Ashcroft *et al.* (2000, p. 96) refer to it as the emergence of new transcultural forms in contact zones shaped by colonisation. It has often been associated with distinct ways of life, but it can also occur in situations of 'equality, mutual respect, and open-mindedness' (Neil, 2004, p. 251). Young (1995), on the other hand, views hybridity as a blend of races and cultures, a narrative that persists throughout the colonial experience and beyond. However, Homi Bhabha has redefined the notion of hybridity, moving away from its racial connotations and emphasising its significance in the 'semiotic [realm] of culture' (Kraidy, 2002, p. 320). According to Bhabha (1994, p. 160), Hybridity is defined as:

The sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces, and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through [self-denial] (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity [by repeating] discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination.

According to the statement above, hybridity reflects the dynamic nature of colonial power, strategically countering dominance by constructing discriminatory identities that uphold its authority. It involves reevaluating presumed colonial identities through the repetition of discriminatory outcomes, resulting in the distortion and shifting of various areas marked by discrimination and dominance.

Prominent postcolonial writer Gilroy (1993), in his book 'The Black Atlantic,' explores the history of African diasporic culture, introducing a culture that transcends specific categorisations such as African, American, Caribbean, or British, encompassing a hybrid blend of all these identities simultaneously. He argues that black individuals are compelled to define themselves based on others' perceptions and that black identity is inherently hybrid due to the historical experiences of the African diaspora and the pervasive influence of racism. This leads black citizens of America and Britain to perceive themselves as less 'American' or 'British' than their white counterparts (Frenkel, 2008). In a related vein, Hart (2012, p. 140) examines the phenomenon of hybridity within Canadian culture by focusing on two contemporary indigenous poets. Hart argues that the history of colonisation in North America by France and England in the early 17th century has led to the hybridisation of Canadian culture, resulting in both French and English becoming the official languages in Canada. However, following France's departure in 1763, the influence of French culture waned significantly in comparison to that of the British. The British, on the other hand, remained for a longer period, significantly impacting Canadian culture in terms of hybridity, and even shaping foreign policy until their withdrawal following the enactment of the Statute of Westminster in 1931.

In the realm of cultural perceptions and power dynamics, Said's groundbreaking book 'Orientalism' occupies a revered position, being hailed as 'one of the most influential scholarly books published in English in the humanities in the last quarter of the twentieth century' (Lockman, 2004, p. 190). Said's work, published in 1978, illuminates the cultural lens through which the West views the East, emphasising the intricate relationship between knowledge and power in shaping and dominating the portrayal of Orientals. Said's primary focus in 'Orientalism' is to highlight the prevalent depiction of Eastern cultures as inferior,

retrogressive, exotic, or in need of Western intervention. This perspective remains highly relevant, particularly in today's context of unjustly labelling migrants and their communities as indolent, intellectually deficient, and inept within Western societies—an idea fundamentally at odds with Said's viewpoint.

Turning to Bhabha's work on hybridity (1994), he introduces a concept fraught with ambivalence and ambiguity within the coloniser. Childs and Williams (1997, p. 122) present Bhabha's perception of Said's approach to colonial discourse as a nuanced exploration of the ambivalence inherent in the coloniser's stance

Too reliant on oversimplifying binaries such as East and West, [coloniser] and [colonised], latent and manifest Orientalism, [...] while Said discusses the differences and oppositions between colonizer and colonized, Bhabha often examines their points of similarity and considers, for example, the stereotype as the cardinal point of colonial subjectification for [both].

Bhabha takes inspiration from Said as a starting point. In his article from the 1980s, he employs Said's quote to illustrate his intellectual stance.

To reintegrate himself with worldly actuality, the critic of texts ought to be investigating the system of discourse by which the 'world' is divided, administered, [and] plundered, by which humanity is thrust into pigeonholes, by which 'we' are human, and 'they' are not (Said, 2004a, p. 26).

The contrast between Said's and Bhabha's perspectives lies in their approach to the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. While Said primarily explores the differences and resistance between the two, Bhabha directs the reader's attention to their similarities and views stereotypes as the central element of colonial subjectification for both parties involved. Childs and Williams (1997, p. 122) further elaborate on Bhabha's viewpoint, discussing the parallel nature of the concepts of the 'colonised' (seen as 'civilised') and the 'coloniser' (seen as 'savage'), emphasising the stereotype as the key element in shaping the identities of both groups. The binary opposition between the coloniser and the colonised generates images that reshape the identities of both parties. In his subsequent works, Bhabha delves into post-colonial identity, exploring its boundaries, temporalities, and movements. He places particular emphasis on the significance of hybridity, which has become a crucial concept within his theoretical framework and gained popularity among scholars from various disciplines. In his book 'The Location of Culture,' Bhabha (1994, p. 285) explores the concept

of culture in the realm beyond distinct boundaries. According to his theory, cultures are constantly intermingling and cannot be isolated or separated. Bhabha argues that hybridity is a problematic aspect of colonial representation that challenges and subverts the authority of dominant discourses. By incorporating the 'denied knowledge' of the other into the dominant discourse, hybridity disrupts the foundation of its authority (Bhabha, 1994, p. 156).

Expanding on Bhabha's concepts, Werbner (2015) asserts that all cultures are hybrid, and hybridisation is an ongoing process, regardless of individuals retaining their beliefs and traditions. Bhabha further elucidates that both the colonisers and the colonised are influenced by imperialist encounters, relying on the creation of a shared culture and the construction of a cultural system. According to Bhabha, hybridity does not entail simply mixing two authentic moments to produce a third; rather, it is the 'third space' that allows for the emergence of other positions (Bhabha, 1994, p. 211). Once the colonisers and the colonised agree on shared beliefs, they establish a space where different cultures and identities intersect, giving rise to something new that exists in the 'in-between' of difference (Bhabha, 1994). Frenkel (2008, p. 928) cites Bhabha to clarify that the third space is a liminal space characterised by the 'cutting edge of translation and negotiation' between the coloniser and the colonised. Within these identified spaces, individuals find themselves situated within intercultural boundaries. Exposure to diverse cultures leads to intercultural encounters where one's identity is shaped within the multifaceted and often contradictory system of meaning. In the context of this thesis hybridity refers to being entangled between two distinct cultures or cultural realities, resulting in a sense of 'double consciousness' or 'double vision' (Zohdi, 2017, p. 146) when an individual finds themselves caught or trapped between two entities.

Bhabha also examines the concept of cultural identity through the lens of 'mimicry,' illustrating the Westernisation of native cultures. Mimicry refers to the process in which the colonised subject imitates the cultural practices, habits, behaviours, assumptions, institutions, and values of the coloniser, becoming an imitation of the coloniser. This imitation creates uncertainty in the colonial power's control over the behaviour of the colonised. However, the colonised can never fully adopt the coloniser's identity and become an integral part of the colonising society. Mimicry, as a colonial practice, aims to reshape the identity of the colonised by adjusting their demeanour and mannerisms (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86). For mimicry to be effective, it must continually exhibit differences, slippages, and excesses, allowing the colonised to assert their agency despite structural constraints (Giddens, 1979).

Bhabha introduces yet another concept – 'third space' in the context of cultural identity. This transformative realm challenges the fixed notions of identity and creates a dynamic space where an individual's diverse cultural layers are in a constant state of change, transformation,

and interconnectedness. In the 'third space,' cultural influences from both the coloniser and the colonised converge, challenging the idea of complete ownership by either party (Frenkel, 2008). Within this third space, a unique hybrid identity emerges as both the coloniser and the colonised engage in collaborative action (Zohdi, 2018). Communication in this in-between space is seen as a process of 'cultural performance' and 'discursive strategies,' where interlocutors negotiate new cultural demands, meanings, and strategies in the context of the present (Bhabha, 1994, p. 51-3). Bhabha's perspective separates cultural differences from fixed unity, emphasising the inherent instability and ambivalence in the act of interpretation (Bhabha, 1994, p. 50-5). Importantly, Bhabha contends that this concept of hybridity is not limited to specific cultures but is present across all cultures, offering the potential for profound cultural transformations within the third space, allowing interlocutors to explore and establish new identities (Bhabha, 1994, p. 56). In essence, the concept of the 'third space' proposed by Bhabha highlights the fluid and transformative nature of cultural identity, where the interplay of diverse cultural influences shape new and evolving identities.

Edward Soja (1996), building upon the work of Lefebvre, Foucault and contemporary feminist and postcolonial theorists, further advances the notion of the third space. In his book, *Third Space: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-imagined Places*, Soja characterises the third space as a term embodying uncertainty and instability, encapsulating a diverse range of logical and experiential journeys (Soja, 1996). It captures the ever-shifting milieu of ideas and meanings (Moon, 2010, p. 133). Soja's perspective highlights how the in-betweenness of the third space serves as a catalyst for the emergence of new forms of identity, transforming an individual's cultural layers through transmutation, intersection, and transformation (Moon, 2010, p. 133). The significance of this concept lies in its emphasis on the flexibility, unpredictability, malleability, and fluidity of identities. However, Soja warns that if the characteristics of the third space are misused or neglected, this fluid abstract space can become stagnant or fixed (Soja, 1996). Across various cultures, particularly within migrant communities, the notion of hybridity becomes essential as it allows individuals to draw upon their cultural knowledge while adapting aspects of the host culture to integrate successfully into their new environment. Thus, both Bhabha and Soja's perspectives offer valuable insights into the transformative and dynamic nature of the third space, emphasising its potential for reshaping cultural identities and fostering meaningful cultural interactions.

This section primarily delves into the concepts of hybridity, in-betweenness, and the third space. It is essential to clarify that my use of the term 'hybridity' does not carry any racist assumptions. Instead, it encompasses both unconscious cultural blending and intentional efforts to challenge homogeneity for political reasons. Building upon the perspectives of Bhabha and other postcolonial theorists, I view hybridity or in-betweenness as follows:

Hybridity or in-betweenness represents a transformative realm where individuals experience a profound shift in their sense of self as they move through transitional spaces and engage with diverse cultures and environments. This in-between space holds cultural significance, allowing for the reformation of identities and serving as a platform where intercultural communication and power dynamics are constantly renegotiated. As a result, new identities emerge from these interactions.

The subsequent section will delve into the concept of othering within the specific context of this study, focusing on the identity negotiation and navigation experiences of Iraqi Kurdish migrants in the UK.

3.5 *The grammar of othering*

Othering is a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses various social, cultural, political, and psychological aspects. It holds significant importance in contemporary critical theories such as postcolonialism (Said, 1978; Hall, 1997), and feminism (De Beauvoir, 1997). These theories, as put forth by scholars like Said, Hall, and de Beauvoir, emphasise the role of power and its influence on the representation and perception of others. Othering entails the construction of a power dynamic within relationships, interactions, and behaviours, with the dominant group asserting superiority over marginalised cultures (Foucault, 1972). The concept of the 'other' and the idea of otherness gained significant attention in the field of geography starting in the 1980s (Staszak, 2008, p. 2). However, it is important to note that earlier discussions about othering were initiated by the feminist scholar de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* (1956). In this book, de Beauvoir presents a comprehensive theory that examines the relationship between the self and others, with a particular focus on the gender binary between women and men and other social hierarchies. de Beauvoir (1997) argues that social and cultural factors play a crucial role in shaping gender and how women are marginalised and defined in relation to men. Her ideas shed light on the power dynamics and inequalities that exist in society, especially concerning gender roles and societal expectations. As de Beauvoir states (1997, p. 16):

The category of the Other is as primordial as consciousness itself. In the most primitive societies and ancient mythologies, one finds the expression of duality- that of the Self and Other. This duality was not originally attached to the division of the sexes; it was not dependent upon any empirical facts. [Nevertheless], it is revealed in such works.

The above excerpt explores the concepts presented by de Beauvoir regarding the social construction of gender and its impact on women's identity and subjectivity. de Beauvoir contends that women are not inherently born with certain traits; instead, societal expectations and norms impose specific roles upon them. They are classified as women and defined by characteristics such as passiveness, appearance, limited power, a perceived need for protection, and a nurturing inclination towards others. These societal constructs shape women's gendered identity and influence how they are perceived and treated within society. de Beauvoir also explains that women exist and are only conscious of themselves based on the ways in which men have shaped their identities and societal roles. This implies that women's understanding of themselves and their place in the world is influenced by the dominant male perspective (Hughes and Witz, 1997, p. 49).

The concept of othering is deeply rooted in early postcolonial literature, particularly in Said's Orientalism theory. Said (1978) portrays the 'orient' as the 'other,' contrasting it with the perceived excellence and divinity of the Western world. He argues that through colonialism, Western ideas and practices were privileged over those of Arab countries and the East in general. Consequently, the cultures deemed inferior by Western standards were relegated to the position of the 'other.' This process occurs when the privileged group considers their beliefs and practices as superior, leading to the marginalisation and devaluation of other cultures. Said's perspective on othering has influenced scholars like Holliday (2013), who defines othering as an ideology that simplifies and essentialises the image of outsiders, applying it to all members of a group or society based on factors such as religion, political alignment, ethnicity, or gender (Holliday, 2011, p. 69).

Othering takes place on both individual and societal levels and is often accompanied by power dynamics (Foucault, 1972). In this context, othering is an ideological constraint that involves constructing a demonised image of 'them' or the other, which, in turn, supports an idealised image of 'us' or the self (Foucault, 1972). This concept is rooted in the idea of favouritism towards one's own group and derogation or bias towards outgroups, and this negotiation can serve as a basis for potential discrimination (Staszak, 2008, p. 2). On a societal level, othering results in social exclusion and ostracism, particularly affecting migrant populations and minority groups (Redmond *et al.*, 2024). Othering manifests in various forms, including racism, discrimination, stereotypes, and prejudice. Discrimination can be understood as prejudice put into action (Lustig and Koester, 2010), while racism specifically involves the belief that one race or ethnic group is superior to others based on skin colour or ethnicity. Racism and discrimination can be expressed directly or indirectly. Direct racial discrimination refers to unfair treatment based on race or related factors, resulting in negative consequences. In contrast, indirect or 'subtle racial discrimination' refers to the tendency to treat different

racialised groups equally under systematically unequal conditions (Ratele and Duncan, 2003, p. 50). It is important to recognise that both forms of discrimination contribute to the creation and perpetuation of racial inequalities, often within specific organisations or within the cultural contexts of individuals (Holliday, 1999). Furthermore, the construction of otherness is closely tied to the power dynamics between dominant and subordinate groups. In such relationships, the identity and experiences of the dominant group are given higher value, while the experiences of the subservient group are often marginalised or disregarded. This asymmetry in power reinforces and perpetuates the process of othering.

Subtle discrimination, encompassing more than individual cognitive processes. It involves three key elements: ambiguity, the influence of power dynamics and societal structures, and the impact of group status and endorsed ideologies on the perception of subtle racism (van Laer and Janssens, 2017, p. 1212). Research suggests that black participants tend to perceive subtle racism more than their white counterparts, often experiencing differential and unfair treatment from their employers (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2021). Those who hold racist ideologies are more attuned to racial cues. However, regardless of group status, the perception of subtle racism is influenced by legitimised doctrines. Through my personal experiences of living in the UK and engaging with different cultures, I have become acutely aware of the impact of othering on the formation of my identity. It has become evident to me that, irrespective of my individual characteristics such as skin colour and clothing preferences, individuals outside my close social circle (e.g., family) may still perceive me as an outsider. This realisation underscores the interconnected nature of defining the 'other' and defining oneself, as the understanding of what lies outside the realm of our identity assists in constructing a sense of self and belonging. During the period of colonisation, Westerners held a privileged identity, while the colonised and people of colour faced discrimination and subjugation under the rule of the colonisers. However, the dominant colonisers successfully exported their values and imposed them through a systematic process of cultural integration. This process of cultural integration has perpetuated the practice of 'othering,' which deeply ingrains discriminatory notions in discourses of power and representation (Akbulut and Razum, 2022, p. 4). The concept of power, influenced by factors such as culture, class, race, gender, sexuality, and religion, plays a crucial role in determining an individual's ability to control material resources and accumulate wealth (Collins *et al.*, 2021).

To summarise the discussion thus far, othering is not an innate or biological characteristic but rather a behavioural phenomenon that influences human actions through misunderstandings and the subjugation of thoughts towards individuals who are racially, ethnically, or linguistically different. It involves a socio-psychological process of categorisation and classification, wherein certain individuals or groups are perceived as 'others' by some people,

whether it be in the context of host communities versus migrants or even within host and migrant populations themselves. In this context, I argue that:

Othering is an active process that fosters a sense of superiority and is not only a product of colonial powers that impose categorisations and privileges upon certain groups over others. It is also impacted by materialistic resources like wealth, citizenship, and social status, as well as gender differences. These various factors play a pivotal role in either exacerbating or mitigating the process of othering.

Moving to new countries brings challenges, requiring individuals to adapt to different ways of life, including learning the host country's language. Despite their efforts to assimilate, they may still be seen as outsiders, experiencing difficulties associated with 'othering.' Addressing these challenges require successful adaptation, which is crucial. It fosters inclusivity, reduces discrimination, mitigates conflicts, enhances social cohesion, promotes economic and cultural enrichment, and contributes to global interconnectedness. In our diverse, interconnected world, successful adaptation is a necessity, playing a pivotal role in building a harmonious and integrated society.

In this section, I discussed the concept of othering and briefly mentioned the role of power. In the next section, I will explore this concept further to illustrate how power influences the formation of an individual's cultural identity.

3.6 Human interaction and power dynamics

In the exploration of migrant cultural identity, power assumes a central role. When individuals engage in intercultural encounters, they must adapt their communication styles to suit their needs and fulfil the requirements of their interactional partners. Giles (1980) developed the Communication Accommodation Theory, which seeks to elucidate the factors influencing language choice and language/code switching among interlocutors concerning the minimisation or maximisation of social hierarchy between individuals and groups. This theory also illuminates how communication behaviours evolve depending on the interaction's context, with language serving as a crucial element in identity formation within this framework. Giles (2008; 2016) contends that individuals express their identity through communication, encompassing their language choices, both verbal and non-verbal. In both instances, whether verbal or non-verbal, language stands as a vital factor in shaping one's identity according to this theory. People employ a range of linguistic devices to delineate boundaries among diverse social and cultural groups, and this feature intricately intertwines with their identities (Norton, 2013). The continuous movement toward or away from others,

accompanied by changes in an individual's communicative behaviour, is termed 'accommodation' (Giles and Ogay, 2007). Language functions as a tool that brings together individuals from various cultural communities, serving as a sort of 'calling card' in the construction of collective identities (Bruno *et al.*, 2012, p. 166). Through specific linguistic devices, individuals can express their sense of self, attribute particular traits to themselves, adapt their thoughts, and convey their beliefs, cultural norms, and values.

Giles and Ogay's theory encompasses three fundamental concepts: convergence, divergence, and maintenance. Convergence extensively studied and historically core to the theory (Gallois *et al.*, 2005; Giles, 2016; Giles and Ogay, 2007), involves individuals adjusting their communicative behaviour to become more like that of their interlocutors (Giles and Ogay, 2007, p. 123). This can include modifying verbal cues, such as accent or the use of similar expressions, as well as nonverbal behaviours. The aim is to minimise differences and establish a sense of similarity between interlocutors (Giles, 2016; Giles and Ogay, 2007). Divergence, on the other hand, involves accentuating speech differences between the speaker and others (Giles, 2016; Giles and Ogay, 2007). For instance, a speaker may employ divergence to emphasise distinctiveness while simultaneously using convergence to demonstrate solidarity, gain social approval, or convey a shared identity. Both convergence and divergence impact the communication process, contributing to a more transparent and smoother communication pattern (Gallois *et al.*, 2005).

Maintenance, in line with divergence, occurs when speakers maintain their original linguistic style or exhibit modesty in their language repertoire, irrespective of the communication behaviour of others (Giles, 2016; Giles and Ogay, 2007). Convergence tends to be the more frequently employed strategy when interlocutors seek approval from the recipient. According to Giles and Ogay (2007, p. 296), 'the more similar we are to our conversational partner, the more they like or respect us, and the more social reward we can expect.' Converging towards a common linguistic style enhances the quality of communication, reduces interpersonal anxiety, and facilitates understanding. However, individuals must be prepared to sacrifice certain aspects of their personal and social identity in the process. Divergence comes into play when the speaker aims to maintain their distinct speech pattern, particularly when they perceive the encounter in intergroup terms and seek to establish a positive ingroup identity (Gallois *et al.*, 2005, p. 125). Through divergence, individuals assert their distinctiveness from those outside their cultural group, fostering a sense of ingroup pride and bolstering their self-worth. Moreover, divergence strategies can be employed to elicit specific attributions and emotions from the recipient. For instance, as a Kurdish individual, I speak Kurdish with my fellow Kurdish friends who share the same dialect (Kurdish Sorani). However, when communicating with other Kurdish friends who speak different dialects (such as Kurmanji), I

switch to English to establish an outsider image or remind my conversational partners that I do not belong to their specific linguistic group. Furthermore, when conversing with my Algerian friends, I may switch between two or more languages and dialects to construct a new identity and position myself within a new cultural context. Considering these aspects, I define 'power' as:

Power is the dynamic influence that individuals and groups exert in intercultural encounters, showcased through their choices in language. It shapes communication by managing hierarchies, expressing solidarity, asserting uniqueness, and nurturing a sense of belonging. This capacity to guide communication dynamics, often through language, enables the pursuit of individual and group objectives within cosmopolitan interactions.

It is imperative to emphasise the profound interconnection between language and identity. Language serves not merely as a conveyer but as an active architect of identities (Evans, 2012). Simply put, identity emerges from intricate social construction, with language playing a pivotal role in this transformative process. As such, these two facets remain inextricably linked. Regardless of an individual's position of power, it exerts a significant influence on their perception of belonging, thereby shaping their overarching identity. To explore the intricate concept of belonging further, Section 3.7 will shift its focus to comprehensively examine ongoing discourses related to fundamental concepts such as 'home' and the profound sense of 'belonging,' considering their role in shaping individuals' cultural identities.

3.7 Home and sense of belonging

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the sense of belonging within a group of Iraqi Kurdish migrants, it is essential to delve into the concept of 'home' and its representation in existing literature.

The concept of home is inherently complex, originating from diverse sources (Ahmadi, 2001). Much like culture, identity, and cultural identity, home is a multifaceted and rich concept, at times paradoxical, encompassing spatial, social, temporal, and psychological dimensions (Somerville, 1997). The perception of home varies across cultures, and even within the same culture, individuals may hold divergent interpretations of it. Its relevance in daily life carries profound significance, invoking both intangible and tangible attributes. Traditionally, home has been associated with a physical residence, a conventional household, a family residing within a single structure, or the ancestral and place of origin. However, limiting the notion of home to these aspects not only implies a static and passive understanding but also suggests

that individuals possess a fixed identity, tethered to their heritage, regardless of their unique individual traits. In this context, McLeod (2000, p. 210) argues:

The concept of home often plays an important function in our lives. It can serve as a valuable means of orientation by giving us a sense of our place in the world. It tells us where we originated and where we belong.

Nevertheless, the literature has witnessed a shift in the understanding of 'home,' especially as many individuals have experienced displacement due to colonisation and migration. Scholars have moved beyond the idea that a house is synonymous with home, as this implies an unchanging and static concept (Douglas, 1991; Somerville, 1992; Wardhaugh, 1999). A mere house cannot capture the essence of home; it may encompass physical elements but lacks the soul of a true home (Chapman and Hockey, 1999). Similarly, for Somerville (1992) and Wardhaugh (1999), home is a multi-dimensional concept enriched with meanings that emerge from individuals' lived experiences. In their work, 'Reimagining Home in the 21st Century,' Lloyd and Vasta (2017) present multiple definitions of home. They affirm that home can symbolise warmth and security, but it can also evoke fear and exploitation, depending on individuals' experiences. Migration, driven by factors such as colonisation, economic shifts, political turmoil, and social insecurity, continues to unfold globally, compelling many individuals to leave their homelands and establish new lives elsewhere. For first migrants, the notion of home becomes intricate and multifaceted. Even after spending numerous years abroad, they may continue to idealise their home country as their true and only home.

Geopolitical and economic instability often compels migrants to seek refuge and establish a sense of home in their new environment, effectively requiring them to create a 'home away from home' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Korac, 2009). For migrants, the concept of home extends beyond the physicality of a house or building and transcends geographical locations (Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Korac, 2009; Mallett, 2004). For newcomers in a foreign place, determining where to designate as 'home' can present a challenging dilemma (Boccagni, 2017; Duyvendak, 2011). Home is not an automatic entitlement, especially for those who are not natives of a particular place (Boccagni *et al.*, 2021, p. 1). Nevertheless, attempting to define the concept of home in an essentialist manner can confine migrants to specific locations (Fathi, 2021, p. 981). Therefore, the understanding of home is influenced by various factors and is integral to establishing a sense of belonging among migrants (Boccagni *et al.*, 2021, p. 2). Gaining insights into migrants' perspectives on home through open dialogue is paramount in comprehending the intricacies and nuances of their experiences and feelings of belonging. Respectfully acknowledging the varied perspectives of migrants on the concept of home can contribute to a more inclusive and compassionate society. Such recognition promotes a sense

of belonging and social integration for individuals navigating the complex journey of migration (Boccagni *et al.*, 2021; Fathi, 2021). Boccagni *et al.* (2021) propose the following:

Asking migrants about a place they would call home is instrumental to understanding what home means for them and how this relates to their living and dwelling circumstances. It is also a way to uncover the factors associated with different 'localisations' of home and their implications for highly discussed questions of belonging, membership, and integration. Therefore, calling a place home can be fruitfully investigated as a performative act rather than a cognitive exercise.

According to Boccagni *et al.* (2021), the notion of home can be understood as both 'anchored' and 'practised' (Lloyd and Vasta, 2017). This viewpoint emphasises that home is not a fixed entity but rather a dynamic process, a tapestry of relationships, emotions, and memories intertwined with a location. It extends beyond the physical attributes of a residence and encompasses the social, psychological, and cultural facets that offer individuals a sense of security. For migrants, creating a home is influenced by cultural processes that define the boundaries between their private lives, such as family, and the broader society. When individuals inhabit a place, it transcends mere physicality and becomes a source of social and cultural refuge. Nevertheless, migrants may encounter challenges in their new host country, leading to a waning interest in adapting and idealising their home country. In this context, the dwelling transforms into a 'mythical place of desire in the diasporic imagination' (Brah, 1997, p. 192). This underscores the emotional and symbolic significance of places to diaspora members, embodying their cultural roots, aspirations, and longing for belonging. However, this idealised image of home often starkly contrasts with migrants' lived realities. Consequently, decisions about where to establish roots and find belonging carry significant implications in nationalist narratives. McLeod (2000) underlines the link between home and belonging to a nation, as both contribute to the construction and purpose of nationalist representation. Nations are often deemed 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983) or 'imagined homeland' (Rushdi, 2006), eliciting emotions of belonging and camaraderie among their populace. This sense of belonging is defined in relation to other nations and is frequently reinforced through the demarcation of borders that segregate diverse peoples (McLeod, 2000).

Characterising a place as home signifies not only a sense of influence, entitlement, control, and familiarity towards a specific locale (Shneer and Aviv, 2010) but also denotes the development of a multifaceted sense of place encompassing social, cognitive, emotional, and spatial elements (Nelson *et al.*, 2020). This shift from a purely spatial understanding to a more

emotional one aligns with Daum's (2017) concept of home as an idea, a social construct, and a narrative that individuals create to define their identity and desires within their immediate milieu. Based on the perspectives presented thus far, I propose the following definition of home:

Home, whether imagined or physically manifested, transcends its physicality, weaving emotional bonds, cherished memories, and cultural threads together. Within this sanctuary, individuals cultivate a profound sense of belonging, security, and self-identity. In this context, the concept of 'home' extends to the 'third space' or 'liminal realm,' an intermediary domain where diverse cultural influences converge, nurturing a unique blend of identities and affiliations. In this third space, ideas of self and identity intermingle, shaped by the dynamic interaction of multiple cultural narratives and experiences, thus enhancing the complex mosaic of belonging.

In the process of establishing a sense of home, material culture plays a crucial role that should not be underestimated. Scholars such as Basu (2008), Mahmud (2023, 2024) and Yi-Neumann et al. (2022) have explored the intricate relationship between material objects and an individual's feeling of belonging. These studies emphasise the significance of material culture as a catalyst in creating and maintaining connections within familial and social networks, where objects serve as symbolic representations of home and identity. The next section will examine into the importance of material culture and objects in shaping one's sense of home and their contribution to cultivating a deeper sense of belonging and identity.

3.8 Reading material culture: A semiotic approach

The study of material culture has become increasingly important in the social sciences. Although not a new concept, the term 'material culture' was first coined by Buchli in 1843. Lucien Febvre introduced it into historical research, and it was further developed by Fernand Braudel and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu extensively explored material culture in works such as *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984). Material culture involves tangible items that people encounter, interact with, and use (Woodward, 2007). It explores the intricate relationship between humans and inanimate objects, showing how these objects both influence and are influenced by human activity. They play a significant role in regulating social relations and giving human actions symbolic meaning.

The definition of material culture varies across disciplines. Some view it as a product of culture rather than culture itself (Schlereth, 1999). The term 'material' encompasses a wide range of

objects, including those with specific uses, meanings, or sets of values attached to them (Greig *et al.*, 2015). Herskovits defines material culture as the totality of artifacts within a culture, encompassing objects of various sizes and scales, from small, portable items like mugs and pens to more complex ones like phones, laptops, or cars influenced by technological advancements and intercultural exchanges (Hulsbosh *et al.*, 2009). In this context, objects and material culture' will be used interchangeably to denote items commonly utilised and interacted with by individuals.

Objects possess both functional and societal significance, conveying specific meanings and establishing social value (Appadurai, 1986). They can also indicate sub-cultural affiliations, occupations, participation in leisure activities, or social standing (Woodward, 2007). In this context, material culture can be seen as 'culture rendered tangible,' representing a distinctive facet of human existence (Sheumaker and Wajda, 2008). In certain scenarios, we may have a basic understanding of the material culture that others engage with, particularly when there are shared elements, such as wearing ethnic attire. However, the precise selection of a particular style or hue may not always be immediately evident, underscoring the intricacy of interpreting material culture. To comprehend these subtleties, one must appreciate the complexities involved. For example, while certain objects may hold shared cultural importance, the choices individuals make regarding style or colour can be multifaceted and not readily apparent. Interpreting material culture requires navigating these intricacies (Woodward, 2007) and considering factors such as context, symbolism, and the societal meanings associated with objects. Woodward (2007, p. 59) outlines several fundamental points regarding the complexity of deciphering material culture:

1. The intended significance behind the use, possession, or display of specific items of material culture may not always be accessible or transparent to others. Individuals may assert that no meaning should be attributed to their interaction with or presentation of an object.
2. In certain instances, our comprehension of the connotations of objects is impeded by a lack of cultural knowledge or familiarity. Our interpretation of items like attire or footwear hinges on having [specialised] cultural insights or awareness of subtle cultural nuances that we might not possess.
3. The importance of material culture is inherently linked to specific temporal and spatial contexts, where social standards of appropriateness and consideration come into play.
4. When specific objects of material culture are observed beyond the confines of their designated time and space, they can appear out of place, inconsistent, or even disconcerting.

Furthermore, the significance of material artifacts extends beyond their physical presence, encompassing their meanings and connections with their owners, whether they are considered real or imagined, lost, or forgotten (Pechurina, 2020). These items, akin to ‘commodities,’ lead ‘social existences’ (Appadurai, 1986, p. 3). Appadurai (1986) characterises commodities as objects that hold economic value, which can be subjectively interpreted based on individuals’ experiences, contexts, and situations. Semmel (1907; English translation, 1978), as cited by Appadurai (1986), argues that value is not an inherent property of objects but rather a judgment made by individuals. According to Semmel (1978), objects gain value when they resist our desire to possess them, rather than their intrinsic difficulty in acquisition. Over time, these objects evolve into aids for memory, triggering recollection and facilitating the process of remembrance (Marshall, 2019).

In the examination of materiality and material culture, it is essential to consider Foucault’s concluding remarks in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences*, which have significantly influenced critical discourse within the social sciences and humanities. By contemplating the relationships between humans and objects, we are encouraged to become thoughtful observers, reshaping our understanding of identity and our role in the process of existence within a materialistic world. Appadurai (2006) directs our attention to the interconnectedness of individuals and objects, emphasising that humans and objects are not inherently separate entities but rather transactions that involve things imbued with the attributes of social relationships. In his seminal work, *The Social Life of Things*, Appadurai (1986) argues that the meanings of objects are not intrinsic but are shaped by human interactions, attributions, and motivations. He suggests that to truly comprehend the significance of objects, as evidenced by their forms, usage, and trajectories, we must closely follow the objects themselves. Furthermore, he underscores that the utilisation of objects varies across time and space, where what may be perceived as a simple gift today can transform into a commodity tomorrow, an art object the next day, and eventually an heirloom over time (Appadurai, 1986).

Similarly, Daniel Miller (2010) explores the interconnection between humans and inanimate objects in his book ‘Stuff.’ He challenges the conventional division between individuals and objects, the sentient and insentient, and the subject-object dichotomy. According to Miller, a comprehensive understanding and appreciation of our humanity can best be achieved by recognising our fundamental materiality. Our existence as humans is intricately intertwined with our environment, and by valuing and comprehending our surroundings, we can gain insights into the people with whom we interact and coexist. Miller asserts that objects exert influence on us just as we shape them, and, in many ways, ‘stuff’ contributes to our very formation, in fact ‘stuff’ create us in the first place (Miller, 2010, p. 10). However, Mahmud

(2023) argues that places and objects themselves are inert and lack influence until individuals assign meaning to them. She further posits that the significance attributed to objects and places is context-dependent, shaped by personal experiences, cultural norms, and social interactions. Therefore, the meaning and impact of material culture do not possess inherent properties but are socially constructed through human interpretation and engagement. According to Mahmud (2023):

As individuals, we actively shape material objects, and in turn, they shape our emotional landscapes and how we perceive ourselves within society. The accumulation of personal belongings, particularly those tied to specific places, propels the evolution of our identities, nurturing personal, social, and cultural growth. This process of materialisation goes beyond mere physicality; it involves imbuing objects with layers of meaning through intricate social and cultural processes. Objects become vessels for narratives, memories, and emotions, embodying both personal and collective identity. This meaning is not preordained but is shaped through our interpretations and interactions with our surroundings. This interplay underscores material culture's relational essence, weaving the material world into the tapestry of our experiences. Objects become conduits through which we navigate society, express our identities, and engage in cultural practices. The exploration of material culture unveils insights into the complex links among individuals, objects, and the broader socio-cultural context that envelops us.

However, materialisation extends beyond the mere physical representation of objects and encompasses the dynamic relationships among individuals, objects, and society. In the realm of social theory, the examination of material culture in the context of migration has been extensively explored. Studies suggest that objects left behind or transported across borders by migrants hold significant emotional value (Svašek, 2012) and gain heightened sensitivity and symbolic significance over time (Frykman and Frykman, 2016). The objects we use become integral to our identity, reflecting our values, beliefs, personality, and character. Concerning migration, the experience of home involves navigating the tension between adapting to new dominant consumption patterns and preserving one's cultural traditions. Migrants often relinquish familiar consumption patterns associated with their sense of home and adopt the consumption practices of their culture of origin (Kreuzer *et al.*, 2018). Consequently, material objects either shape or reshape individuals and groups' desire for recognition as members of specific cultures or subcultures.

Individuals residing within liminal cultural spaces often attach significant importance to material possessions. These objects establish personal connections to an imagined home in the diaspora and serve as anchors to their cultural identity and origin. Thus, material possessions act as potent symbols of migrant and diasporic belonging, facilitating the creation of homes and a sense of belonging. Drawing inspiration from Gell (1998) and Harrington-Watt (2014), Marshall (2019) underscores the agency of personal objects, asserting that they elicit emotional responses, incite social effects, and drive actions. Additionally, scholars like Miller (2010) contend that objects possess the power to shape our existence as they play a formative role in their owners' identities. For instance, Philipp and Ho (2010) discovered that South African migrant women in New Zealand express their sense of home through the objects they brought from their home country. These items held immense emotional value, enabling them to cultivate a sense of transnational belonging without the need to physically return to their country of origin (Marshall, 2019). Considering the insights shared in this section, I conceptualise material objects as follows:

Material culture encompasses tangible items imbued with cultural, social, and personal significance. Ranging from everyday items to meaningful artifacts, these objects hold both practical utility and symbolic value. They profoundly shape human experiences, identities, and interactions, actively contributing to the construction of narratives, the preservation of memories, and the evocation of emotions. These objects serve as intricate links that connect individuals to their environment, cultural heritage, and personal history.

In the context of this study, material culture and materiality are intricately intertwined, with material culture assuming a pivotal role in not only shaping but also reshaping an individual's personal and collective identities. It is through the intricate process of creating and transforming objects that we navigate the multifaceted journey of adaptation, ultimately forging a novel sense of home in unfamiliar surroundings. These objects serve as vessels of memory, encapsulating the experiences and emotions of our past. They become essential components in crafting an 'imagined home beyond home' (Kreuzer *et al.*, 2018), a concept that extends beyond physical spaces to encompass the profound emotional and cultural connections we establish through the objects that accompany us on our life's journey.

3.9 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, a thorough and exhaustive review of the scholarly literature has been undertaken, serving as the cornerstone upon which the current study is built. This comprehensive exploration has encompassed key concepts and theories such as 'cultural

identity,' 'hybridity,' 'othering,' 'power dynamics,' 'notions of home and belonging,' and 'material culture.' These concepts have been critically examined through the lenses of post-colonialism and non-essentialism, providing a robust theoretical framework for dissecting the intricate processes of identity negotiation and navigation in the context of migration.

The profound insights derived from the subsequent data analysis and organisation will be expanded upon in the forthcoming chapters, specifically Chapters Five, Six, and Seven. These chapters will delve into a more detailed discussion and interpretation of the research findings, aligning them with the research objectives and the established theoretical framework. The upcoming chapter – Chapter Four will offer an extensive exploration of the chosen research methodology, elucidating the specific approaches employed to address the research questions introduced in Chapter One. This chapter is of paramount importance as it not only demonstrates the practical application of the research approach but also lays the foundation for the subsequent chapters, where the findings will be comprehensively discussed and interpreted in the context of the overarching research objectives and theoretical underpinnings.

4 The Research Process and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the interplay between the methods employed and the research methodology that underpins this qualitative multimodal study. It underscores the use of reflective triangulation, drawing from various data sources, to illustrate the intricate nature of participants' lived experiences and their adaptation. The multimodal research approach refers to the variety of data collection methods utilised in this study. This aspect will be further elaborated upon later in this chapter.

The chapter is divided into six main sections. The first section 4.2 examines the theoretical and philosophical foundations of the study, specifically focusing on the interpretive constructivist paradigm. Section 4.3 introduces the research design, elucidating the nature of narrative interviews and providing justification for their use in narrative research. Additionally, the section outlines the approach taken to recruit and engage participants. The third section 4.4 delves into the data collection process, employing multimodal data collection methods such as interviews, visual ethnography, photo-voice, story writing, and a corpus of material artefacts over a six-month period with eight participants. Furthermore, the limitations of the data collection are elaborated upon. This is followed by a section addressing the researcher's positionality and reflexivity in the study. Section 4.8 explores the ethics and ethical considerations adhered to during the research. The final section focuses on the data analysis and presentation procedures. Throughout each section, theories are employed to substantiate choices and assessments, aiming to ensure the credibility and relevance of the arguments presented. As a novice researcher, I perceive this chapter as highly intricate, encompassing numerous critical issues that require examination in relation to data collection and analysis. These aspects will be explored not only in this chapter but also in the subsequent three data findings chapters.

4.2 The Philosophical Underpinning

This research adopts the interpretive constructivist approach, as advocated by Holliday (2016, p. 24), due to its inherent focus on recognising the subjectivity and agency of individuals (Hua, 2016, p. 12). In the following section, I will examine the theoretical foundation that underpins the selection of this epistemology and discuss the methodological approach that guided this qualitative interpretative constructivist research.

Understanding the philosophical underpinnings of research is a crucial and intricate task that provides researchers with the necessary framework for collecting, analysing, and interpreting data with precision. The definition of philosophical underpinning can vary across disciplines

and contexts within the same field (Scotland, 2012; Singh, 2012). In both qualitative and quantitative research, terms such as ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology hold significant importance (Marsh et al., 2017). Ontology concerns itself with the nature and structure of the world, striving to articulate the reality that researchers seek to understand (Wand and Weber, 1993, p. 220). Conversely, epistemology delves into the nature of knowledge and examines how truth is perceived and ascertained. It explores the researcher's relationship with the research and the very nature of reality (Greco, 2021). Simply put, it addresses how knowledge is acquired. Axiology, on the other hand, revolves around values, particularly ethical considerations that must be diligently considered during the research process (Bahm, 1993). Lastly, methodology guides the process of knowledge acquisition and encompasses the strategies employed by researchers in constructing knowledge (Tracy, 2020). It comprises a series of thoughtful discussions, debates, decisions, and choices regarding the selection of specific research techniques.

The foundational importance of ontology and epistemology in shaping one's understanding of reality cannot be understated. Ontology, as explored in the philosophical study of existence, seeks to answer the question 'what is reality?' (Wand and Weber, 1993, p. 220). In the context of this study, ontology is perceived as the reality constructed by the participants to make sense of the world. It is acknowledged that individuals create multiple and dynamic realities based on their experiences and worldviews (Burns et al., 2022). However, these philosophical ideas often remain concealed, posing challenges in grasping the reality experienced by the individuals under investigation. Therefore, it becomes essential for researchers to choose a paradigm capable of unveiling these realities. The selected research paradigm should encompass philosophical perspectives, offering a framework for understanding social phenomena and guiding the collection, assessment, and application of data (Bryman, 2016). The researcher should provide theoretical reasoning for their choices, clarifying the rationale behind adopting a specific approach and shedding light on the interpretation of specific findings (Cohen et al., 2007, 2000).

Furthermore, epistemology plays a pivotal role in research, assisting the researcher in selecting an appropriate methodology aligned with the study's purpose and objectives. As articulated by Crotty (2003, p. 3), epistemology refers to the understanding and explanation of how knowledge is acquired. In line with this definition, my epistemological standpoint acknowledges that individuals possess multiple realities, each uniquely shaped within their own contexts and across time. Effectively capturing these realities is of paramount importance for the researcher, a task facilitated through the generation of codes and the development of themes and subthemes that illuminate the participants' lived experiences (as discussed in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven).

Among the various philosophical paradigms, positivism and interpretivism emerge as prominent and traditional approaches. In this research, the interpretive constructivist perspective is embraced, as it provides a lens through which to scrutinise the participants' realities (Holliday, 2016). The forthcoming subsection will present an overview of this chosen interpretive paradigm, emphasising its significance in acknowledging the diverse and evolving realities forged by the unique perspectives of the participants, thereby augmenting the depth and comprehension of the research findings. Interpretivism, as an overarching term (Grix, 2004), encompasses a range of perspectives widely employed in disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, linguistics, and semiotics since the 1970s (Cohen et al., 2007). At its core, interpretivism is concerned with the theory and practice of interpretation, employing naturalistic data collection methods such as observation and interviews to apprehend and derive meaning from the world as perceived by the researcher (O'Reilly, 2009). This philosophical stance embraces a relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology, emphasising the interconnectedness of social reality and settings. Unlike positivist researchers who favour hypothesis testing, interpretive researchers engage in a sense-making or 'hypothesis-making process' to interpret reality or truth (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 103).

The interpretive constructivist approach, as propounded by Holliday (2016), offers a perspective that acknowledges the subjective and constructed nature of culture and identity. It accentuates the gradual emergence of explanations through iterative investigation and interpretation, allowing for flexibility in data collection techniques and encouraging researchers to transcend their own perspectives to capture the richness of social life and the subjective world of human experiences (Holliday, 2016; Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). This paradigm proves particularly suitable for researching culture and identity as it aims to apprehend the subjective experiences of individuals and delve into their perspectives. By adopting a subjectivist epistemology, relativist ontology, naturalistic methodology, and balanced axiology, the interpretive constructivist approach enables the exploration of migrants' lived experiences, seeking to comprehend how the participants negotiate and navigate their identities in a new environment. Through this approach, the researcher can construct knowledge socially and derive meaning from the participants' personal experiences within the research context (Punch, 2005).

Recognising the limitations inherent in the interpretive constructivist approach is of utmost significance, particularly concerning the potential subjectivity and the researcher's predispositions influencing the data. Such considerations may raise valid concerns about the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Nonetheless, within the unique scope of this study, which acknowledges and embraces the existence of multiple realities, the researcher can actively engage with participants to explore and gain insights into their individual

experiences, thereby avoiding sweeping generalisations about the entire population. By adopting this approach, potential biases in interpretation can be mitigated, facilitating an exploration of events and individuals within their contexts (Creswell, 2003; Hammersley, 2013). Further, the research process is seen as socially influenced, entailing a dynamic collaboration between the participants and the researcher, fostering the co-creation and negotiation of meaning during data collection and analysis. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the narratives provided by participants may not always precisely mirror their lived experiences but rather the interpretations they attribute to their encounters in the new environment. To present a more precise and comprehensive depiction of the participants' lived experiences, a range of multimodal data collection methods were employed, affording a broader and deeper understanding of their experiences. This approach enables a more in-depth exploration of the participants' lived realities.

4.3 Research Design

This section outlines the evolution of the research design and delves into the methodological considerations and rationale behind the chosen methods. It also elucidates the link between the data collection process and the overall research objectives for this thesis.

The research design serves as the methodological structure of a study, guiding the research approach (Rose *et al.*, 2019). It acts as a framework and philosophy for conducting research, outlining the overall strategy and data collection techniques (De Vaus, 2001). Research designs can be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods, and the choice of design significantly impacts the quality and success of a project (Miller and Dingwall, 1997). In this study, a qualitative approach influenced by the 'interpretive constructivist' perspective (Holliday, 2016) is chosen. This approach is deemed suitable for gaining deeper insights into the real-world issues faced by participants, allowing for an in-depth investigation and understanding of their experiences, perceptions, and behaviours (Sutton and Austin, 2015). Qualitative research offers flexibility in data collection methods, including interviews, ethnography, and the study of material objects, among others, with the researcher's choices driven by the specific research context.

While the multimethod and multimodal research approaches have gained popularity across various disciplines (Bateman *et al.*, 2017), their application in the study of migrants and their communities, especially in the context of Kurdish migrants, remains an uncharted area. Multimodality involves the use of diverse data collection techniques and characterises communication scenarios that rely on integrating different forms of communication for maximum effectiveness (Bateman *et al.*, 2017, p. 7). In this research, a multimethod and multimodal research approach is adopted, which involves the convergence of different 'sign

modes of data' (Bateman et al., 2017) to understand the participants' lived experiences from multiple perspectives (Antoniadou, 2017). The term 'sign modes' refers to the various ways meaning is conveyed in communication (Bateman et al., 2017). This integration is crucial as it captures the complexity of the data collected, with different modes such as text, image, and gesture contributing unique layers of meaning. The approach of using multiple modes concurrently enhances research authenticity and reflects the dynamic nature of human interaction. Furthermore, employing multimethod techniques helps achieve research objectives, gain deeper insights, optimise time, and promote multimodal thinking, often referred to as 'multimodal interpretation,' through triangulation across the methods used (Castaldi, 2021, p. 58).

In this research, I employed a variety of methods, including narrative interviews, visual ethnography, photovoice, the compilation of a corpus of material objects, and story writing. Before investigating the details of these diverse data collection techniques in Section 4.4, I will underscore the narrative approach. I will provide a rationale for choosing a narrative research design and conduct a comprehensive examination of the methodological considerations that underpin the selection of these methods. These considerations serve as the foundation for the forthcoming discussion of the specific methods in this chapter.

4.3.1 Narrative research

This section aims to provide a justification for the selection of a narrative research design based on scholarly perspectives and to highlight the relevance of narrative research to this study.

The narrative approach is situated within the realm of qualitative or interpretive research methods (Gudmundsdottir, 1997). The term 'narrative' finds its origins in the Latin words *narrat-*, meaning 'related' or 'told,' and *narrare*, meaning 'to tell.' These etymological roots share similarities with *gnârus*, signifying 'knowing' in Latin (Kim, 2016, p. 6). Narrative, in this context, refers to the comprehensive life story wherein individuals share fragments of their lives as 'completely and honestly as possible' (Atkinson, 1998). It also encompasses various stories that recount different events witnessed or experienced by the narrator, presenting a broader perspective intended by the storyteller (Riessman, 2012). In narratives, the narrator plays a central role in the telling and narrating of stories, selectively emphasising certain elements while mystifying and downplaying others.

Fisher's Narrative Paradigm (1985) defines narratives as symbolic interpretations of aspects of the world, unfolding in time and shaped by history, culture, and character. This perspective views narratives not as logical arguments but as persuasive constructs. Fisher's work adopts an interpretive approach, diverging from the rational world paradigm rooted in science, which

posits that humans are inherently rational beings who use their rationality to explain phenomena (Dainton and Zelley, 2005). In contrast, the narrative paradigm offers a humanistic view, suggesting that humans are inherently ‘storytellers,’ and that narration involves symbolic actions, both verbal and behavioural, which possess sequence and meaning for those who create, interpret, and live them (Fisher, 1985, 1987, 1989). Fisher’s definition allows us to transcend mere rationality and apply narrative understanding to real-world contexts. Within his narrative paradigm, Fisher puts forward five presuppositions, which will be explained below:

1. Humans are homo narrans - storytellers.
2. The pragmatic mode of communication based on ‘good reasons’ rather than proofs or arguments.
3. Our actions and thinking are swayed by history, biography, culture, and character.
4. The production and assessment of ‘good reasons,’ or our rationality, is determined by our sense of ‘narrative probability’ – the coherence of the story, and ‘narrative fidelity’ – the story rings true or factual with the stories they know to be true in their lives.
5. The world we live in is not a set of puzzles to be solved but rather a story in which we continually choose the stories among many, and we use them to explain the world and our positionality.

The overall premise of Fisher’s narrative paradigm suggests that storytelling plays a significant role in human communication and decision-making, shaping our understanding of reality through the coherence and fidelity of the narratives we encounter and create. This approach offers an alternative viewpoint to traditional logical and argumentative methods, elevating narrative and storytelling as fundamental components of human communication and comprehension. However, despite its significance in communication, the narrative paradigm has limitations. One notable limitation is its potential unreliability as a data collection technique, which can be attributed to the subjective influence of the researcher. This subjectivity may compromise the credibility of the collected data. Rowland (1987, p. 122) further raises concerns about Fisher’s extensive definition of the narrative concept, arguing that:

A discursive political speech in which an advocate cites a wealth of such statistical and expert evidence favouring increased support for mass transit is different in important ways from a speech that cites no such traditional evidence, but instead tells a story about a ride on a subway.

The given statement highlights the limitations of Fisher's narrative paradigm, with a particular focus on political speeches. According to Rowland (1987), a discursive political speech and a narrative-based political speech are different from each other. The difference between these two types of speeches lies in their methods of persuasion. The discursive speech employs logical reasoning and factual evidence to make its case, appealing to reason and intellect. On the other hand, the narrative-based speech relies on storytelling to evoke emotions, empathy, and a sense of relatability, appealing to the audience's feelings and personal connections. He further argues that classifying different texts as narratives could undermine the unique qualities of each individual appeal. Similarly, Johannesen (1996, p. 3) emphasises the distinction between exploring and analysing 'the nature and effectiveness of communication techniques, processes, and methods' and 'the ethical use of such techniques.' The idea that all stories are universally perceived as accurate representations of one's life by a particular audience contradicts Fisher's concept of narrative probability and fidelity.

To address these criticisms and offer additional clarification, Fisher (1989, p. 97) elaborates that the narrative paradigm serves as a philosophical statement, providing an approach to interpret and evaluate human communication. This study adheres to Fisher's core principles, acknowledging the participants as storytellers and recognising how their migration history, personal characteristics, and affiliation with smaller cultures influence their narratives. Although the terms 'story' and 'narrative' are distinct, they are used 'interchangeably' (Feldman et al., 2004). This study primarily adopts the term 'story' as it refers to a detailed organisation of structured of narrative based on time, regardless of the chronological order of the events (Kim, 2016, p. 8). Story also constitutes fundamental instruments individuals employ to convey information, fostering mutual understanding in both interpersonal exchange and personal cognition (Feldman et al., 2004). The notion of story and its significance within the narrative enquiry is further explored below.

4.3.1.1 Story: A complete description of lived experiences

The concept of 'story' holds significant importance in the study of narratives, as it provides humans with a means to comprehend the world around them. The precise definitions assigned to the term 'story' can be ambiguous, leading to significant implications. Aristotelian philosophy and poetics identify narratives as stories that follow a distinct 'beginning, middle, and end' (Fisher, 1987; Whitmarsh, 2011, p. 40). Stories possess multiple layers that vary depending on the context, exerting influence over individuals' minds (Fisher, 1987); they also give meaning to life experiences (Kramp, 2004, p. 107). Stories serve as vessels for preserving memories, fostering reflection, connecting the past and present, and envisioning the future (Kramp, 2004). Kramp's idea highlights the significant time-related aspects of stories,

including their past, present, and future elements, and this temporal aspect contributes significantly to our narratives and experiences. In the process of 'narrative inquiry' (Fisher, 1985), researchers often collect stories through various methods, such as interviews, journals, or other forms of data. As highlighted earlier, in the context of this study, I gathered data using multimethod and multimodal techniques to examine the lived experiences of a group of Iraqi Kurds in the UK. These techniques will be further explored in section 4.3.3, and their utilisation will be explained in section 4.4.

The concept of a story holds different meanings for different individuals, and individuals themselves may narrate stories in diverse ways based on their understanding and positioning within the story. Hinchman and Hinchman (1997, p. xvi) provide three key features that underpin the importance of narrative stories, namely their chronological nature, their inherent meaningfulness, and their social significance. Narrative stories should be defined provisionally as discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events meaningfully for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and/or people's experiences (Hinchman and Hinchman, 1997). However, focusing solely on the sequence or chronology of events does not encompass all the elements that contribute to a successful narrative. Viewing narratives through this narrow lens can render their meaning and purpose shallow (Labov and Waletzky, 1967, p. 13). The ultimate philosophical aim of a narrative is to convey meaning, and it is through the meaning embedded in the storyteller's discourse or stories that the narrative becomes engaging and thought-provoking (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006).

Additionally, narratives are 'culturally framed,' possess transferability, and are subject to critical evaluation (Mitchell and Weber, 1999, p. 72), meaning a story can vary across different cultures, and people with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, age groups, and genders can narrate and create stories differently. 'Culturally framed' refers to socially shared assumptions about the meaning of events and actions through which individuals understand what is relevant for a particular time, place, and community (Goffman, 1986). The stories we tell are influenced by the context in which they are shared, and we assess each story before sharing it with the outside world. In other words, there are underlying reasons for why we tell narratives, and what we reveal must adhere to the culturally framed factors and serve the purpose of one's culture. Polkinghorne (1988, p. 14) affirms this notion, postulating that '[People] have a narrative of their own lives, [enabling] them to construe what they are and where they are headed. At the cultural level, narratives also [...] give cohesion to shared beliefs and transmit values.'

Narratives encompass both verbal and visual elements, and, as noted by Cohan and Shires (2013, p. 52), a particular account can be deconstructed for analysis purposes. The

chronological organisation of narratives aids in constructing a cohesive story, as it involves presenting a sequence of events that highlight a process of change from one event to another. However, it is essential to shift our attention to the concept of ‘voices.’ The plural form is utilised here because, as previously mentioned, narratives are shaped by the narrator’s knowledge, experiences, values, and emotions (Moen et al., 2003). The narrator’s experiences are a collection of stories that are influenced by cultural, historical, and institutional factors within which they occur (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005). The voices that the storyteller assumes during the narrative process can be classified as either ‘intermental’ voices, occurring within the social realm, or ‘intramental’ voices, existing within the individual’s inner psychological realm (Moen, 2006, p. 61). Through these stories, individuals present a multitude of voices, and the voices they adopt provide them with a sense of agency during the narrative process.

The literature on the narrative research approach is built upon three fundamental principles. First, it suggests that all individuals organise their experiences of the world into narratives. Second, narrators construct their stories based on past and present experiences, values, the intended audience, and the temporal and spatial context of the narrative. Lastly, the third principle, connected to the second one, concerns the presence of ‘multivoicedness,’ indicating the existence of multiple voices within narratives (Moen, 2006, p. 60). In her thesis, Badwan (2015) draws our attention to certain challenges associated with the narrative label. She emphasises that there is no clear demarcation between small stories and expositions that reference biographical experiences, making narratives more complex and subject to different interpretations by researchers and readers. With this challenge in mind, I consider my data as a collection of stories that emerged from employing multimethod and multimodal data collection practices. This approach allowed me to capture the participants’ lived experiences within a specific timeframe, examine the sequences, and organise their narratives, encompassing the past, present, and future, to bring their voices to the forefront. The following excerpt exemplifies the type of data generated during one of the interviews. The participant, Karim, is a Kurdish actor, poet, and writer from Suleimani residing in Kent. The extract is derived from Karim’s written narrative and has been translated from Kurdish Sorani into English:

I have been here by the seashore for over a week, attempting to cross the channel. It is not to escape this town [Calais] but to evade a smuggler, those who cannot even write their name correctly. I feel greatly frustrated with these bootleggers and traffickers who show no mercy to anyone. It's heart-breaking to see these young boys, beautiful girls, and families suffering under the mercy of these smugglers.

[...]

Finally, I am here in London, where I can resume my hobbies and live my life to the fullest. I hope this city will help me achieve all my dreams and lead me to a stage of contentment and serenity⁴.

The stories above recount a past event, conveying Karim's emotions and struggles during that period. The narrative captures his feelings of annoyance and the need to escape from a smuggler, followed by a shift in his story upon arriving in the UK. This transition from a negative to a positive experience makes Karim's narrative engaging, sentimental, nostalgic, and evocative. Moreover, it illustrates how narratives are constructed chronologically by the narrator. These excerpts underscore the significance of storytelling, as Karim finds meaning in his life experiences by effectively sharing these stories (Mueller, 2019). The inclusion of these excerpts illustrates how individuals construct stories across various time periods and locations. It also emphasises the researcher's role in interpreting and understanding the underlying meaning and discourse within the participant's spoken, written, and visual narratives, regardless of their level of 'narrativity' (Sturges, 1989). It is worth noting that even if individual statements may not have a high degree of narrativity, they still contribute to building a narrative timeline. This can happen through the emergence of small stories within each dataset that trace the participant's realities, and through the construction of these stories, the narrator gives meaning to those realities, while the researcher makes the narrator's realities visible to broader audiences. The above example demonstrates the connection between the paradigm I use for this study and narrative inquiry. In the following subsection, I will explore the intersection between the interpretive constructivist approach and narrative inquiry.

4.3.2 The connection between the interpretive constructivist approach and narrative enquiry

Narratives are instrumental in elucidating the complexities of personal and social relationships (Carr, 1986). Researchers often merge elements from constructionist and interpretivist approaches when analysing narratives, given their alignment with the 'narrative framework,' which focuses on the examination of social positioning and performance (Esin et al., 2013, p. 1). This connection underscores the interplay between constructing and interpreting narratives. However, the explicit link between narrative and the interpretive constructivist approach remains underexplored. In this study, I contend that narrative and the interpretive constructivist approach are intrinsically intertwined yet possess distinct

⁴ Full analysis of the two extracts can be found in chapter seven, section 7.2.

characteristics (Figure 3). Exploring the synergy between these paradigms offers valuable insights into how narratives are crafted and interpreted within the interpretive constructivist framework. This investigation sheds light on the dynamics of narrative research, enhancing our comprehension of how individuals shape and convey their realities through storytelling. The interpretive constructivist approach, with its narrative-like structure, enables researchers to delve deep into participants' stories, capturing the essence of their unique experiences. Embracing subjectivity and acknowledging the ever-evolving nature of human experiences, this approach unlocks a wealth of insights into the intricacies of human existence and communication. Using an interpretive constructivist approach, we explore the diverse range of human narratives, revealing the complex meanings that collectively shape our shared human experience.

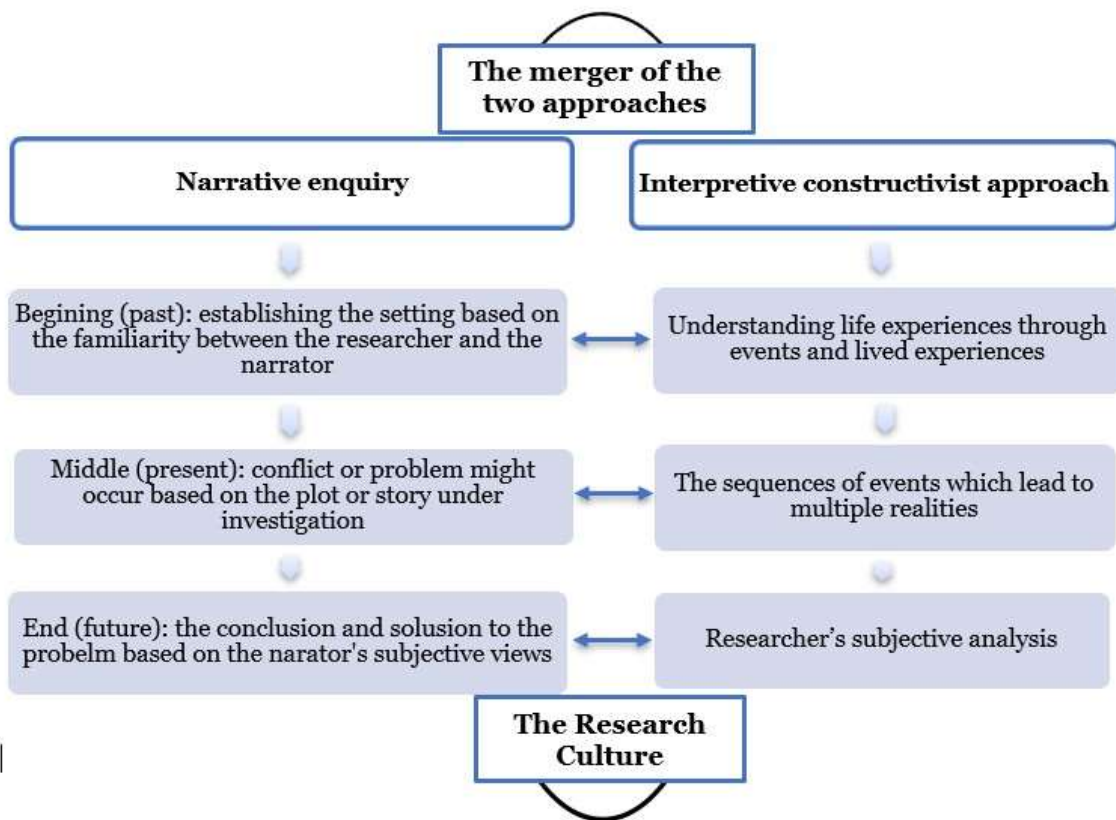


Figure 3: The connection between the interpretive constructivist approach and narrative research.

The diagram presented above (Figure 3) illustrates the relationship between narrative inquiry and the interpretive constructivist approach. It highlights their shared foundations and roles in exploring participants' narratives in this research. On the right side of the figure, we see the elements of the interpretive constructivist approach. These elements involve understanding individuals' lived experiences, exploring event sequencing, and considering the researcher's

subjective thinking and data evaluations, which are used to interpret participants' stories within the interpretive constructivist framework. On the left side of the diagram, we depict the features of narrative inquiry. This includes the narrative's structure, which typically comprises a beginning (reflecting past experiences), a middle (representing the current state or present), and an end (envisaging the future). This narrative structure allows for a comprehensive examination of participants' stories, highlighting the connections between their past, present, and future experiences. The two boxes at the top and bottom of the diagram represent the intersection between narrative, the interpretive constructivist approach, and the research culture. This connection emphasises the mutual influence and integration of narrative inquiry and the interpretive constructivist paradigm in shaping the research process, including the researcher's identity. It highlights how the researcher's engagement with participants' stories is influenced by the interpretive constructivist lens, while narrative inquiry enriches the understanding of participants' lived experiences and perspectives.

The interpretive constructivist approach shares similarities with the structure of a narrative, consisting of a beginning, middle, and end. It centres around comprehending life experiences and places human interpretation at the forefront of the research process. Unlike traditional methodologies focused on generalisation and predicting cause-and-effect relationships, interpretive constructivist research seeks to understand and interpret the underlying meanings behind human behaviours, including motives, meanings, motivations, and other subjective experiences within a temporal context. A crucial element of this approach is the understanding that people actively create their own reality through the stories they tell, which are diverse, subjective, and influenced by shifting cultural norms. This paradigm facilitates the exploration of human experiences and provides a nuanced understanding of the complexities that shape individual perspectives.

Narratives, whether conveyed through oral, visual, or written means, consist of interconnected sequences of events and actions. They serve as cultural patterns through which individuals weave their stories, permeating every facet of life. Regardless of their basis in factual occurrences, realism, or fiction, narratives play a crucial role in how people derive meaning from their existence. However, it is essential to recognise that the representation of reality within narratives is inherently subjective and deeply intertwined with the lived experiences of the participants. This challenges notions of objectivity and highlights their constructed, rhetorical, and interpretive nature. Yet, narratives possess a universal presence, granting access to the diverse range of human experiences that shape individuals' lives. In accessing and comprehending these rich realities, the interpretive constructivist approach proves invaluable. Researchers delve into the subjective lived experiences of the participants, navigating the intricate fabric of their narratives to gain insights into how they interpret and

make sense of their worlds. In this study, participants express their experiences through multimodal narratives—spoken, written, and visual—bringing order and coherence to events that might otherwise seem random or disjointed.

Within the realm of narrative inquiry concerning migration and the lived experiences of migrants, language plays a paramount role. The words and phrases chosen by narrators to describe events hold significant meaning, providing insights into the storyteller's identity and how they navigate their position in the world. Through the retelling of chronological events and the sharing of specific knowledge, these narratives contribute to the continuous construction of knowledge. Knowledge is perceived here as a compilation of small-scale narratives representing multiple realities that are shaped and negotiated through interactions and discourses. The language utilised in these narratives serves as a powerful tool in understanding the complexities of migrants' experiences and their sense-making processes within the context of migration. As we proceed to the next section, I will explore the pivotal role of multimodal data collection techniques in shaping and eliciting the diverse narratives of the participants. These techniques enable a comprehensive understanding of their lived experiences and provide a nuanced glimpse into the complexities of their identities, cultures, and journeys within the context of migration.

4.3.3 Narrative interviews, visual ethnography, photovoice, corpus of material objects and story writing as a multimodal construct

Narrative research interviews were the primary method of data collection in this study. However, for a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and the meanings embedded within their narratives, I also utilised visual ethnography, photovoice, a corpus of material objects, and story writing.

Narrative research serves as a vital qualitative methodology to delve into and grasp the lived experiences and cultures of individuals. This approach facilitates a deep and nuanced understanding of the diverse perspectives and intricate narratives that shape the participants' lives, contributing to a profound exploration of their lived realities (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Narrative inquiry is a broad concept that has garnered considerable interest among scholars in the social sciences and humanities due to its diverse perspectives on what constitutes a narrative. Various approaches to narrative interviews have been developed, including Free Association Narrative Interviewing by Hollway and Jefferson (2008), Life Story Interview by McAdams (1985), and the Biographical Narrative Interpretative Method by Wengraf (2001). The selection of the most appropriate narrative approach is crucial for researchers, providing the optimal opportunity to address research questions and effectively explore the area of investigation.

Life Story Narratives represent a significant qualitative research method wherein researchers gather information about the subjective essence of an individual's life. Atkinson (1998, p. 8) emphasises that life stories provide comprehensive narratives of one's life experiences, highlighting critical aspects. The use of life story narratives in psychological research traces back to influential figures like Sigmund Freud (1910-1958), Gordon Allport (1942), and Erikson (1975) and over time, this method has gained popularity within the field (Hermans and Kempen, 1993; McAdams, 1985; Tomkins, 1979). Moreover, narrative research focused on migrants has emerged as a global area of interest, with scholars worldwide actively exploring narratives within migrant communities (De Fina and Tseng, 2017; Eastmond, 2007).

Wengraf (2001) introduced the Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method with its unique structure, comprising three subsessions: subsession one – the initial interview; subsession two – questioning and clarification of specific concepts and narratives used by participants; and subsession three – the 'narrative follow-up.' This structured approach aims to elicit a narrative rather than predetermined answers to specific questions, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' lived experiences and perspectives.

Like any other research method, narrative research has some limitations. Critics have argued that it lacks academic rigour and a solid theoretical foundation. Scholars like Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 42) contend that narrative inquiry may not be sufficiently theoretical, raising questions about its reliability. Conle (1999) has also raised concerns about the credibility of using a narrative style. However, proponents of this technique argue about the usefulness of narrative as a data collection tool, emphasising how it can encourage participants to express the challenges and changes they experienced during migration and bring meaning to their life stories (Kim, 2016; Collins and Stockton, 2018). Conle (1999, pp. 18-19) highlights that 'stories gathered and told can generate strength and 'harden.' However, narrators have a certain power in controlling the stories – when and where to start and "the time of the telling of the story" [...] push the extraneous into the background and attend to what counts.'

I partially agree with Conle's (1999) statement. In the context of this study, I have observed that participants often impose limitations on the genre of their narratives during initial interviews due to their unfamiliarity with the researcher (myself), the research environment, and the interview contexts. For instance, one participant named Murad initially claimed that he had never experienced othering when we first met. However, in subsequent follow-up interviews, he shared several stories related to the topic of investigation, highlighting instances of experiencing othering in his work environment. This illustrates how participants may gradually open up and reveal more nuanced experiences as they become more comfortable

with the researcher and the research context. Further, the narratives that narrators choose to share can provide valuable insights into the significance of those stories. In certain situations, these stories can shed light on various facets of the narrators' identities, as evident in the case of Karim. Initially, he mentioned facing othering only once from a group of white people. Yet, upon examining his journal, several incidents emerged that he had initially refused to share. Karim's reluctance to share further stories on the topic may stem from his fear of judgment, leading him to withhold certain aspects of his story as a way of employing a 'face-saving' strategy (Brown and Levinson, 1978, pp. 222-225).

Another significant aspect of narrative inquiry that researchers must consider is the participant-oriented nature of this approach. Participants might perceive the research setting as a therapeutic session and, as a result, approach it with a clinical mindset. Consequently, their actions within the narrative setting could be influenced by their understanding of therapy rather than engaging in analytical discussion (Mueller, 2019). I will delve more deeply into this aspect in the section on positionality and reflexivity (Section 4.5). Regarding the authenticity of the narrative approach, Atkinson and Delamont (2006, p. 166) underscore that narratives presented by individuals should not be viewed as inherently truthful accounts, as storytellers may shape their narratives based on the intended audience. However, researchers often interpret the data and construct a version of reality based on the information available to them. In this study, I perceive the participants' narratives as foundational elements through which the narrators construct their life stories based on their lived experiences. Hence, I consider these narratives as genuine representations of their subjective realities. Building upon this understanding, I conceptualise narrative as:

A narrative serves as an edited and rearranged representation, and at times, it may include selective highlights from an extended story to convey a particular perspective that the narrator or orchestrator intends to present. During this process, specific elements of the entire story are given prominence and brought to the forefront, while others may be downplayed, obscured, overlooked, or relegated to the background.

The above statement highlights that narratives are not impartial accounts but rather subjective and purposeful constructions aimed at conveying specific perspectives or messages. Recognising the selective nature of narratives helps researchers and readers critically engage with the stories, leading to a deeper understanding of the narrators' intentions and the underlying meaning of the narrative. Understanding the significance of participants' experiences within migrant communities empowers them to interpret and comprehend their identities in their new socio-cultural realities, allowing for the construction of unique and

individualistic narratives based on their own interpretations. The narrative approach proves highly suitable for researching identity in migrant communities, as it enables an examination of individuals' social inquiries in their natural settings (Morse and Richards, 2002). However, it is important to note that the narrative data in this study does not claim to provide a comprehensive portrayal of the entire Kurdish population. Instead, these stories serve as symbolic portrayals shedding light on the cultural, social, and psychological worlds of the individuals involved (Crossley, 2000). For that reason, I perceive narratives not merely as products of social life but as 'culture in action,' representing an interactive and complex social process that demands a comprehensive understanding of the storytellers and their backgrounds. This comprehension is crucial for effectively navigating the challenges encountered during fieldwork (Daiute, 2014, p. 2; Wertsch and Tulviste, 1992, p. 551).

4.3.4 Research setting: approaching and selecting participants

The study's original goal was to engage twelve participants; however, the actual participation comprised only eight individuals due to (a) a deliberate decision to refrain from contacting individuals already familiar to me, and (b) the strict Covid-19 pandemic regulations implemented by the UK government, which discouraged people from participating. According to Creswell (1994, p. 148), qualitative researchers should judiciously choose informants and materials that most closely correspond to the research question(s). Considering Creswell's assertion, the selection of participants for this study was guided by the following criteria:

- a) The participants in this study were required to be first-generation Iraqi Kurds from Southern Kurdistan (or Iraqi Kurdistan).
- b) They needed to have the ability to communicate in Kurdish Sorani, English, or both.
- c) They should have been residents in the UK for a minimum of ten years.

These criteria were thoughtfully chosen to align with the study's objectives. The initial requirement aimed to focus on individuals who had personally undergone the migration journey, leading to the exclusion of second-generation Kurds. The second criterion excluded Kurds from other regions of Kurdistan, such as Turkey, Iran, and Syria. This decision was influenced by the researcher's prior experience during a master's dissertation, where finding participants from these regions proved challenging. The third criterion was designed to exclude recent migrants or refugees in the UK, ensuring that the study's focus on a specific group's experiences and adaptation remained consistent. Including newcomers who were still in the process of adjusting could potentially have taken the study's findings in a different direction.

From the beginning, I encountered difficulties in locating suitable participants who met these criteria, primarily due to my residence in a relatively small town with a limited number of potential subjects. To address this challenge, I sought assistance from a former teacher in London who acted as a gatekeeper, given her influential status within the Kurdish community in London. In my initial contact with the gatekeeper, she provided me with a comprehensive list of potential participants. Subsequently, I reached out to these individuals via phone and email, providing them with the participant information sheet and a consent form. This step was essential to ensure that participants were well-informed about the study's purpose, the participation process, and the research procedures. After a waiting period of four to eight weeks, I contacted those who had initially expressed interest and invited them for face-to-face interviews. While one participant did not respond to my attempts to contact them through email and text messages, I ended up with five participants. However, two participants later withdrew from the study due to unforeseen circumstances. As a researcher, I had anticipated such occurrences, yet I must admit that they were disheartening. This encounter served as a reminder of the importance of patience and thoughtful handling in dealing with such situations. The following entry from my personal diary reflects my feelings of disappointment and underscores the significance of exercising patience and careful deliberation in managing such scenarios:

On this day, I find it difficult to express my emotions adequately. I am overwhelmed by a profound sense of disappointment, to be precise, an intense disappointment. Despite my persistent efforts to find suitable participants, some individuals have already withdrawn their interest even before the study could commence. This turn of events has shattered all my plans, and the feeling is far from pleasant. However, I recognise the need for patience and careful consideration in navigating this situation.

(Researcher's diary – June 2020)

Furthermore, ethical considerations were thoroughly addressed throughout the study, ensuring that participants had the freedom to withdraw from the project if they ever felt uncomfortable at any stage. With the approved ethical protocol in place (see section 4.8), the interview process commenced with the remaining participants. To broaden the participant pool, the snowballing technique was employed, allowing for the recruitment of additional participants through referrals from those already involved in the study. All interviews were recorded and transcribed immediately after each interview. This immediate transcription of the recorded interviews served the purpose of cross-referencing with my memory, error correction, and overall familiarisation with the data, following the guidance of Riessman (1993). In cases where participants used languages other than English (e.g., Kurdish Sorani),

appropriate translations were provided to ensure the accurate representation of their narratives. In the following sections, I will provide an explanation of the multimodal data collection methods, with a particular emphasis on how I utilised them to collect the data.

4.4 *Multimodal data collection methods*

In this section, the focus is on delineating the methodology employed for data collection, with a specific emphasis on participants' narratives regarding their migration experiences. The data collection process spanned over a period of six and a half months and encompassed a variety of multimodal techniques, including the hybrid narrative approach, story writing, visual ethnography, a corpus of material objects, and photovoice. The data collection process primarily revolved around conducting narrative interviews, which were complemented by secondary data collection methods. Distinct approaches were tailored to individual participants. Story writing sessions were conducted immediately following the interviews, while photographs of material objects were acquired during and after the interview sessions. As elucidated in the preceding section, the study centred on eight first-generation Iraqi Kurds who had resided and worked in the UK for over a decade. A total of fifteen interviews were conducted, comprising seven follow-up sessions with eight participants (see Table 4). Pseudonyms were utilised to safeguard the identities of the participants, with the chosen names being gender specific.

The subsequent pages will cover the specific data collection techniques employed in this study. The section will begin by providing an overview of the hybrid narrative approach, elucidating the process and methodology employed. This will be followed by a discussion on the story-writing task, highlighting its role in the research. Finally, in section 4.4.3, the rationale for utilising visual images to collect material objects will be expounded upon, leveraging the relevant theoretical framework.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Material status	Qualification	Occupation	Interview language
Karim	Male	40-50	Single	Diploma-home	Poet & writer	Kurdish Sorani
Saman	Male	50-60	Married	Master-UK	Artist & Teacher	Kurdish Sorani
Kani	Female	40-50	Married	Degree-home	Self-employed	Kurdish Sorani
Murad	Male	40-50	Divorced	Degree-home	Councillor	English & Kurdish Sorani
Omer	Male	50-60	Married	Ph.D.-UK	University lecturer	Kurdish Sorani
Hana	Female	50-60	Married	Ph.D.-UK	Businesswoman	English
Nina	Female	30-40	Single	Master-UK	Manager	English
Ari	Male	40-50	Single	Ph.D.	Lecturer & researcher	Kurdish Sorani & English

Table 4: Participant’s demographic information.

4.4.1 Hybrid narrative approach: Extracting stories

In this subsection, I will provide a detailed explanation of how I conducted the interviews and extracted participants’ stories.

Interviews serve as a social rhythm (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009), representing an interactive event between the researcher and the participants. According to Nascimento and Steinbruch (2019, p. 416), interviews are a ‘socio-cultural construct based on the subjectivity of the involved actors,’ requiring researchers to perform interpretative actions to understand the meanings conveyed during the interviews. For this study, interviews played a pivotal role, particularly in conducting narrative inquiries during the fieldwork. I chose this approach because it allows the participants to share their story and migration experiences through coherent narratives with a clear structure, including a ‘beginning, middle, and end’ – encompassing the past, present, and future (McAlpine, 2016, p. 33). I fully implemented the narrative approach, recognising its multilevel and interdisciplinary nature. As Andrews et al. (2008, p. 12) assert, attempting to oversimplify the complexity of narrative research would undermine the richness of its approaches, theoretical insights, and unexpected discoveries.

The interviews were conducted in either Kurdish Sorani or English over a period of six months, from October 2020 to March 2021, at various locations in Southeast England. Each participant was interviewed at least twice; with each session lasting one to two and a half hours. Throughout the interviews, I recorded the discussions using a digital voice recorder and took

notes to guide me in asking probing questions. The interview locations varied based on the preferences and circumstances of the participants. The first interview occurred in my house; as the participant requested a private and comfortable setting to openly share stories about his migration journey. Subsequently, all other interviews took place in the participants' homes, workplaces, and public places such as coffee shops and pubs, ensuring a conducive environment for open and honest exchanges.

My interview approaches were influenced by various narrative styles, particularly the Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (Wengraf, 2001) and Life Story Narratives (Atkinson, 1998). During my research, I did not strictly adhere to either of the conventional approaches; instead, I amalgamated techniques from both methods, giving rise to what I have termed the hybrid narrative approach. It is crucial to clarify that the hybrid narrative approach does not constitute a theoretical framework, nor is it my intention to establish a new methodology. Rather, it serves as a novel concept within the research framework. While it draws upon elements from both approaches, its distinct role and application within this study will be expounded upon in subsequent sections. By incorporating a range of narrative techniques, I ensured that I captured a comprehensive and varied set of narratives from the participants, enabling a deeper exploration of their experiences and perspectives.

Initially, I chose to follow the biographical narrative interpretive method due to its unique structure in eliciting stories or narratives, which suited the population I was researching and prompted its implementation in my study. At the beginning of each interview, I presented a carefully constructed single narrative question, such as 'please tell me the story of your life, all the events and experiences that have been personally important to you; how it all happened' (Wengraf, 2001). The open-ended nature of this question allowed the participants to share their stories freely, without requiring further guidance from me as the researcher. However, I soon realised that relying solely on one narrative approach would not fully capture my participants' multiple realities. Some participants also had difficulty grasping the question and were confused about what I meant by 'story,' leading to uncertainties in their responses. For instance, on two occasions, participants asked for elaboration and clarification of my question. These incidents prompted me to re-evaluate and improve my approach in asking questions with the remaining participants. As a result, I rephrased my question to 'what do you do? What type of job do you do? Tell me about yourself,' initially proposed by McAdams (1985) and Atkinson (1998). By simplifying the question while still addressing the same topics, the participants better understood the inquiry and responded more comprehensively.

In the context of the Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method, which typically involves three subsessions, I deviated from the prescribed structure to enhance the interactivity and

informativeness of the interviews. This entailed asking probing questions, seeking clarification, and delving more deeply into the participants' life stories (Atkinson, 1998). While narrative researchers emphasise the importance of crafting appropriate interview questions to capture authentic and genuine data leading to a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973), there is general advice to avoid 'wh' questions, especially 'why' questions (Wengraf, 2001; Atkinson, 1998). However, after listening to the interviews, I realised that I occasionally used 'why' questions, recognising their potential to foster meaningful discussions and elicit specific responses without compromising the narrative integrity. This experience led me to reflect on the existing theories and techniques of narrative interviews, underscoring the necessity for a more realistic and nuanced understanding of the interview process. Furthermore, the structure of the Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method imposes certain limitations on me. It restricts me from merely listening to participants' accounts and prohibits the use of clarification questions. As a result, I found myself assuming a role akin to that of a therapist, which I deemed somewhat unrealistic and burdensome.

To ensure that I did not overlook any critical information that could impact the data's outcome, I made a prompt decision to deviate from this rule and ask questions whenever I encountered intriguing aspects or required clarification. To ensure that the narrative's coherence remains unaffected by my inquiries, I opted for probing questions such as 'What exactly did you mean by that?' 'How do you feel about this?' and 'Can you provide an example?' instead. These questions aimed to elicit additional data and explore more deeply into the life stories of the individuals under investigation (Atkinson, 1998). To prepare for the interviews, a list of generic questions focusing on participants' diverse migration experiences was compiled. Follow-up questions were asked at different stages during the interviews, allowing for a more in-depth exploration of participants' narratives. The following are the questions that I asked during different phases of the data collection period:

- When did you come to England? How old were you when you left Kurdistan?
- What were the reasons behind your decision to move?
- Do you recall the day you arrived in the United Kingdom? Any memories of that day, and how did you feel?
- Can you discuss your everyday life in the United Kingdom?
- How challenging is life in the United Kingdom?
- How did you adapt to the changes that occurred since your arrival?
- Do you have any regrets about moving to the UK?
- To what extent do you feel you have immersed yourself in British culture?
- Have you encountered any challenges since your arrival? If so, what were they, and how did you overcome them?

- How do you celebrate special occasions that reflect your culture?
- What does the concept of home mean to you? How many times have you visited [home]?

Having a set of predefined questions in mind proved to be highly beneficial for me during the interviews. Interview questions also enabled me to focus on obtaining specific information and guided me in determining the most effective way to gather that information (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 42). These questions served as puzzle pieces, aiding me in connecting the narratives shared by the participants. Additionally, as discussed in section 4.3.3, I employed various methods to collect secondary data, including a story-writing task, visual ethnography, corpus of material objects and photo voice to gain deeper insights into the participants' lived experiences. The following section outlines the process of story writing and highlights how I captured the interplay between the participants' adaptation experiences and their sense of identity.

4.4.2 Story writing

Despite engaging in extensive conversations with the participants and collecting vast amounts of data, I incorporated the story-writing technique as a secondary method of data collection for two primary reasons: (a) to assess the credibility of the participants' narratives, and (b) to provide an opportunity for participants to reflect on their experiences and explore different aspects of themselves. Following the initial round of interviews, I requested the participants to write a narrative, recount a specific event, or share a memorable story (Appendix 10.6, 10.7, 10.8 and 10.9). I deliberately refrained from specifying the genre of the story, granting the participants complete freedom in making that decision. As a result, four participants took part in this task, with one individual providing his journal for examination and another sending a written piece after the follow-up interview. The remaining three participants respectfully declined to participate, stating that they had already divulged their stories and had nothing further to add to their narratives. Those who agreed to take part spent an average of twenty to thirty minutes contemplating and writing their stories. The written accounts added depth to the spoken narratives and contributed to a critical analysis.

The intriguing aspect of this activity was the genre of the stories. Most participants who engaged in the task chose to focus on negative experiences. Their stories encompassed themes related to othering, such as instances of racism and discrimination, and delved into the emotional impacts of these experiences on their process of adaptation and sense of identity (See Chapter Six). Furthermore, the story-writing task provided a unique avenue for the participants to express their perspectives, revealing additional dimensions of their identities, such as their experiences as victims. As the stories were written in Kurdish Sorani, it shed light

on another layer of the participants' language and national identities, which are vital components in establishing one's cultural identity. The utilisation of this supplementary data collection technique enriched the study by offering deeper insights into the participants' experiences and allowing for a more nuanced exploration of their identities and narratives. In addition to the story-writing, I utilised visual ethnography, photovoice, and corpus of material culture techniques to gather visual data. These approaches will be further examined in the subsequent subsection.

4.4.3 Visual ethnography, photovoice, and corpus of material objects

To create an interactive research method, I incorporated visual ethnography, corpus of material culture, and photovoice techniques to gather visual data on the topic of material culture and identity. I employed an ethnographic approach to explore the relationship between material objects and the participants, aiming to understand how they interacted with these objects in their personal spaces and to gain an insider's perspective on the individuals being studied.

Visual ethnography is a powerful tool that complements traditional narrative interviews and story-writing tasks in researching migrants. Incorporating visual elements, such as photographs and cultural artefacts, can provide a multi-dimensional perspective on the participants' experiences and identities. Visuals offer a representation of the participants' lives and environments, capturing aspects that may not be fully conveyed through spoken or written narratives alone (Holliday, 2007, p. 65). In this study, visual data were collected by both the researcher and the participants. Traditionally, visual data is often considered secondary to written or spoken texts by ethnographers, qualitative researchers, and anthropologists (Emmison and Smith, 2007). For example, Mann (2016) suggests that researchers can utilise photographs, documents, and artefacts either in conjunction with interviews or as standalone sources of data. On the other hand, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 13) view artefacts as 'material objects' that require careful examination on their own. While I find value in both arguments, I believe it is possible to adopt a hybrid approach that incorporates elements from both perspectives. In this study, visuals are not merely relegated to being supplementary additions to written or spoken texts (Harper, 2012). Instead, they also exist as separate sources of information, independently capturing documented realities.

While visiting the participants' homes and workplaces, I came across items and objects that held significant personal and cultural value. With their consent, I took photographs of these material objects found in their private spaces. For the participants who were interviewed in public settings, I utilised the photovoice technique to access data related to material culture. Photovoice is an observational method that generates ethnographically rich data, originally

established by health promotion researchers (Wang and Burris, 1997), but now widely used across various social science disciplines. After the initial round of interviews, I asked the participants to take pictures of items and objects that held personal significance for them. They were then requested to provide a brief description of the photos and reflect on the reasons, emotions, and experiences associated with their chosen objects. As a result, several participants shared images of objects, family photos, and significant places, granting full consent for their use in the thesis. Upon receiving these photos, I carefully examined them, ensuring compliance with research ethics and removing any content that could identify the participants. For example, one participant submitted a journal as a form of material culture, and another sent me family photos that could easily identify the participants. To uphold ethical standards, I meticulously redacted any identifying information and discarded any data that contravened ethics.

During the follow-up interviews, I asked the participants to discuss the photographed objects, explaining their meaning and importance. This process allowed the participants to narrate and contextualise the significance of these objects, revealing how the visual data acted as a catalyst for the narratives they wished to convey, especially concerning their identity and culture. Including visual data was essential as it enabled me to capture emotions, expressions, and non-verbal cues that may not be fully conveyed in textual narratives. These visuals added depth and richness to the overall research findings, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' stories. Through the visual data, the participants could vividly portray and perform their reality, revealing layers of their identities. By incorporating such methods, I was also able to be reflexive in dealing with the data during different phases of the data analysis (see section 4.9). This reflexivity contributes to the rigour of the research process, ensuring that the findings remain grounded in the participants' perspectives.

The data collection method employed in this research is not without limitations. Despite careful planning and efforts to establish a relaxed and informal atmosphere, I encountered various challenges during the fieldwork. These challenges encompassed factors associated with the research context, interview questions, physical noise, Covid-19 restrictions, and meeting locations. Undoubtedly, these challenges have had an impact on the outcomes of the data collection procedure and its results. In the following subsection, I will delve into these limitations and elucidate their specific influence on the research findings.

4.4.4 Data collection limitations

As a Kurdish woman practising Islam and wearing a headscarf (although not a proper hijab), I approached the participants with caution due to their diverse origins in different parts of Southern Kurdistan, each adhering to specific rules, norms, and values. Before each interview,

I established guidelines based on several sociocultural factors, such as age, gender, family background, and the town they resided in before migrating. For instance, while shaking hands between men and women is a common greeting norm, I had to consider whether the participants were comfortable with this practice, as Kurdish culture is influenced by Islamic religion which prohibits physical contact between opposite sexes who are not family members. Moreover, notwithstanding religious consideration, the emergence of Covid-19 and the government's social distancing measures further impacted my approach during the interviews. As a precaution, I generally avoided handshakes except for two occasions where the participants initiated a firm handshake, to which I reciprocated. This sensitivity to cultural norms and public health guidelines ensured that the interviews were conducted with respect and consideration for the participants' preferences and safety.

Additionally, the interviews were conducted in various locations across London and the Southeast of England, which necessitated travelling to unfamiliar boroughs, towns, and cities. Despite having visited London on numerous occasions, I had to allocate extra time to locate suitable meeting spots and ensure punctuality. The challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic further complicated the planning of the interviews. To accommodate the participants who preferred public meeting spaces, I offered them complete freedom to choose the interview locations, as they were more familiar with their boroughs and places of residence. This approach allowed them to feel at ease and facilitated open and comfortable discussions during the interviews. However, it also required flexibility and adaptability on my part, as each location presented unique logistical considerations. Despite the complexities, I prioritised the participants' preferences and comfort to ensure meaningful and productive interactions.

The local and national lockdowns in the UK significantly impacted the participant recruitment process and caused delays in conducting the interviews. The participants expressed valid concerns about adhering to government lockdown rules and their own safety if they were to meet me in their homes. As a result, some participants chose to postpone the interviews until they felt it was safe to proceed. The pandemic also influenced decisions regarding interview locations, with a preference for public places like coffee shops to ensure their safety and that of their families, considering the penalties associated with households mixing to prevent the spread of infection. While public places served the purpose of conducting interviews during these challenging times, the ambient noise, particularly the traffic noise in London, affected the audio quality of the recordings. As a result, there were instances where certain participant responses were not entirely clear. To address this issue, I scheduled follow-up interviews, mainly via Skype and Zoom, in which I asked similar questions; to gain a better understanding of the participants' adaptation stories and ensure comprehensive data collection. Despite the

challenges, the flexibility and adaptability in conducting interviews allowed for meaningful engagement with the participants and the exploration of their experiences amidst the constraints imposed by the pandemic.

Regarding the interview approach employed in this study, Lindlof and Taylor (2011, p. 182) suggest that the narrative interviewing method often relies on establishing a close and long-term relationship with participants. However, due to the challenges posed by Covid-19, I was unable to physically meet the participants before the interviews. Instead, I engaged in phone or text conversations with them, spending a few minutes discussing my project to provide them with an idea of the research. These informal conversations served to establish rapport and build a sense of trust between us. Further, during the interviews, I aimed to act not only as a researcher but also as someone from the same community as the participants. This approach facilitated a more comfortable and open atmosphere during the interviews, allowing the participants to share their stories more freely. Despite the restrictions for the face-to-face meetings, I made a concerted effort to connect with the participants on a personal level, ensuring that their voices and experiences were valued and respected throughout the research process.

Furthermore, the participants selected and shared specific stories that were never aggregated, and the meaningful experiences are emergent, relational, and negotiable (Davis and Lohm, 2020, p. 15). For example, one participant spent some time, sharing stories about their journey before migration, rather than focusing on their experiences in the diaspora. The nature of the stories narrated by some of them led me to question whether I was eliciting relevant and adequate narratives. However, in the end, I realised that the participants' stories were relevant and adequately addressed the questions I had in mind. Specifically, the utilisation of the multimethod and multimodal data collection techniques allowed me to overcome these limitations. These techniques aided in the analysis process, allowing for a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) that reaches beyond mere facts and surface appearances. I am also aware of the limitations associated with the visual data collected by participants. As a researcher, I understand that if I had collected this data in participants' natural environments, such as their homes, the outcome would have been different. Being able to see these items, including those that did not immediately catch my attention, would have provided additional insights.

4.5 *Researching multilingually*

In Section 4.4, a comprehensive overview of the participants' demographic information was provided, including details about the languages used for interviews. Building upon this foundation, this section will explore the concept of researching multilingually. It will delve into

the advantages of employing multiple languages in research and address the challenges associated with this approach.

Traditionally, research predominantly was carried out in English, the lingua franca of academia, dominating scholarly discourse (Bennett, 2008). However, recent years have witnessed a notable transition towards conducting research in multiple languages (Holmes et al., 2013). While the origins of multilingual research lie in fields like Applied Linguistics, education, and intercultural communication, its influence has now permeated various disciplines (Holmes et al., 2013, p. 286). This shift mirrors academia's broader call for research that acknowledges and engages with linguistic diversity. In contemporary academic circles, researchers, including doctoral candidates, increasingly immerse themselves in multilingual research pursuits without explicitly labelling them as such (Holmes et al., 2013). They might collect data in one language and subsequently translate the content for reports or theses (Squires, 2009), occasionally overlooking the intricacies of translation or the necessity of maintaining transparency throughout the process (Holmes et al., 2013). Nevertheless, the demand for multilingual research is burgeoning, as scholars recognise the benefits of interacting with multiple languages to enrich the research process (Jorda and Falmoir, 2015).

Conducting research multilingually entails employing multiple languages throughout the entire research journey (Holmes et al., 2013; Halai, 2007). This approach embraces the linguistic diversity inherent in our globalised society, facilitating access to a broader spectrum of perspectives and insights (Fay et al., 2023). Tasks such as conducting interviews in various languages, analysing data from diverse linguistic sources, and presenting findings in multiple languages are integral components of this approach. By embracing multilingualism, researchers foster inclusivity, deepen cultural understanding, and facilitate the exchange of knowledge across linguistic boundaries. They acknowledge that language profoundly influences thought, identity, and experience, and by engaging with multiple languages, they enhance the depth and breadth of their research endeavours.

Addressing language issues within the research process is essential for maintaining integrity and inclusivity. Researchers must carefully plan data collection, determining which languages will be used and how translation will be handled (Nurjannah et al., 2014). In my research, data was collected in both English and Kurdish Sorani, with language choice being a crucial criterion for participant selection, as highlighted in subsection (4.3.4). This decision was intentional because I believe that the language chosen plays a significant role in revealing participants' identities. In addition to that, incorporating languages other than English can stimulate researchers' critical thinking, potentially leading to the development of new literature. Magyar and Robinson-Pant (2011) suggest that using multiple languages in

research may reshape the perceptions of the researchers of what constitutes 'good' literature and inform future decisions regarding language choice for research dissemination.

In this research, participants were empowered to select the language(s) for their interviews, providing valuable perspectives on how power dynamics between the researcher and the individuals affected language choices. For example, despite their deep connection to Kurdistan and the Kurdish identity, individuals such as Nina and Hana opted to conduct their interviews in English, likely influenced by their early upbringing in the UK. Murad's preference for an English interview was evident, seemingly driven by a desire to showcase proficiency in English and assert his linguistic competency. The selection of interview language prompted me to reflect on my role as a Kurdish researcher and my positioning within the research process, revealing how power dynamics influenced language selection. Participants' language choices unveiled additional layers of their backgrounds and urged me to consider broader implications, including the impact of power dynamics between myself and the research participants (Chen, 2011). In subsection (4.7.1), power relations and status will be further explored, shedding light on their influence on language selection.

Participants spoke in Kurdish and English, sometimes blending words from one language to another to retell their stories during the interviews. Implementing two languages not only empowered them to freely express themselves but also affirmed their cultural backgrounds, thereby enhancing the credibility and inclusivity of the research (Giampapa and Lamoureux, 2011). While using multiple languages during the data collection process can be advantageous, it also presents challenges that the researcher has to be aware of. One of the main challenges is the 'translation' of the data from one language to another, where finding direct equivalents for words or phrases may be difficult (Turhan and Bernard, 2022). Also, navigating cultural nuances that may not have direct counterparts in other languages; managing contextual ambiguity, as words can have different meanings depending on context (Amenador and Wang, 2022; Choi et al., 2012 Omer, 2021, 2014). Another issue with translation can be linked to the differences in linguistic structure and grammar; addressing subjectivity in interpreting abstract concepts; handling technical terminology that may lack direct equivalents; and managing time constraints, which can impact the thoroughness of the translation process (Choi et al., 2012).

To overcome these obstacles, researchers should enlist the expertise of qualified translators proficient in both languages and well-versed in the subject matter. Additionally, allocating ample time for the translation and review process is crucial. Providing context and clarification where needed can also enhance the accuracy and fidelity of translations. The handling of data not originally in English, along with insights into the translation process, is elaborated upon

in greater detail in Section 4.9. By conscientiously considering these factors, I avoided unintentionally marginalising participants and overlooked the importance of the Kurdish Sorani language in the research discourse. Integrating these considerations into the research process has heightened the authenticity and relevance of multilingual research endeavours (Ganassin and Holmes, 2013).

4.6 Positionality and reflexivity

In this section and its subsections, I will delineate and expound upon the nuanced aspects of my positionality throughout the course of this research endeavour. I will elucidate how the deliberate adoption of a reflexive approach significantly shaped and guided my trajectory through the multifaceted processes of data collection and analysis.

Recognising the researcher's positionality, encompassing their knowledge and beliefs, and actively engaging in reflexivity to discern how this awareness is applied, are foundational elements in the practice of qualitative research (Holmes, 2020). Given that researchers assume a pivotal role in shaping the research process, it becomes imperative to scrutinise how their historical knowledge, personal experiences, underlying assumptions, and inherent beliefs inevitably exert influence over both the research process itself and its eventual outcomes (Holmes, 2020). In the ensuing pages, I will expound upon my stance regarding the 'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives, elucidating how I traversed the path towards becoming a more reflexive researcher throughout the duration of this study.

4.6.1 Positionality

As a researcher following the interpretative constructive approach, it is essential for me to acknowledge how my personal background and familiarity with the participants inevitably influence my interpretation of the narratives they share. While I have previously discussed my background and interest in this study in section 1.5, the primary objective now is to engage in a deliberate process of recognition and reflection regarding my role as the researcher within this study's context.

Positionality refers to the researcher's worldview and standpoint, encompassing ontological and epistemological assumptions that are influenced by their values, beliefs, and various personal characteristics (Holmes, 2020). Distinguishing between two distinct positions that researchers can hold in relation to the participants in a research study is a widespread practice. These positions are often classified as either outsiders or insiders (Bukmal, 2022). In qualitative and interpretivist research, a fundamental assumption is that knowledge is contextually situated within the relationships between individuals. Given this emphasis, the researcher plays a pivotal role in the interpretation process, actively engaging in the discovery

of situated knowledge (Bukmal, 2022; Cohen *et al.*, 2007). Also, it is of utmost importance to acknowledge the positionality of researchers, as they are intimately connected to the subject matter being studied and act as instruments in the data collection process (Adeagbo, 2021).

A general understanding of an insider researcher is regarded as a member of the group being studied (Trowler, 2011; Kanuha, 2000), while an outsider researcher lacks prior knowledge of the group or is not a member (Fleming, 2018). This dichotomy faces serious issues. According to Smith and Osborn (2007), an insider researcher can share meaning, a common background or identity with the participants, and this could be positive in terms of the rapport building more easily and quickly due to their shared experiences and cultural understanding. Upon entering the Kurdish community, I did not approach myself as a researcher only but also a member of the community. I delved into the lives of the participants while also sharing aspects of their culture and specific attributes. We shared common ground – being Kurdish, speaking the same language or dialect (Kurdish Sorani), and all having migrated to the UK as immigrants or refugees. These shared attributes led the participants to perceive me as an ‘insider’ researcher rather than an ‘outsider’ (Le Gallais, 2008). To the participants, I was not just a researcher but also a Kurdish woman with similar shared religious beliefs, norms, and values. In a sense I was one of them.

As an insider researcher, I received a warm reception from the participants, swiftly fostering trust and openness. They willingly shared their life stories, including sensitive topics related to their migration and adaptation experiences. Remarkably, I identified a resonance between their past and present journeys and my own migration experience. This shared background created a sense of commonality, strengthening our connection and enabling meaningful conversations (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). Nevertheless, I remained acutely aware of potential biases that might emerge from my insider perspective as a Kurd (Saidin, 2017). According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), insider researchers may unintentionally carry preconceived notions or biases stemming from their subjective experiences, potentially influencing data interpretation and introducing subjectivity. To address this concern, I took measures to ensure that my insider positionality did not unduly affect the research outcomes. I consistently engaged in self-reflection (see subsection 4.5.2) and maintained vigilance, allowing me to navigate the challenges and potential pitfalls associated with insider research while leveraging the advantages of my unique perspective to extract valuable insights from the participants’ experiences. Consequently, I aimed to maintain a degree of ‘distance’ from the participants to ensure research credibility and to conduct a comprehensive analysis (Pyrzczak, 2017).

While adopting the role of an insider researcher and acknowledging my shared cultural experiences with the research participants, it is imperative to recognise that the diverse backgrounds of the respondents, encompassing variations in their cities of origin, age, and educational level, place me in the position of an ‘in-between’ researcher. This ‘in-between’ role affords me a certain degree of objectivity while concurrently permitting me to draw upon the advantages of my insider perspective (Saidin, 2017). As I proceed into the forthcoming chapters, specifically Chapters Five, Six, and Seven, I wholeheartedly embrace the practice of self-reflexivity, wherein I am mindful of and discern my distinct positionality as a Kurdish female researcher who shares experiences with the individuals under scrutiny. This self-reflexive approach serves as an instrumental tool for enhancing my researcher positionality. Subsequently, I will swivel the discussion towards the pivotal significance of reflexivity in advancing our comprehension and adeptly navigating my multifaceted role as a researcher.

4.6.2 Reflexivity

As a researcher adhering to the interpretative constructive approach, it is incumbent upon me to acknowledge and deeply appreciate how my personal background and inherent familiarity with the participants unavoidably shape my interpretation of the narratives that they share. While I have previously expounded upon my background and expressed my keen interest in this study in section 1.5, the paramount objective at this juncture is to engage in a deliberate process of recognition and reflection regarding my role as the researcher within the context of this study.

My journey into reflexivity commences with a pivotal decision concerning the selection of data collection methods (see Figure 4). Through these chosen techniques, I diligently gathered information pertaining to the values and beliefs held by the participants. This initial step enabled me to delve beyond the surface, uncovering the profound narratives concealed beneath their outward expressions. Subsequently, I embarked on a process of evaluating these narratives, inevitably influenced by my own subjective perspectives. The beauty of this reflexive journey lay in its multifaceted nature, allowing me to scrutinise the data from various angles. It was through this multidimensional approach that I could comprehensively assess diverse forms of data, including spoken, written, and visual sources. This holistic examination served to unearth answers to the myriad questions that guided my research.

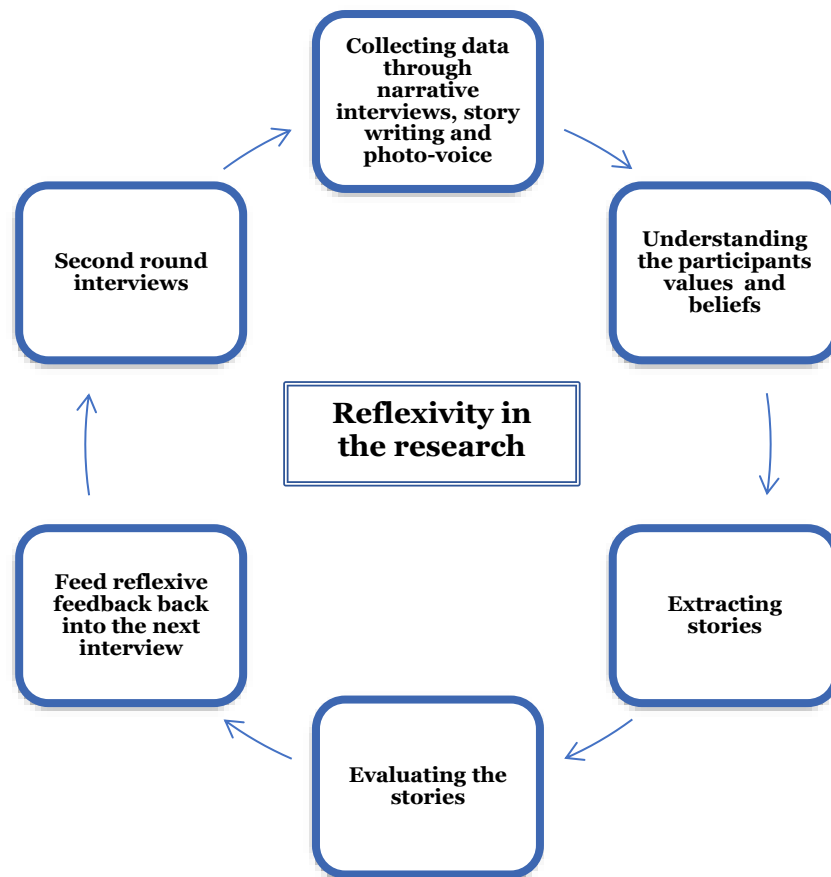


Figure 4: My Reflexive Turn during the data collection stages.

Additionally, I made a deliberate choice to incorporate the practice of keeping a journal throughout my research. Inspired by Arche’s (2010) edited volume, ‘Conversations About Reflexivity,’ and the significance of rigorous self-reflection emphasised by contributors, I embraced the concept of a researcher’s journal. This methodological practice, characterised by systematic recording of experiences, thoughts, and observations, played a pivotal role in elevating the standards of rigor, credibility, and depth within my research endeavour. The journal also facilitated a meticulous process for interview planning, including comprehensive reflections on both strengths and weaknesses, which, in turn, continually evaluated my role as a researcher. This unwavering commitment to reflexivity not only assisted in navigating ethical complexities but also ensured the safeguarding of confidentiality and the protection of participants’ rights. Ultimately, it significantly contributed to enhancing the overall credibility and trustworthiness of my research.

Throughout my research journey, reflexivity operated on various levels. Initially, during the data collection phase, I made methodological decisions aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of my chosen research methods. I also encountered moments of disinterest and narratives seemingly unrelated to the immediate scope of my study. Careful consideration of specific data

collection techniques, as discussed by scholars such as Holliday (2007) and Smith et al. (2022), during interviews prompted reflection on their significance. Surprisingly, this re-evaluation led to recognising the value of seemingly unrelated narratives, particularly those related to pre-migration stories, as discussed by scholars like Fisher (1985, 1987, 1989). These narratives contributed substantial depth to the overarching narratives of the participants.

My initial control over participant selection was somewhat limited since I was introduced to my participants through a gatekeeper, especially during the early stages of data collection. The gatekeeper primarily connected me with individuals who were prominent in the Kurdish community in London. It soon became apparent that these initial choices could potentially influence the data and steer my study in a specific direction. However, after conducting the first two interviews, I made a conscious decision to transition to a snowballing technique for participant recruitment. This shift allowed me to exercise greater precision in selecting participants from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. It also enabled me to establish more meaningful relationships with them. These thoughtful considerations proved instrumental in aligning with my research objectives and ultimately contributed to the attainment of my research goals.

Utilising narrative interviews as my primary data collection technique presented a significant set of challenges during my research journey. As discussed in section 4.5, conducting narrative interviews required a nuanced approach, particularly in avoiding the use of ‘why’ questions, as emphasised by Atkinson (1988) and Wengraf (2001). The rationale behind this caution is that ‘why’ questions have the potential to distort the narrative and hinder its natural flow. Upon reviewing the interview recordings, I noted instances where I inadvertently used ‘why’ questions. Surprisingly, the use of these questions did not disrupt the narrative as anticipated; instead, it provided a unique avenue to delve more deeply into the participants’ experiences. It allowed for the extraction of richer and more detailed descriptions, enhancing the overall quality of the narratives. This realisation prompted a re-evaluation of my interview approach. In response, I consciously incorporated ‘who,’ ‘what,’ and ‘when’ questions strategically within the interviews to complement the narrative structure and engage more effectively with the participants’ stories. This adaptive approach contributed to a more comprehensive and insightful exploration of the research topic. Furthermore, my reflexive journey extended into the data analysis stage. Initially, I found myself overlooking specific data, particularly related to abstract concepts such as ‘home’ and ‘belonging’. However, through introspection and careful consideration, I came to appreciate the importance of ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973). This introspective process led me to re-evaluate the previously overlooked data, enriching the research findings and unveiling nuanced facets within the participants’ narratives. This heightened reflexivity ultimately enhanced the overall depth and credibility of the study.

4.7 *Trustworthiness*

This section aims to shed light on justify the chosen approach for interpreting the collected data ensuring its accuracy, credibility, and precise representation. In the context of this study, trustworthiness is of paramount importance, and in this regard, Lincoln and Guba (1985) introduced a set of rigorous criteria - credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability - as an alternative to the traditional quantitative assessment criteria like validity, reliability, objectivity, and external validity (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). For this research, the original and widely recognised criteria introduced by Lincoln and Guba (1985) will be employed to demonstrate the concept of ‘trustworthiness.’ By using this well-established term, I aim to avoid any confusion that might arise from the use of terms like validity and reliability. The application of this framework in the study is elaborated upon as follows:

‘Credibility’ - the congruence between the findings and reality:

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), a study’s credibility is established through the convergence of the researcher’s and participants’ experiences. Credibility emphasises the alignment between participants’ perspectives and the researcher’s accurate representation of them. During the data collection process, I attentively listened to the participants, respected their viewpoints, and ensured that my portrayal reflected the true essence of the stories they shared.

‘Dependability’ - establishing trust in trustworthiness:

To bolster the third aspect of Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) trustworthiness, I ensured that the research process was logical, traceable, and well-documented (Tobin and Begley, 2004), enabling readers to scrutinise the research process and assess its dependability.

‘Confirmability’ - approaching objective reality:

To fulfil the confirmability aspect and draw conclusions regarding specific themes and overall outcomes of the thesis, I ensured that the interpretations and findings were derived directly from the data. Following Koch’s (1994) guidance, I provided explanations for the theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices made throughout the study, enabling readers to comprehend the rationale behind these decisions.

‘Transferability’ - the generalisability of the inquiry:

The data collected in this study are transferable, meaning the results can be applied or generalised to other contexts or settings. In other words, readers can extrapolate certain

aspects of the participants' experiences and apply them to different situations. As Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 316) succinctly state, 'it is not the naturalist's task to provide an index of transferability,' but rather the researcher's responsibility to 'provide the database that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers.'

Additionally, I was exposed to the concept of '**triangulation**' by Cho and Trent (2006), an essential perspective in ensuring trustworthiness. Triangulation involves using multiple datasets, theories, and methods to enhance credibility in research. In this study, I employed various data collection techniques, including a hybrid narrative approach, visual ethnography, story writing, corpus of material culture and photovoice, which allowed for the collection of a substantial amount of data and facilitated the attainment of a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973). Moreover, employing multiple sources of data and utilising several theoretical frameworks enabled me to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research direction.

4.8 Ethics, ethical procedure, and limitations

This section discusses the ethical considerations and procedures employed in this research. Before initiating data collection, establishing a robust ethical framework was paramount, given the involvement of human participants. Adhering to stringent ethical guidelines and protocols was necessary to ensure the protection of participants' rights, welfare, and privacy throughout the research.

Ethics in research refers to a set of principles and guidelines governing the moral conduct and responsible practices of researchers when engaging with participants or handling data (Resnik, 2018). It encompasses fairness, respect, integrity, and accountability in the research process (Anderson, 2017, p. 59). This concept underscores the significance of fostering a respectful and mutually beneficial relationship among all parties engaged in the research endeavour. In this study, strict adherence was given to ethical guidelines from Canterbury Christ Church University, aligning with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (Appendix 10.1). These comprehensive ethical codes outline the expected conduct of the researcher concerning research subjects, ensuring their rights and well-being are protected (Bryman, 2012; Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). I also adhered to ethical principles; with a particular focus on informed consent and participant confidentiality; as highlighted by Esterberg (2002) and Bulmer (2001), respectively.

To ensure the ethical well-being of participants, I provided comprehensive and accurate information about the study's purpose, objectives, methodology, and potential benefits and risks. Through the process of informed consent, I emphasised the voluntary nature of

participation, assuring participants of their right to withdraw at any stage without facing adverse consequences. Regarding participant confidentiality, meticulous steps were taken to protect their identities. No personal data that could lead to direct or indirect identification was used. Instead, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants. In one case where a participant had initial identification concerns, after discussing potential risks, they agreed to remain anonymous, and a pseudonym was assigned for their safety. Ethical research practices prioritise informed consent and participant confidentiality (Esterberg, 2002). In this study, a comprehensive approach was followed to obtain informed consent from each participant. Before interviews, I introduced myself, explained the study's objectives and data collection procedures, and sent an information sheet and consent form via email (Appendix 10.3) to empower participants to be involved. Proper documentation was maintained through duplicate signed consent forms – one for the participant and one for my records.

During the research process, extra precautions were taken to protect participant anonymity and confidentiality (Elliott and Timulak, 2005). Given that participants came from various parts of London, specifics about the study location were avoided to preserve their privacy. Moreover, the borough where their residences were located was not disclosed. Recognising the emotional sensitivity of the topics discussed during interviews, participants' well-being was prioritised. Whenever a participant requested a pause or became emotionally overwhelmed, recordings were promptly halted. This approach conveyed empathy and respect for participants' emotional experiences (Bulmer, 2001), creating a supportive and trusting environment that encouraged open and honest narratives (Esterberg, 2002).

This section has elaborated on the rigorous ethical approach followed in this research, emphasising the significance of obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and protecting participants' identities and well-being. Adherence to ethical guidelines and principles is deemed essential for studies involving human subjects, particularly when exploring sensitive and personal topics. Further, it is crucial to recognise that power dynamics between the researcher and participants can change, influenced by the establishment of 'trust'. This aspect will be explored further in the subsequent discussion.

4.8.1 Power relation and status

In this section, I delve into the intricate power dynamics inherent in the researcher-participant relationship and their implications throughout the research process. Power relations are a fundamental aspect of human interactions, intricately intertwined with broader societal structures (Gottfried, 1996). The distribution of power within these relationships is contingent upon various factors, including the individuals involved, both the researcher and the

participants, and the specific context in which these interactions occur (Scheurich, 1997). Lawrence and Buchanan (2017) highlight the often-institutional power held by researchers, granting them control over specific aspects of the research process. However, it is essential to recognise that power dynamics extend beyond the researcher alone; participants also play a pivotal role in shaping the research process. The interactions between researchers and participants give rise to dynamic power relationships, resulting in a mutual and evolving connection within the research context. This perspective aligns with the interpretive constructivist approach, which emphasises non-hierarchical, reflexive, and interactive relationships (Duffy, 1985).

Researchers wield their power in designing research settings and formulating interview questions, while participants can influence the process by withholding information or choosing not to participate in specific data collection activities (Given, 2008, p. 334). During this research, I encountered diverse power dynamics on my journey. While I had control over aspects like participant selection and the formulation of questions, I realised that participants also possessed agency and influence in certain contexts. This dynamic varied depending on the settings; participants viewed me not only as a researcher but also as a friend and family member with a genuine interest in their communities and voices. This ever-changing power dynamic shaped our roles, highlighting the interactive nature of the researcher-participant relationship and the importance of acknowledging its complexities. My evolving position allowed for a dual role, where participants saw me as both a researcher and a fellow Kurd, sharing cultural backgrounds, feelings, and values (Duffy, 1985). This flexibility was instrumental in building trust-based relationships, enriching the collected data and deepening our mutual understanding.

Being a migrant researcher studying their own community comes with unique challenges. As a researcher, I might appear vulnerable, and the boundaries of my position could be unclear (Bourdieu, 1990). However, during the research, I consistently received positive feedback from participants. They extended respect to me and often used titles like 'Dr,' a common practice in the Kurdish community to show admiration and respect for expertise (Charmaz, 2006, 2012). Yet, the use of such titles sometimes made me feel 'othered,' potentially influencing the interview dynamics negatively (Charmaz, 2006). To ensure that participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences without my education level affecting the depth of the research, it was crucial to remain sensitive to these cultural nuances and power dynamics throughout my research journey.

My experiences during interviews were diverse and not uniform. As a young and relatively inexperienced researcher, I found myself affected by certain participants' attitudes and

behaviours. For instance, one individual occasionally displayed reluctance in responding to specific questions and shared minimal information about his life stories. Our interaction dynamics were influenced by my age and limited research experience, particularly as the participant already held a Ph.D. Additionally, this participant probed my religious beliefs as a Muslim woman, questioning my outlook and clothing choices. Such inquiries made me feel uncomfortable, but I remained composed and capable of defending my beliefs while explaining my choices, such as wearing a scarf. Reflecting on these varied power dynamics was vital for me as a researcher. Being mindful of how age, experience, and personal attributes may influence participant responses allowed me to navigate these situations professionally and consider their potential impact on the research process and outcomes. After thorough reflection on the entire research process and the intricate dynamics between the researcher and participants, I align myself with Grenz's (2005) perspective that power is fluid and not solely confined to one party. Attempting to restrict power within rigid boundaries becomes challenging due to its dynamic nature.

4.9 Data analysis

In this section, the intricate process of analysing the collected data using the 'thematic analysis' (Braun and Clarke, 2006) approach, grounded in the interpretive constructivist approach, is expounded.

The significance of data analysis in qualitative research is underscored, because it greatly impacts the study's quality (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 10). Researchers must carefully deliberate and choose an appropriate method, considering their specific project's objectives and the nature of the data. Considering the narrative approach as the primary data collection method in this study, the adoption of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach was a logical and judicious decision, given its wide recognition and status as a foundational method in qualitative research (Braun and Clarke, 2006, pp. 77-78). This is further explored in the following subsection.

4.9.1 Thematic analysis

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data analysis and effectively report the research findings, I adopted Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis and reflexive thematic analysis approaches (2019), which are widely recognised and increasingly popular in qualitative research. Thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 4), involves identifying patterns of meaning across a dataset and providing a detailed description of the data. This method allows for the discovery of themes that may not be immediately obvious or

explicitly stated in the data, making it well-suited for analysing narrative data and interpreting the underlying patterns and themes that emerge from the participants' stories.

Thematic analysis as described by Foss (1996), presents both a challenging and rewarding journey, ideally suited for fulfilling the researcher's objectives. It necessitates a systematic and meticulous examination of the narrative, encompassing scrutiny of the characters (the narrators), the plot (the sequence of events), and the setting (the time and place) in which the story unfolds. This approach's inherent flexibility grants researchers the liberty to implement steps in their research without undue constraint, empowering them to select the most fitting theoretical framework. Thematic analysis proves particularly valuable in studying diaspora communities, offering an avenue to unveil and explore themes that might have initially remained obscured. In this study, the utilisation of thematic analysis facilitated the comprehensive analysis of the collected data, leading to the identification and exploration of multiple themes directly relevant to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019; Foss, 1996).

Thematic analysis involves six phases, creating an iterative and reflective process that allows researchers to move between these steps. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise the need to address theoretical and methodological issues, with a particular focus on thematic coding for making decisions. They emphasise the importance of explicit consideration and discussion of these choices. They also highlight the researcher's ongoing reflexive dialogue (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Thematic analysis can be inductive (bottom-up) or deductive (top-down). The inductive approach derives themes directly from data, while the deductive approach is more researcher-driven (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In this study, the inductive approach predominantly guided the analysis, although some data was analysed deductively for specific research questions. The bottom-up approach identified various themes and subthemes. The next sections will elaborate on the phases of thematic analysis, focusing on the recursive process. For this study's purpose, some method steps are combined, presenting Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach as a linear four-phased method.

4.9.1.1 Phases of thematic analysis

I carefully followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) step-by-step guide for conducting thematic analysis, which encompasses six distinct phases, which are summarised in Table (4) below. These phases involve (1) familiarising myself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report (Table 4). To streamline the process and incorporate reflexivity, I combined steps one and two, as well as steps four and five, following the suggestions put forth by Braun and Clarke (2019) for a reflexive thematic analysis. While the authors emphasise that

qualitative data analysis involves storytelling, interpretation, and creative construction rather than an absolute search for truths, I firmly believe that researchers must harness their creativity to make sense of and interpret the available data. In the forthcoming sections, I will delve into each of the stages of thematic analysis as outlined by the authors.

Phases	Description of the process
Data familiarisation	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, and noting initial ideas.
Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data systematically across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes and gather all data relevant to each theme.
Revisiting themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.
Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, the final analysis of selected extracts relating to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the examination

Table 5: The process of thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Phase 1: Data familiarisation and generating initial codes

During this phase, I undertook essential tasks such as transcription, translation, multiple readings of both original and translated transcripts, and generating initial codes. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the data's socio-cultural representations and meanings (Ong, 1982), I manually transcribed all interviews. Due to time constraints, I translated only relevant data from Kurdish Sorani to English. Transcription inherently reflects my social, cultural, political, and epistemological judgments (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). On average, each interview took 10-12 hours to transcribe, making this stage demanding and time-consuming. However, it helped me become deeply familiar with the participants' data and facilitated subsequent coding.

The English transcriptions preserved the original structure and style of participants' responses, capturing their authentic expressions as accurately as possible (Cohen et al., 2007). After transcription, I securely stored password-protected copies of each transcript on a computer, using pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. For Kurdish transcriptions, as the

Kurdish alphabet was not available on my keyboard, I manually wrote and stored hard copies in a locked cabinet to protect the identities of the research participants. For instance, participant Omer's description of an object mentioned after the initial interview – a samovar or samawar⁵ – was translated from Kurdish Sorani to English as follows:

نەمە یەکیکە لەو سیمبۆلانی ئەو کە لەمەلەوه هەمیشە پاراستوو مە. زۆر بەی ژیا نی منالیم لەگەڵ باپیرەم
کە خاوەن دیوێخان بوو، بەردەوام سەماوەر لەدیوێمخاکەماندا دانەخرا. سەماوەر بەو بۆنەییوە
هەمیشە لەیادەوێر یەدا سیمبۆلیکی جوانە و بەستراوەتەو بەکۆمەڵێک یادەوێر دیکەو، بەتایبەتیش
باپیرەم کە لەراستیدا ئەو کاریگەری راستەوخۆی لەسەر ژیا نی هەبوو. جگە لەوش تەعبیرە لە
دو نیای شەرقی و تەقلیدیکی جوانی کوردەواری و تاد.

The translated version of the written text

The samovar holds a special place in my home, cherished as a meaningful symbol. In my childhood, I spent a lot of time with my grandfather, and his parlour's samovar made a lasting impression on me. It has deep sentimental value, connected to cherished memories, especially those with my grandfather, who greatly influenced my life. Beyond its personal importance, the samovar symbolises the unique traditions and cultural heritage of Eastern societies, particularly within the Kurdish community.

Translating Kurdish to English presented both excitement and challenges. Despite some phonological and syntactic similarities, vocabulary differences necessitated precise translation. My primary focus was capturing the essence and intended meaning rather than adhering to strict word-for-word translation, which risked distorting the original meaning. During transcription, I meticulously examined each interview, closely scrutinising emerging themes and employing colour-coding techniques for initial codes. Coding plays a pivotal role in thematic analysis, systematically labelling qualitative data to identify themes and their relationships; and employing concise words or phrases to encapsulate data significance. Extraneous data, such as participant demographics and interview questions, was excluded, while relevant context was retained to maintain conversational flow. This approach aligns with Strauss and Corbin's (1990) coding process, encompassing data breakdown, examination, comparison, conceptualisation, and categorisation. In each transcript, I diligently identified words, sentences, and paragraphs with potential significance for addressing my research questions. Integrating transcription and coding provided multiple opportunities to engage with data and detect patterns (Boyatzis, 1998). Revisiting the data led to new code

⁵ See Figure 7.14 chapter seven for the visual data, the full analysis and discussion of the extract.

identification and the refinement of existing ones as the analysis progressed. Codes that did not align with the study's principles or failed to capture the richness of the phenomenon were discarded (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 31).

Phase 2: Identification of themes and subthemes

Following the initial thematic analysis, I carefully reviewed each dataset, meticulously identifying significant themes and subthemes relevant to the research questions (Figure 5). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), themes capture essential aspects of data, reflecting patterns of meaning within the dataset. Transforming codes into coherent themes required establishing cohesive ideas. Identifying common themes highlighted recurring patterns, though their selection relied on subjective judgment and an open-minded approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 82). This stage demanded patience and examining the lens through which themes were observed (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 8). Subsequently, I provided a detailed account of specific themes or groups related to areas of interest (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Phase 3: Reviewing, defining, and naming themes

During theme identification for the study, some codes did not align with main themes. To address this and any emergent themes, I established a temporary 'miscellaneous' theme, as described by Braun and Clarke (2021) as 'themes-as-the-outcome of analyses.' Next, I discerned broader data patterns to address research questions, analysing related code groups for finalised themes. Reviewing and renaming themes as needed, some evolved into sub-themes. For instance, multiple cultural worlds initially marked as a sub-theme but was later elevated to a central theme (see Chapter Five). The theme of home and belonging similarly arose from patterns across transcripts. This stage was challenging, requiring patience, careful thought, and planning.

Interview extract	Example codes	Themes and subthemes
<p>(1) When I think back before turning 32, I can't remember much because when you are not in charge of decision-making, you just do not [overthink]. You just led rather than lead. But after I got married, it was different because my husband was more open-minded, and I got my freedom - if I wanted to travel or do anything.</p> <p>(2) After my father passed away, I even changed my university course. My brothers changed their universities, and I said, why not me? Why is everyone doing what they like? Why not me? So, I left the pharmacy degree and applied to another university to study architecture, the course I always wanted to do, but I couldn't because of my parents.</p> <p>(3) I used to be very religious, so I thought about creating a new Kurdish government under Sharia law. Because I did believe that, as a nation, we have to be an Islamic state to gain freedom and become an independent country, but I changed my perceptions about this a few years later and realised I was wrong.</p> <p>(4) when I arrived here, I began to question myself, who am I? I didn't spend a day without questioning my values, my roles in society, and my passion and spiritual beliefs. Once you go through significant life changes, these questions will interfere with your daily life [...]. Shortly after that, you select personal characteristics, keep the ones that define you, and dispose of the others that go against your beliefs and values.</p>	<p>decision making – agency freedom, inferior vs. superior uncertainty and dilemma role shift and role identity</p> <p>identity salience, avowal and ascription religious and national identity, identity shift, identity change, and evolving identity identity dilemma, and identity confusion identity change</p>	<p>Theme 1: Multiple Cultural Worlds</p> <p>Subtheme 1: Agency and Dynamic Nature of Self-representation</p> <p>Subtheme 2: Evolving Identity</p> <p>Subtheme 3: The Illusion of the Wholeness</p>

Figure 5: Thematic analysis coding process.

Phase 4: Producing the report

After coding data and identifying themes and subthemes, the analysis development phase began—an essential step involving crafting a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and engaging narrative from the data’s story, both within and across themes (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 18). I carefully selected potent data extracts representing common themes with depth, intensity, and complexity. The analysis worked in layers, using data to weave a narrative. This involved embedding data extracts within analytical narratives (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 18) to build arguments related to research questions. As a novice researcher, I grappled with data presentation and structuring findings chapters. I experimented with case studies and content analysis, but neither suited the study’s needs. Therefore, I chose to present data thematically (Figure 6), ensuring clear structure and coherence across chapters. The diagram below depicts a thematic map used in a findings chapter – Chapter Six.

Chapter Six: Migration Experiences: Past, Present and Future

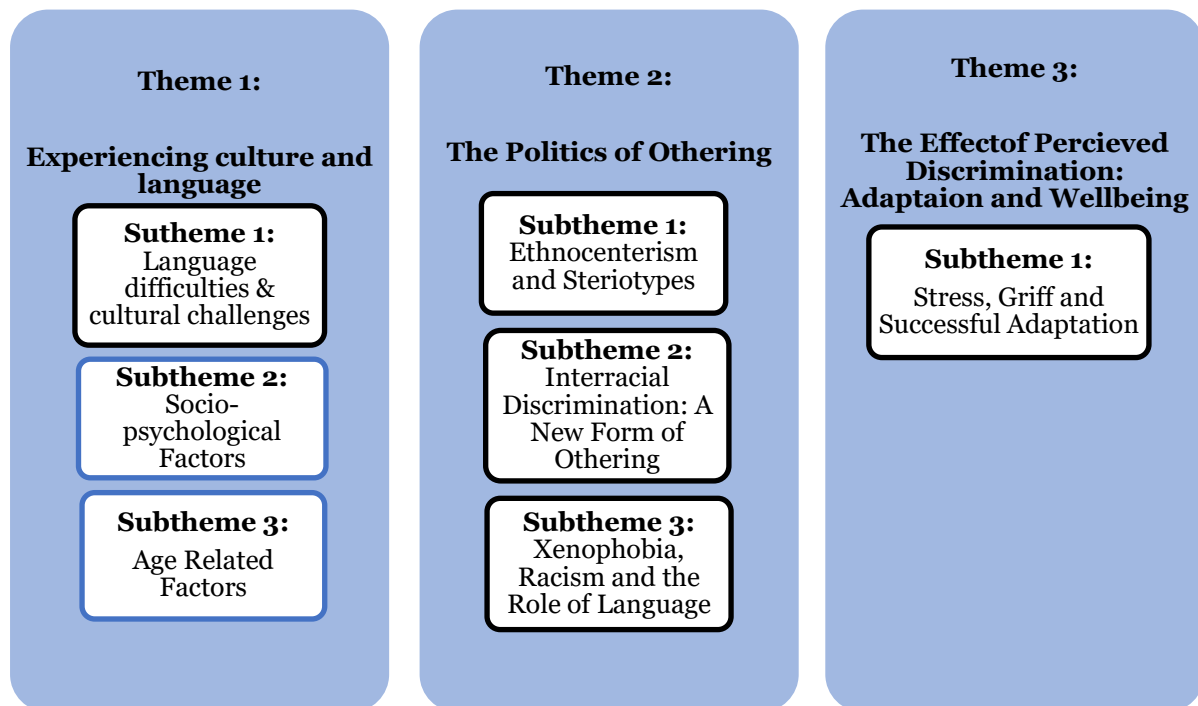


Figure 6:An illustration of a thematic map taken from the second findings chapter – Chapter Six.

4.10 Chapter conclusion

This chapter offers a detailed account of the methodological framework adopted for this research, with a particular emphasis on the integration of multimodal data collection techniques.

Before delving into the specifics of the narrative interview approach, it is essential to underscore the deliberate choice of employing multiple modes of data collection. These techniques were thoughtfully selected to ensure a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of participants' migration experiences in the UK. The study actively engaged with eight participants from the Kurdish community in Southeast England, primarily located in London and Kent. Prior to the fieldwork, access to participants and their informed consent was secured through personal networks and snowballing techniques, providing a strong foundation for robust data collection. The application of an interpretive constructivist approach, which serves as the philosophical underpinning of this study, allowed for a deep interaction between the data and the participants' cultural reality. This approach was complemented by considerations of reflexivity and positionality, acknowledging the potential impact of my personal history, gender, values, and research objectives in this thesis. To enhance the trustworthiness of the data, a suite of measures was meticulously implemented, including strategies to bolster credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and triangulation.

The subsequent chapters, namely Chapters Five, Six, and Seven, will elucidate the themes and subthemes derived from the multimethod and multimodal data collection and analysis. Chapter Five will delve into the complexities of identity negotiation and navigation, while Chapter Six will provide insights into the multifaceted world of migration experiences. Lastly, Chapter Seven will offer a window into the exploration of material culture, materiality, and identity. It is essential to acknowledge that the interpretative perspectives presented in each findings chapter inherently reflect my subjectivity, given the richness and complexity of the dataset.

5 Negotiating and Navigating Identity

5.1 Introduction

This introduction is divided into two parts. The first part will provide an overview of how the findings have been structured across Chapters Five, Six, and Seven. The second part will introduce the content of this specific chapter.

5.1.1 The organisation of the findings chapters

As I delve into the intricate nature of my findings, it is imperative to offer a detailed exposition of their organisation within Chapters Five, Six, and Seven. These chapters collectively form the focal point of my investigation into the lived experiences of a specific population: Iraqi Kurdish migrants residing in the UK. My emphasis is particularly directed towards understanding the intricate processes of identity negotiation and navigation that shape their journeys within their new cultural realities.

Chapter Five takes the initial step in this journey by undertaking an extensive exploration of the concept of identity negotiation and navigation. Here, I delve deeply into the complex interplay between participants and this central concept, elucidating how their experiences have profoundly influenced the dynamic process of identity negotiation and navigation within the new cultural context. **Chapter Six** extends this exploration by providing a meticulous examination of the participants' migration experiences. I place particular emphasis on the role of past narratives and stories in shaping their present realities. Additionally, this chapter explicitly expounds on how the participants' encounters with othering experiences played a significant role in shaping their identity negotiation processes within the new cultural context. In **Chapter Seven**, the lens shifts towards the domain of material culture concerning participants' identity negotiation and navigation. The primary objective is to underscore the pivotal role played by various objects in shaping the identities of the participants, while also delving into how these objects facilitated and streamlined the arduous journey of migration. This carefully structured progression through the chapters explicitly highlights how identity negotiation, navigation, and the influence of othering experiences intertwine within the context of participants' migration journeys, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of their lived experiences.

To provide a clear organisational overview of the data across these chapters, the following table succinctly illustrates the arrangement:

Chapters	Themes and subthemes
Chapter Five	<p>Theme 1: Multiple cultural worlds</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Navigating multiple identities 2. Agency and dynamic nature of self-representation 3. Evolving identities 4. The illusion of the wholeness <p>Theme 2: Home and sense of belonging</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Home, identity, and sense of belonging 2. Mobility and sense of belonging <p>Theme 3: Ethnic reactivity</p>
Chapter Six	<p>Theme 1: Experiencing culture and language</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Language difficulties and cultural challenges <p>Theme 2: Othering</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ethnocentrism and stereotypes 2. Interracial othering 3. Xenophobia, racism, and the role of language 4. The effect of perceived discrimination on adaptation <p>Theme 3: The effect of perceived discrimination on adaptation</p>
Chapter Seven	<p>Theme 1: Objects as an art</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants use of artefacts and identity 2. Laurels and journal as a material culture 3. Heirlooms as memory objects <p>Theme 2: Place attachment and identity</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The power of place attachment <p>Theme 3: Clothing and identity</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Subtheme 1: Apparel, clothing, and identity <p>Theme 4: Celebrating cultural tradition</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kurdish diaspora and imagined community <p>Theme 5: Ritualising food</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Food as an ice breaker to reduce social isolation 2. Food sharing and performing identity

Table 6: The organisation of the findings chapters.

5.1.2 Introduction to Chapter Five

This chapter, the first findings chapter, presents the initial findings and aims to address the following research questions:

- How do Iraqi Kurdish migrants to the United Kingdom (re)negotiate and navigate their identities in response to their new cultural and social context?
- How do Iraqi Kurdish people define themselves in terms of nations and groups?

In the context of this research, the concept of identity has surfaced in various narratives. This chapter is dedicated to presenting the primary findings of the study in a thematic structure, focusing on three major overarching themes: (a) the existence of multiple cultural worlds, (b) home and a sense of belonging, and (c) ethnic reactivity, which are crucial components in the participants' negotiation and navigation of their identities. These themes were derived from the spoken and visual narratives provided by the participants. The participants elaborated on how they managed various aspects of their identities and overcame the fear of losing their personal identity in specific situations, all while discussing their experiences of migration. However, many participants found it challenging to define themselves or identify with a particular social group, leading to complex explanations of their identity. This complexity underscores the need for competence in defining one's sense of self, requiring individuals to negotiate and navigate between different aspects of their identity as necessary. Furthermore, the notions of 'home' and 'sense of belonging' emerged as crucial elements within the participants' stories, unveiling a distinct link between the two. Consequently, I will address them collectively to establish their interrelation concerning participant identities.

The chapter is organised as follows: in the first section, I explore the participants' experiences of negotiating and navigating their identities. I begin by discussing the participants' engagement with multiple cultural worlds to illustrate how they utilise various identity cards to negotiate their personas and adapt to their new environment (Section 5.2.1). This is followed by a subsection that delves into the participants' agency and self-representations, a theme that emerged during the data analysis stage. Then, I examine the participants' evolving identities (Section 5.2.3), and the concept of the illusion of wholeness (Section 5.2.4). Next, I shift my focus to the second theme – home and a sense of belonging. Initially, I explore the interplay between these three concerns (Section 5.3.1). This is followed by a subsection on mobility and its impact on the participants' sense of self (Section 5.3.2). Finally, in the last section (Section 5.4), I examine the participants' awareness of their ethnicity and investigate the markers of their ethnic identity.

5.2 *Multiple cultural worlds*

In this section, I will explore the multiple cultural worlds of the participants, aiming to illuminate the complexity of negotiation and navigation between different personas. The multiple narratives shared by the participants reveal fascinating stories that underscore their diverse identities. Negotiating this multiplicity varied among individuals, with some finding the process less complicated, while most struggled to adhere to a single identity. To gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, the upcoming sections and subsections will delve further into the data, starting with information about the participants' diverse identities with a particular focus on their adeptness in negotiating and manoeuvring through these various facets within the third space.

5.2.1 Navigating multiple identities

Through an examination of the participants' narratives, it becomes apparent that grasping one's identity is an intricate endeavour due to its multifaceted nature. The participants' idealised self-expression is intricately linked to the degree of agreement and negotiation among their various 'sub-selves.' Through the process of navigating between these layers, certain aspects of their identities become apparent. It is important to recall the emphasis placed on navigation in Chapter Three as it represents a strategic ability to make decisions and, within the context of this study, refers to the negotiation between multiple selves or layers of identity that individuals posit. While some identities may be readily recognisable, others require deeper exploration. Nevertheless, by examining the participants' perspectives and attentively listening to their self-perceptions, a more profound understanding emerges regarding how individuals position themselves.

Within the studied community, many participants define their identities in intricate and multifaceted ways. During the interviews, they emphasise their affiliation with numerous cultural worlds, with each 'small culture' contributing to the shaping of their complex whole (Holliday, 1999). Some participants explicitly describe their cohesive cultural identity in their own words as they recount their life stories in relation to behaviour, context, and place. They indicate that they act and behave differently in various contexts and situations, depending on the roles they assume within their respective 'small cultures' (Holliday, 1999). For instance, as previously mentioned in the preceding chapter, narrative interviews were conducted to gain insights into how the participants define themselves. When asked to introduce themselves and express their sense of identity, most research participants provided rather intricate responses, underscoring the complexity of their personas. Hana, who arrived in the United Kingdom at the age of twenty-four, has been living in the country ever since. Throughout this time, she has experienced multiple relocations driven by personal and social factors. According to her, she

has made efforts to transform her life and pursue her aspirations. Leveraging her educational accomplishments, she successfully obtained employment in various organisations. Subsequently, she translated her acquired skills and knowledge into a venture that had long been her ambition – establishing her own business. Hana characterises her identity in the following manner:

I am just an ordinary British-Kurdish female - I lived half of my life in Kurdistan and the other half in the UK. I describe myself as a mother of three children, trying her best to change herself and the world through herself [...] I have a massive responsibility because these three children will make three families in the future, and they need to be prepared for that. Who else would they look up to if there is not their mother?

(Hana – interview 1)

Hana's connection to two distinct nations, shaped by her life experiences and upbringing in Kurdistan and the UK, gives rise to a 'double' or 'dual' personality – a 'Kurdish Hana' and a 'British Hana.' While these two identities are separate, she maintains a link to Kurdistan through her ancestral roots and to the UK through her academic achievements and lifestyle. These dual national identities work in tandem to form the complete Hana. However, this alignment with two nations introduces a conflict within her self-image. On one side, she desires to be perceived as 'ordinary,' but on the other, she fully embraces her role as a devoted mother, reflecting her distinct gender identity. Additionally, she presents herself as a visionary dedicated to effecting positive change in the world, indicating her openness and deep concern for the planet. Hana's multifaceted idealised self-images vividly illustrate the intricate nature of her self-perception, requiring careful consideration. Her identity as a nurturing mother aligns with her portrayal as an exemplary role model, someone her children can admire and aspire to emulate as they grow. Rather than simply stating her identity, Hana actively strives to earn recognition.

Similarly, Saman, another participant, elucidates his diverse identities within the context of his professional pursuits. Through sharing personal anecdotes and offering crucial background details, he paints a clear picture of the various elements that constitute his identity. The following passage serves as an example of this:

I am a secondary school art teacher. In my role, I also assist two other teachers. I teach art lessons across different stages. Besides my professional teaching job, I am also an artist from Kurdistan, which is more important than my teaching job.

(Saman – interview 1)

Saman's description reveals the complex layers of his identity and how they intersect with his professional and artistic pursuits. His various roles reflect the different cultural contexts he actively engages with. Initially, Saman defines himself as a high school art teacher, emphasising his position within the education system. Additionally, he highlights his collaboration with two fellow educators, indicating his involvement in cooperative teaching endeavours. However, he places particular importance on his identity as an 'artist from Kurdistan,' underlining its personal significance, which surpasses that of his teaching profession. While he dutifully fulfils his role as a teacher, his identity as an artist carries more significant weight and holds deeper personal meaning for him. This suggests a potential tension or balance between his professional and artistic personas. Furthermore, the connection he draws between his identity as an 'artist' and his affiliation with his homeland, 'Kurdistan,' may signify a deep attachment to his place of birth and a robust national identity.

Another participant, Murad, effectively conveyed the diversity of his identity by employing a metaphorical representation. He likened his various selves – personal, social, and cultural – to the layers of an onion. This metaphor offers valuable insight into Murad's perception of his surroundings and his aspirations regarding how others perceive him. According to Murad, this metaphor holds significant symbolism, vividly portraying the multifaceted nature of his identity.

First, we are humans. Imagine you are holding an onion; we could argue that the outer layer is us (humans), the second layer you are Kurds, and the third layer you are Muslims, or we could say we are human, we are Muslims, and we are Kurds. We don't need to go any deeper, and that is enough. If we stick to the first layer (we are humans), that is enough; we can work with anyone.

(Murad – interview 1)

Murad presents an analysis of identity by using the metaphor of an onion. He suggests that at the core, all individuals are humans, represented by the outer layer of the onion. Moving inwards, he proposes two possible layers - one identifying as Kurds and another as Muslims. Additionally, the statement provides an analysis of Murad's use of language and identity construction. Murad indirectly reveals the layers of his identity by using the pronoun 'we,' allowing for a visible exploration of his core. Altman and Taylor (1973) suggest that individuals typically disclose limited information about themselves, choosing selectively what to reveal. In Murad's case, identifying as 'human' is sufficient for him to interact safely with people from diverse backgrounds. This underscores the importance of his human identity, which is intrinsic to his being and holds the greatest significance. By anchoring himself in his human identity, Murad navigates other aspects of his identity and positions himself in a safe zone, enabling him to engage with others without concern. Furthermore, Murad's cautious selection

of attributes may be linked to his professional role within his community, as he recognises that disclosing his political and religious identities could potentially harm his career. Consequently, he carefully chooses his words to avoid polarisation and division among people based on majority/minority and powerful/powerless cultural groups within his community.

In his statement, Murad's use of the first-person plural pronoun 'we' adds a fascinating dimension. It potentially signifies consensus, unity, and a shared responsibility (Verkuyten, 2014, p. 188). By including himself in the conversation, he aims to cultivate a sense of 'we-feeling⁶,' fostering individual dynamics and establishing better group relations (Verkuyten, 2014, p. 189). The utilisation of 'we' can also be connected to the dynamic interplay between power and culture. Murad constructs categories through shared consciousness and a collective identity to position himself within a specific social group and its shared worldview (Hall, 1981, pp. 23-24). This aligns with William's (1970, as cited in Sharma and Tygstrup, 2015) concept of 'structures of feeling.' In other words, Murad's choice of discourse suggests a call for diversity, particularly within the realm of politics, where 'we' denotes solidarity and cohesiveness. This viewpoint is supported by Bramley (2001, p. 260), who argues that the strategic use of 'we' is crucial in constructing the identities of politicians as group members, invoking collective identity or group membership.

In contrast to Murad's self-perceptions across various contexts, Kani's narrative centres on her position within the Kurdish community. She reflects on how her engagement in multiple projects has shaped her identity and contributed to raising awareness among fellow Kurds about the significance of values such as equality and diversity. Through highlighting her roles as an educator and activist, Kani unveils different facets of her identity.

After I arrived here, I opened five different Kurdish supplementary schools. I provided a valuable and constructive curriculum for the children and their parents. I aimed to spread self-awareness about the cultural differences between Kurdish and multicultural Britain to minimise the gap between the two cultures. Our children should know about equality and diversity and the respect we should pay to every individual regardless of skin colour, religion, and origin.

(Kani – interview 1)

In Kani's narrative, her pride, uniqueness, and sense of community are intimately intertwined with the concept of multiculturalism (Taylor, 1994). As both an organiser and an educator, she takes an active role in engaging with her community to enhance their understanding of the world. One notable initiative is the establishment of a specialised educational program

⁶ The term 'structure of feeling' describes how individuals continually interact with their social environment, highlighting the ongoing exchange between personal experiences and broader societal dynamics.

designed for children and their families. This endeavour reflects her commitment to strengthening the bond between her Kurdish heritage and British culture. Kani's intentions extend beyond mere education; she aspires to bridge the gap that some Kurdish families have created. Shielding themselves and their children from the potential impact of the cultural norms and values of the receiving society, they maintain a degree of cultural insulation. Kani's program seeks to address this challenge by offering a safe space where cultural identity can harmoniously coexist with British culture. She carefully navigates the terrain of cultural expectations, aiming to strike a balance between preserving her community's heritage and embracing the expectations of British society. In essence, Kani's identity is a tapestry woven from multiple 'threads' (Holliday, 2016), each representing a facet of her experiences and roles. Her identities are shaped by her cultural heritage, the expectations of both her community and the majority group(s), and her personal aspirations. Depending on the context, specific aspects of her identity come to the forefront, influenced by the prevailing identity discourses. This dynamic relationship between identity and agency underscores the profound role personal agency plays in shaping and representing multiple identities. By constructing narratives that encompass various dimensions of her life, Kani develops a diverse range of 'self-concepts' (Bugental and Zelen, 1950). These narratives depict fluid and dynamic personas, illustrating her sense of agency in making life choices.

To expand upon the concept of multiple selves, the following subsection explores the intricate relationship between identity and individual agency. This examination delves into how agency actively contributes to representing an individual's multifaceted self. Through this exploration, we gain a deeper insight into how participants adeptly navigate the intricacies of their identities and recognise the pivotal role they play in shaping their lived experiences.

5.2.2 Agency and dynamic nature of self-representation

Within this section, Hana, Nina, and Murad provide insights into their respective roles within family and broader societal contexts, displaying the extent of control they possess over their lives. This control is interpreted as their 'agency.' In this context, 'agency' refers to the level of power or control, be it through thoughts or actions, that an individual seizes over various aspects of their lives, including their identities. As a result, this agency brings about changes in how they perceive themselves in specific locations, across different time periods, and within different spatial dimensions (Giddens, 1984). The participants' accounts regarding agency often involve descriptions of the individual roles they assume within personal (family) and social (wider society) domains, which appear to contribute to the construction of their multi-layered identities. Furthermore, the choices they make concerning ideal identity attributes seem to be somewhat linked to the dominant roles they play within these domains. For

instance, many participants adhere to the reality of their lives, seeing themselves as responsible and accountable for others. On the other hand, for some individuals, the sense of agency arises from being subjected to the dominance of others, such as parents, and conforming to societal expectations and rules. However, the participants in this research exhibited a less straightforward process of constructing agency and representing themselves. The intricacies involved in this process overshadowed their underlying narratives. They shared personal stories that highlighted their agency and discussed their capacity to act within both private and public spheres. In certain instances, family dynamics and cultural influences created challenges surrounding the participants' sense of agency. The following extract illustrates this situation.

I hardly remember anything before I turned 32 because I believe that's where my life mainly started. When I think back before turning 32, I can't remember much because when you are not in charge of decision-making, you just don't [overthink]. You are just led rather than lead.

(Hana – interview 1)

The above story accentuates the pivotal role of agency in unlocking an individual's potential for personal growth and empowerment. It highlights the significance of agency in the process of shaping Hanan's identity and underscores the fundamental role of decision-making autonomy in forging a more fulfilling and personally meaningful life trajectory. Hanan's narrative offers a compelling illustration of the influence of agency on her identity construction. The ability to exercise agency by making decisions and taking charge of her life contributes to a profound sense of autonomy and self-determination. Moreover, the recollection of her earlier years reveals the impact of limited control over decision-making on the significance and memorability of her experiences. By expressing that she was 'led' rather than actively leading, Hanan implies a lack of agency in her past experiences. This absence of agency potentially hindered her capacity to shape her own identity and make choices that aligned with her genuine desires and aspirations. She also underwent a change in her role following her marriage, which led to a growing sense of agency and the ability to represent herself. As the following narrative highlights:

[...] after I got married, it was different because my husband was more open-minded, and I got my freedom - if I wanted to travel or do anything. He is a very nice person. He was giving me all the freedom. I can't remember that he said you must ask my permission to do anything. So, my life started by becoming more of a decision-maker, and I became more in charge of what I wanted to do.

(Hana – interview 1)

Hana intriguingly correlates her agency with the level of freedom she gained within her marriage. However, it is essential to acknowledge that these two concepts, while interconnected, hold distinct meanings and applications, even though Hana occasionally uses them interchangeably (Barlas and Obhi, 2013). In Hana's perception, agency is inherently linked with freedom. She exemplifies this through her transformation, progressing from being silenced by her parents to a position where she not only makes decisions for herself but also guides and leads her own family. Essentially, she considers her marriage as the gateway that allowed her to liberate herself from the constraints of her previous reality. Undoubtedly, the presence of an open-minded and supportive partner played a pivotal role in facilitating this transition, empowering her to assume a more active role as a decision-maker.

Similarly, Nina also delves into the concept of agency, offering her perspective that individuals can begin to exert agency once they reach a particular age, as she explains in the following story:

I didn't think of anything then because I was only ten. But, as I was getting into my teenage years, I thought my parents wanted me to be something I was not. So, they tried to bring me up in a way like, we're in the UK, but you're being brought up the same way as Kurdistan. It was like, these are our standards, and you have to meet them. It was hard to understand their ways of thinking. I thought, why can't I just be myself and live my life? It is my life. It is not yours! So, I just find it very difficult. But I was ready to listen to them.

(Nina – interview 1)

In this excerpt, Nina engages in introspection, reflecting on her experiences during her teenage years, particularly the challenges arising from navigating parental expectations and asserting her own identity. The sense of agency she experiences is significantly influenced by the constraints imposed upon her by her parents, leading to a struggle to carve out her own sense of self. As a result, she begins to feel a palpable disconnect between her parents' desires and her authentic self. The limitations placed upon her choices and actions erode her feelings of agency, ultimately impacting her sense of identity. This is evident in her poignant statement, 'they want me to be something that I'm not,' which encapsulates the internal conflict she faces as she grapples with her parents' expectations and her own evolving identity. Nina's parents hail from a conservative community and their migration to a new environment exposes them to societal norms that may differ significantly from their own. In their earnest desire to protect Nina's well-being and dignity, they adopt a closely supervising approach to her upbringing. This protective stance, while well-intentioned, creates tensions between Nina's quest for personal agency and her parents' desire to shield her from potential harm.

When I started university, I was living on my own. I could go to [town] whenever I wanted; I could do what I wanted when I wanted. But I didn't have complete freedom. I had a landline in my bedroom, and my mum called me at five on the dot to ensure that I was in the flat, and then she would repeat eleven times. So, I couldn't leave anyway. But during the day, it was nice. I was going to university, going to town, and going for breakfast with my friends.

(Nina – Interview 1)

In this excerpt, Nina's experiences during her university years offer valuable insights into her dynamic negotiation of identity within the context of newfound independence, free from parental influence. The transition to university marks a significant phase of identity exploration and self-discovery for Nina. Embracing the freedom and autonomy that accompanies living independently, she seizes the opportunity to make her own choices and engage in activities that resonate with her personal preferences and desires. For instance, actively participating in outings to town and enjoying breakfast gatherings with friends, Nina demonstrates her newfound agency in shaping her social interactions and daily routines. By exercising her autonomy in decision-making and embracing the opportunities presented by university life, Nina gradually disentangles herself from the influence of parental expectations, cultivating a heightened sense of independence and self-determination. She also recognises the enduring impact of her parents' expectations and concerns on her life. The regular scheduled phone calls from her mother serve as a constant reminder of their ongoing presence and monitoring. This parental oversight has had a notable effect on Nina's sense of identity, imposing certain boundaries and limitations on her independence. Moreover, the negotiation of identity becomes apparent in her reflections on this situation. Skilfully navigating the delicate tension between her desire for autonomy and her parents' need for reassurance and safety, Nina grapples with questions of personal agency and the delicate balance between asserting her own identity and maintaining strong familial connections.

My brothers could go out whenever they wanted, they could do whatever they liked, but I wasn't like that. When we left Manchester, everything changed. Our lives have been transformed. Now I have more freedom and am in control of my choices. I can go to a different country alone, and she is fine. I went on holiday on my own and went away for four days. So, we have come a long way.

(Nina – follow-up interview)

The above story sheds light on a poignant reality prevalent in many Kurdish families, exposing the pervasive gender inequality and societal norms that affect both men and women. This traditional Kurdish framework, deeply ingrained in the structure of Kurdish tribes, often marginalises and restricts the visibility of women within the community (Alizadeh *et al.*,

2022). Within this construct, men are perceived as superior or heroic figures, while women are unjustly portrayed as villains and deemed incapable. The analysis also underscores Nina's parents' adherence to this traditional framework in their parenting approach, granting their sons more freedom while curbing their daughter's movements and autonomy. This observation serves as a stark reminder of the gender disparities and unequal treatment that persist within her family dynamic. Further, this accentuates that the parents' ideology is significantly influenced by cultural traditions and the belief that women need to be protected from anticipated misstep. Additionally, the analysis appropriately acknowledges the influence of geographic mobility on Nina's perspective and life experiences. Her relocation from Manchester to a Kentish town has profoundly influenced her understanding of navigating multiple realities. The movement has also manifested a positive effect on Nina's mother, fostering increased open-mindedness. Consequently, this shift has bestowed upon Nina a heightened sense of agency, granting her greater freedom and autonomy to make decisions for herself. The transformative effects of this change are poignantly illustrated in the following excerpt:

After my father passed away, I even changed my university course. My brothers changed their universities, and I said, why not me? Why is everyone doing what they like? Why not me? So, I left the pharmacy degree and applied to another university to study architecture, the course I always wanted to do, but I couldn't because of my parents.

(Nina – follow-up interview)

Following a series of challenges in expressing herself and pursuing her genuine interests, Nina's journey took a momentous turn after the passing of her father. This pivotal transition marked a period of profound introspection and newfound determination for Nina. Liberated from the constraints of others' expectations, she emerged from her previous state of conformity and embarked on a quest for the equality and autonomy she had long yearned for. However, this desire for personal freedom within the traditional Kurdish cultural context, particularly among older generations, poses a challenge to prevailing societal norms that often deem certain actions, especially for women, as inappropriate. Nina's upbringing within a traditional family setting constrained her autonomy in making career decisions. At first, she complied with her parents' desires and opted to pursue a pharmacy degree, aligning with their aspiration for her to become a pharmacist. However, this decision imposed an identity on her that did not resonate with her personality, as her parents played a significant role in ascribing a specific identity to her. While studies have underscored the importance of family influence and support in students' academic success and satisfaction (see Koçak *et al.*, 2021), Nina perceived this dynamic as problematic. Through her struggles and unwavering determination, she eventually harnessed her strength and amplified her voice. Her poignant question, 'why is

everyone doing what they like? Why not me?’ epitomises her resolve to assert her own desires and pursue her dreams. Consequently, she made the courageous decision to follow her passion for architecture, aligning her academic trajectory with her genuine aspirations and avowed identities (Jackson, 1999).

Another participant, Murad, highlights how engaging in multiple roles can facilitate the development of his diverse identity and empower his agency.

The Covid-19 restrictions really changed how we lived our lives. I’m naturally an active person, so I don’t need much sleep – five to six hours is plenty for me. My day usually starts around seven in the morning. About eight years ago, my wife got sick and had to have surgery for a brain tumour. Luckily, the surgery went well, but then a year later, she developed bipolar disorder, which has been tough for both of us. My kids are older now, but back then, I used to get up at seven to make sure they were ready for school, had breakfast, and all that. After dropping them off, I’d be back home by around eight-thirty or nine and spend an hour checking my emails and waking up my wife. Dealing with bipolar can be hard, especially during her down times when she doesn’t feel like doing anything at all – not even eating or getting out of bed. So, I’d spend almost half an hour trying to get her up, making sure she ate something, and taking her for walks like the doctor suggested. I did this for about five years. After that, it was time for me to do some shopping and cook dinner. Then, in the afternoon, I’d pick up the kids from school, feed them, and take care of their stuff. Later in the evening, I’d go to meetings that would go on till about nine or ten o’clock. It was a busy schedule, but I didn’t mind it because I saw it as my duty as a husband and a father. And I found joy in taking care of my family.

(Murad – interview 1)

During the challenging period of the Covid-19 pandemic and even before, Murad faced a demanding schedule that required him to fulfil multiple roles and responsibilities as a father, husband, and professional. His unwavering dedication to protecting his family led to a shift in his roles. He transitioned from being a caring husband to his ailing wife to becoming a responsible father, all while fulfilling his professional obligations. To ensure his children’s well-being amidst the uncertainty surrounding their mother’s health, Murad took on the role of an active agent and therapist, prioritising their physical and psychological needs and providing them with a sense of protection. By navigating between these different roles, Murad constructed his social reality and developed evolving identities that responded to the changing demands of his family. Murad’s situation presented challenges in terms of maintaining agency and control over various situations and circumstances. Through his actions and responsibilities, he assumed agency by taking on what needed to be done to provide reassurance and security for his children in the face of their family’s circumstances. The use of

the pronoun 'I' and the possessive adjective 'my' in Murad's narrative signifies his self-reflection and self-representation, indicating the personal attention, devotion, and experiences he encountered throughout his journey (Mead, 1934). This aligns with the concept of agency as proposed by William James (1890 cited in Leary, 1990), emphasising the individual's presence, autonomy, and impact. Murad's agency allowed him to actively shape and respond to the challenges he faced, ultimately guiding his actions and decisions in the best interest of his family's well-being.

So far, the participants' introspections in this section provide valuable insights into the interplay between agency and identity negotiation within family relationships. This perspective highlights the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach that considers the social and familial contexts shaping the evolving self of individuals like Nina, Hana, and Murad. The content presented makes it clear that 'agency' and 'identity' are intertwined yet distinct concepts. This finding is crucial, as previous studies have often overlooked the interplay and development of agency and identity in individual growth (see Feryok, 2012; Trent, 2013; Miller, 2016). Additionally, the identities that participants shape through their agency are dynamic and continually evolving, as demonstrated by the data. To delve more deeply into identity negotiation, the next section will examine the fluid nature of identity characteristics.

5.2.3 Evolving identity

Based on the research findings, it is evident that the participants exhibit 'fluid' and 'dynamic identities,' a widely discussed topic in the literature (Bauman, 2004; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Delahunty, 2013). However, what sets them apart is their unique perspective on themselves and their awareness of the evolving nature of their identities. As explored in Chapter Three, individuals' identities undergo changes, influenced by their self-perception (Verschueren, 2008), and the desired self-image is shaped by how others perceive them and how they aspire to be seen by others. Essentially, the participants are engaged in negotiating their ideal selves, which involves both their self-perception and external influences within the realms of desire. For instance, Omer's multifaceted identities illustrate a shift from one persona to another depending on the context and circumstances. In our discussion, Omer shared personal anecdotes from his early childhood, providing insight into various dimensions of his identity and offering candid reflections on his self-perception. Throughout his narratives, he highlighted the dynamic nature of his religious and national identities, recounting multiple instances where these aspects of his identity underwent transformations and change. These shifts, as he articulated, had profound implications for his interactions with

others and his overall sense of personal well-being. The following excerpt exemplifies his reflections on these experiences:

In the past, I held strong religious beliefs and considered the idea of establishing a new Kurdish government based on Sharia law⁷. I firmly believed that our nation needed to become an Islamic state to achieve freedom and independence. However, after some time, I underwent a significant shift in my perspective and came to the realisation that my previous stance was mistaken. I now understand that it is possible for our country to be independent without being governed by Islamic religious principles. My views have evolved, and I no longer see the necessity of religious influence in shaping our nation's governance.

(Omer – interview 1)

In this statement, Omer discusses his previously strong religious beliefs and the impact they had on his political views. He expresses his belief in the necessity of establishing a Kurdish government based on Sharia law, associating it with the attainment of freedom and the goal of achieving an independent Kurdish state. However, he re-evaluates his position and acknowledges the fallibility of his earlier perspective. He realises that it is possible to pursue Kurdish independence without the influence of Islamic religion. Furthermore, Omer's capacity for introspection and the transformative nature of his ideological outlook exemplifies the dynamic nature of identity, illustrating how individuals can reassess and revise their beliefs based on new information and personal growth. Omer's ability to critically analyse his own views demonstrates his agency in shaping his identity and challenging prevailing ideologies. Through this reflection, he contributes to the scholarly discourse on the complex interplay between religion, politics, and identity (Safran, 2008). His journey highlights the importance of critical thinking and open-mindedness in navigating personal and societal belief systems, emphasising the potential for individuals to redefine their identities through self-reflection and intellectual growth. In connection to the previous account, Omer expressed a desire to modify a specific part of his name, namely a nickname that he adopted during a period when his religious identity held prominence. This nickname serves as an identifier of his familial affiliation, Omer (interview 1) claims 'I even think about changing my family name (not his surname)⁸ because I am not religious and don't want to hold something that no longer represents me.'

⁷ Sharia law, Arabic **sharī'ah** is a set of law that lays down governing principles to help people. Otherwise stated it is God's will for humankind.

⁸ In Kurdish culture, people are recognised by their name followed by the geographical location (e.g., Talabani, Barzani, and so on) or a more sophisticated family name (e.g., sheikh, mala, sayid), which is linked to the degree of the religious affiliation of the family. Thus, people identify themselves by their family names or birthplace to gain recognition and respect.

Name changing is a common practice within migrant communities, serving as a marker of identity transformation and indicating a desire for affiliation with host communities (Bursell, 2012; Khosravi, 2012). Altering one's name, whether partially or entirely, carries significant meaning and reflects a profound shift in one's identity. It can also serve to differentiate oneself and address potentially stigmatised social identities (Bursell, 2012). In the case of Omer, his contemplation of changing a portion of his name is likely linked to the transformative journey he has undergone in terms of his religious beliefs. As he no longer identifies as a devout Muslim, his current nickname, which carries strong religious connotations, no longer resonates with his evolving sense of self. Omer believes that by contemplating a name change, certain aspects of his identity with religion enable him to embrace a more meaningful sense of self. During subsequent interviews, I explored the motivations behind his decision and examined the potential transformative impact that altering his nickname could have. Omer provided the following response to these inquiries.

I didn't obliterate my nickname, especially on social media. My decision is based on my perception of culture. In Kurdish society, nicknames concerning family names and tribes are trendy; people use them to gain respect and recognition. As an academic, I have issues with some cultural norms. If I am the one who criticises, others might ask, why do you talk about something while you repeat the same mistake? I want to be the person who changes this tradition and establishes a new structure within Kurdish society. Otherwise, my great-grandfather was a scholar who had written many books about Islamic law, criticism, rhetoric, astronomy, and mathematics. So, there is nothing to be ashamed of, and I feel proud to be a member of such a prosperous family.

For Omer, culture dominates individuals' identities within Kurdish society, and some become victims of such domination, while others exploit cultural norms for personal gain, such as garnering respect and recognition. Omer, with his academic background, aspires to challenge and ultimately eliminate harmful cultural practices. He seeks to avoid perpetuating mistakes rooted in tradition. Concurrently, he grapples with the fear of facing criticism, questioning why he discusses cultural issues while seemingly adhering to them, such as using a nickname for both social and academic purposes. Omer's narratives in both interviews reveal the complexity and uncertainty in his views and beliefs, which can shape and reshape his identity. These narratives hint at contradictions and denials, with the first interview highlighting his desire to change his name to disassociate from certain ideologies, while the follow-up interview presents a denial of this intention. This denial reflects how one's ideologies and, consequently, identities evolve based on experiences, contexts, internal and external influences, and principles. In a similar vein, Ari, shares his evolving sense of identity and the challenges he faced in defining himself at different stages of his life.

To me, what constitutes one's identity is the beliefs, values, cultural norms, experiences, and memories that make up one's subjective self. Failing to adhere to what is expected and abnormal is a starting point in destroying who you are. Therefore, we have to be sensitive about our existence, and once we know how to deal with these matters in life, we are more likely to develop and create continuous and flexible self-respect and dignity.

(Ari – interview 1)

In this statement, Ari offers profound reflections on the concept of identity and its multifaceted nature. He posits that an individual's identity is a product of various interwoven elements, encompassing beliefs, values, cultural norms, experiences, and memories. Ari underscores the pivotal role of conformity to societal expectations in the preservation of one's identity, suggesting that deviating from societal norms could potentially jeopardise one's sense of self. This perspective underscores the impact of societal norms on identity formation and how they can influence an individual's self-perception. Furthermore, Ari highlights the importance of cultivating a 'mindful self' in relation to one's existence and the way one confronts life's challenges, drawing upon the concept of continuous and adaptable self-respect and dignity. This underscores the critical role of self-awareness and the ability to navigate life's intricacies in maintaining a robust and flexible sense of 'social' and cultural 'identity' as expounded by social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and contemporary research (Adarves-Yorno *et al.*, 2020).

Getting confused about some aspects of your life is not complicated or impossible. For example, once I arrived here, I began to question myself, who am I? I didn't spend a day and asked about my values, my roles in society, and my passion and spiritual beliefs. I have experienced a lot of grief in life, I don't want to get into that in detail, but once you go through significant life changes, these questions will interfere with your daily life. For example, you feel you are worthless and empty, and once you have identified these, you realise that something is wrong and needs changing. Shortly after that, you select personal characteristics, keep the ones that define you, and dispose of the others that go against your beliefs and values.

(Ari – interview 1)

Ari's reflective experiences have deepened his understanding of the components that form his identity and the qualities he should either embrace or discard to align with the roles and expected behaviours in his new environment (Badura, 2018; Selby, 2021). As he delved into this journey of self-discovery, Ari traversed through layers of his non-essential self, leading to moments of self-realisation and self-presentation where his true essence emerged. During this transformative period in his life, he grappled with fundamental questions about his values, societal roles, and spiritual beliefs, prompting a profound examination of his identity. These inquiries were driven by significant life changes and challenges he had faced. As he continued

to delve deeper, Ari confronted feelings of worthlessness and emptiness, serving as signals that inner changes were necessary. In response to these realisations, Ari embarked on a deliberate process of selecting and preserving personal characteristics that synchronised with his evolving sense of self. Simultaneously, he shed aspects that no longer aligned with his core beliefs and values. This journey exemplifies the concept of evolving identity, where individuals engage in self-questioning and exploration, particularly during life transitions or crises. Ari's experience parallels Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, where individuals grapple with identity issues and strive to synthesise their evolving identities (Erikson, 1950; Erikson, 1968). Overall, Ari's narrative showcases the significance of introspection and adaptation in shaping one's evolving sense of self. Like Ari, Nina's journey of identity transformation unfolded gradually and seamlessly, signifying a steady evolution and transformation of her identity. The following story illustrates this:

I was brought up in a family where religion was important. So, I went to an Islamic school when I started secondary. Also, I used to wear a hijab. I loved the experience; I enjoyed learning new things about religion, and [I wanted to be] surrounded by people who share the same beliefs. But when I look back, I feel it was toxic because other people tell you – my friends, that every Jew is horrible; every English person is drunk.

(Nina – interview 1)

Nina's upbringing was firmly rooted in the Islamic faith, with early exposure to the fundamental beliefs of Islam. Her family's decision to enrol her in an Islamic school during her secondary education further reinforced her cultural background and provided her with a sense of belonging among like-minded peers, particularly Muslim girls. Nina regarded this experience as enjoyable and appreciated the camaraderie within her community. However, her perspective on religion underwent a transformation as she matured into adulthood, particularly as she no longer found satisfaction, security, and happiness in associating solely with individuals who sought contentment and happiness at the expense of others. Through encountering multiple incidents and being at the centre of various situations, Nina began to re-evaluate her immediate environment and question her own identity. Interacting with individuals who negatively influenced her behaviour and triggered aggression towards other communities became increasingly uncontrollable. Consequently, she developed a judgmental attitude, and her ideology evolved to a point where she started stereotyping people from different communities based on their appearances and the assumptions others made about them (e.g., forming generalised beliefs such as viewing all Jews as horrible and all English people as drunk). However, reflecting on her opinions and behaviours became a catalyst for a new beginning, enabling her to redefine the purpose of her existence. By acknowledging these issues, she took steps to distance herself from individuals who negatively impacted her

ideology, prompting her to re-evaluate her religious beliefs and personal identity. The repercussions of these experiences were evident in the transformation that occurred in her religious convictions. Consequently, her affiliation with Islam diminished, and she became more open and receptive toward the faith and religion of others. This shift in perspective highlights the role of personal empowerment in shaping various aspects of their identity, as Nina emphasises: ‘In the end, it was my own choices and decisions that influenced the path I chose to walk, both in terms of my religious beliefs and how I perceive myself in relation to others.’ She then expands on her views about her religious identity as follows:

I think I’m very religious; others probably say no because I don’t pray, wear a headscarf, or fast. But to me, religion is more spiritual and more about your intention and communication with God [...]. There isn’t an hour that goes by that I don’t say thank you so much for everything that I have and my family, and please protect us. You know, these are all things I do in my heart. I believe in respecting people and nicely treating those I encounter in my life. I try not to be judgmental; I find all these things so important than, you know, praying five times a day or wearing a headscarf.

(Nina – interview 1)

Nina’s affiliation with Islam remains intact, however, what has undergone transformation are the fundamental beliefs that she was raised with or inherited from her parents. For her, engaging in practices such as praying five times a day, fasting during Ramadan, or wearing a hijab – a headscarf, is no longer an obligation but a matter of personal choice. She distinguishes between one’s spiritual and religious practices, viewing them as separate entities. Following Islam and adhering to its practices do not automatically make her feel sacred and religious. In essence, Nina has created a distinct space, a realm away from the influence of others, where she connects with God in a way that resonates deeply with her individual spirituality. For her, the subtle changes in her beliefs and perspectives did not occur abruptly rather, they gradually took root through a prolonged internal struggle, culminating in a transformative shift in her identity – one characterised by a newfound respect for the rights of others. This transformation is evident in the following narrative:

I believed I could never be friends with somebody who lost their virginity before marriage, but I was stupid because things happen. So, people are caught, and it is none of your business. So, why should I be judging people based on this silly thing? But I don’t have these mindsets anymore. I have learned much from [other] people in my work culture.

(Nina – follow-up interview)

Nina’s choice of friends was previously influenced by her religious and cultural beliefs. She held the belief that having a friend who was not chaste or had lost their virginity was

unacceptable. This perspective was deeply rooted in Kurdish culture, which considers the loss of virginity as morally wrong and contrary to the fundamental tenets of the Islamic religion. As a result, Nina's perception of others became influenced by her religious and cultural beliefs, leading to stereotypical thinking and a closed-minded outlook towards those from different backgrounds. In such an environment, everything was viewed as inappropriate or forbidden. However, her experiences of working in a multicultural environment and engaging in intercultural interactions gradually broadened her understanding. As a result, she began to adopt new ways of thinking and mentally developed new strategies for interacting with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. This process led to increased 'intercultural competence' (Bednarz, 2010; Bennett, 2009), allowing her to be more open and accepting of others' differences. These changes have been observed by her family and friends, and Nina herself postulates the following:

I know I have changed. I've just grown as people grow; you grow out of things and adapt to new things. So, I think that's the fact that I've become more carefree, and I'm more tolerant. I judge less; people still in my life from back then have noticed too. A Kurdish friend has known him for about 10 to 15 years. For the past 7-8 years, I lost contact with him, and we would still like Facebook friends and Instagram friends, but we weren't talking, while before, we used to talk all the time. Towards the end of last year, we started communicating [...] He was like, oh my God! Are you still the same [...] you were 15 years ago? I remember back then; everything was like no-no! I can't do this because it's shameful, but now you're different.

(Nina – follow-up interview)

The 'small cultures' (Holliday, 1999) that Nina was exposed to, such as her family and school culture, were constrained and influenced by larger cultural frameworks, such as Kurdish culture and Islamic culture. The beliefs instilled in her by her parents and those she interacted with limited her opportunities to explore alternative perspectives and understandings. Being a member of multiple small cultures contributed to a narrowed understanding of the outside world, as her experiences were primarily shaped by these close-knit environments. Further, the impact of her family's cultural traditions and religious beliefs played a significant role in shaping Nina's identity to the point where she perceived everything outside these boundaries as unacceptable and inadmissible. However, as she began to critically examine and question some of the cultural practices and religious information passed down to her, her beliefs and personality underwent transformation. Over time and through different experiences, her religious beliefs, and certain aspects of her personality, such as her tolerance level and sense of being carefree, evolved. These changes have contributed to the emergence of a different person both socially and culturally. Nina's exposure to new ideas and perspectives has expanded her understanding, enabling her to embrace a more open and adaptable approach

to her beliefs and interactions with others. As a result, she has developed into an individual with a broader worldview, capable of embracing diversity and change. On a similar line, Hana also experienced identity change. However, unlike Omer and Nina, Hana's religious identity has become an essential aspect of her life after a long-lasting battle within her inner self.

In the last seven years, I started to understand my religion better. I used to pray because I was told to pray. I used to read the Quran because I was told to, but I never knew why praying or reading the Quran is good. But things are different, and religion shapes who I am. For example, this morning when I came here, I played Surah al Kahif⁹ twice while doing my work because it is Friday, and I prayed and said, 'allahoma nawarli ma bayna jom3atayen' [Oh God, light me between the two Fridays]. I never knew to do this before.

(Hana – interview 1)

Due to the influence of family traditions, Hana initially practised her religion without fully grasping the fundamental beliefs of Islam, as she was compelled to do so by her parents. From a young age, she was instructed and obligated to pray and read the Quran, yet she lacked a profound understanding of the reasons behind these practices. In contrast to Nina's experience, Hana's parents granted her more freedom of choice in matters related to her religious practices. They never enforced the wearing of a hijab or attendance at an Islamic school during her younger years, instead supporting her in making her own decisions. This atmosphere of freedom allowed Hana to explore her faith and develop a personal and emotional connection to her religion, leading her to find answers to the conceptualised questions she had about her faith. As a result of this journey, Hana's tolerance level has grown, and her ideology regarding the practice of her religion has evolved over time. Her perception of what it means to be a devout Muslim has shifted, transforming her beliefs, and significantly impacting her life. Subsequently, her narrative transitions to discuss the changes in her personality and how she perceives herself within a particular social context. The following excerpt exemplifies this transformation:

If you [had] conducted this interview with me ten years ago, you would have seen a different person sitting in front of you and talking entirely differently. But I'm massively changed by setting up this business and getting myself out of my shell. I have changed because I've realised and reached a stage where my values as Kurdish and British are the same, [in fact] what matters is your values as a human. So, once you realise you have come to that stage, you know that it's what you care about being a human being and respecting whoever you come across as who they are. So, you just find all the values are the same.

(Hana – interview 1)

⁹ According to the hadith by prophet Muhammed, reciting Surat al Kahif on Friday help you to earn great blessing from Allah [God].

Through her life experiences, Hana has gained a deeper sense of self-awareness, contributing to the development of her evolving identities. The journey of building her own business has been instrumental in fostering her autonomy and personal growth. As a result, her ideology has undergone a transformation, shifting from a focus on bi/hyphenated-national identities, such as being British and Kurdish, to embracing and respecting the existence of others. This change in her identity has had a profound impact on how Hana perceives and interacts with others. Her shift in identity has also positively affected her self-perception, leading to improved self-efficacy. Additionally, her role as a mother has served as another catalyst for re-evaluating her sense of self and identity. In Hana's own words:

My children changed me into the best; they make me feel that I have a massive responsibility because these three children will make three families in the future. So, they must be prepared for that, and who else would they look to if there's not their mother?

(Hana – follow-up interview)

The data presented in this section suggests that the participants in the study exhibit multiple identities, engaging with various categories and transitioning between them depending on the context, situation, time, and spatial dimensions. This observation presents a complex and dynamic understanding of identity, where individuals manifest different facets of themselves in response to diverse circumstances. This finding contrasts with the outcomes of a previous investigation conducted in my BA dissertation (Mahmud, 2016) on 'non-native' English lecturers. In that study, the participants tended to make sense of themselves through a particular category that they self-identified with. This discrepancy underscores the variability of identity constructions across distinct research contexts, highlighting the nuanced nature of identity formation and representation. Importantly, the process of acclimatising to a specific identity was not straightforward for the participants in this study. They encountered moments of confusion and bewilderment, leading to what I refer to as 'the illusion of wholeness' (Ewing, 1990). This phenomenon manifests when individuals grapple with which identities to embrace and which to discard, indicating the intricate nature of identity negotiation. By delving deeper into the notion of the 'illusionary self,' this research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dynamics involved in identity construction and expression within the group under investigation.

5.3 The illusion of wholeness

In the previous section, it was evident that the participants displayed a multitude of self-representations that varied in different contexts and were subject to rapid changes. Building upon this observation, this section seeks to strengthen the argument by emphasising that the participants did not perceive their selves as static and fixed entities. Instead, they experienced

a displacement of self, giving rise to what I term 'different selves,' which emerged in response to diverse situational definitions. Consequently, individuals encountered complexity and dilemmas when attributing specific identities, leading to what I refer to as the 'illusion of wholeness' (Ewing, 1990). The notion of 'illusion' in this context refers to the perplexity some participants faced in their quest for self-identification. On the other hand, 'wholeness' pertains to an individual's self-definition and the perception of certain experiences as forming a cohesive and integrated whole (Ewing, 1990, p. 252). Despite not being consciously aware of these shifts, I contend that many participants purposefully navigated these changes, displaying a level of awareness of the ongoing transformative process. This proposition is substantiated by the presence of such shifts in the narratives of multiple participants, lending support to the notion that these changes were intentional and reflective. The research participants in this study openly shared stories that revealed their encounters with identity confusion. A notable example is Omer, who disclosed intriguing stories about the transformations in his self-representation, shifting from a symbolic and unchanging whole to a collection of distinct 'selves' (Goffman, 1959). Omer eloquently articulated:

In the past, I held the belief that my wife should wear a niqab or burka, and as a result, I compelled her to do so. However, over the course of several years of extensive research and reading, my perspectives on religion have undergone significant transformation, leading to changes in my own beliefs and attitudes.

(Omer – interview 1)

Omer's religious beliefs exerted a significant influence on his behaviour, particularly within his family culture where he assumed a dominant role and sought to control their decisions, exemplified by his insistence on his wife wearing a 'burka.' However, Omer's faith did not remain static and unyielding; it underwent changes and shifts, possibly due to external influences or demographic changes. The inconsistencies observed in Omer's self-perceptions might be associated with discrepancies and contradictions within the cultural system to which he belongs. Moreover, his transformation from a religious to an unspiritual stance can be attributed to various factors. He has encountered numerous unpleasant situations where his identity was marginalised and subjected to categorisation as an outsider by the people with whom he interacted. These experiences likely played a role in shaping his evolving sense of self and contributing to the changes in his religious outlook. The following extract exemplifies this process of transformation:

Deciding to make a radical change can be challenging, as it often means facing resistance and criticism from others. People may see you as a 'devil' and distance themselves from you. In such a situation, it's natural to feel a sense of loss and even loneliness as relationships are affected. However, it's

crucial to remember that personal growth and self-discovery often come with the cost of losing some connections. Embracing change and staying true to your beliefs can lead to a deeper understanding of yourself and a more authentic life. While some relatives may disapprove, prioritising your own values over external expectations can be empowering. Ultimately, you are not created to please others, but to find your own purpose and happiness. Following what you believe is right for you can lead to a sense of liberation and inner fulfilment. Embracing this journey, though challenging, can lead to personal growth, resilience, and a stronger sense of self.

(Omer – follow-up interview)

In the narrative above, Omer underscores the daunting challenges and potential repercussions associated with making profound life changes, particularly concerning one's personal beliefs and values. He employs the metaphorical use of the term 'devil' to illustrate how society may perceive and stigmatise individuals who deviate from established norms during this transformative journey. Omer also highlights that such decisions can trigger resistance and criticism, leading to social isolation and strained relationships. Nevertheless, Omer firmly believes that embracing change and staying true to one's convictions can lead to significant personal growth and self-discovery. He suggests that the sacrifices made, including the potential loss of certain connections, can be justified when it results in a deeper understanding of oneself. Despite potential disapproval from family members or others, Omer asserts that prioritising values over external expectations can be an empowering act, enabling individuals to chart their own path. Omer's journey of personal belief transformation, particularly regarding religion, has been far from smooth, giving rise to what psychologists describe as an 'identity crisis' (Gladden, 2017) and 'identity moratorium' (Marcia, 1966, 1980). The intricate interplay of socio-cultural factors and the quest for self-expression have led Omer to navigate various facets of his identity. However, this exploration has left him grappling with unresolved issues, resulting in doubt and uncertainties that cast a shadow over his self-concept. These challenges have instilled in him a sense of suspicion regarding his own existence. The following narrative illuminates these complex dynamics:

When I first arrived in the Netherlands, I experienced a profound internal struggle that left me feeling uneasy, restless, and plagued by troubling dreams. This inner turmoil prompted me to engage in a process of deep introspection, questioning the fundamental tenets of my beliefs and the significance of my prayers to God. After a lengthy and introspective battle, I eventually found the answers I had been seeking. Consequently, I made the decision to let go of the practices of prayer and fasting. I no longer hold onto the belief that God requires me to constantly stand before him, imploring for forgiveness five times a day.

(Omer – interview 1)

Omer's journey of identity transition was profoundly influenced by various interconnected factors. First and foremost, his relentless pursuit of knowledge and commitment to continuous learning played a pivotal role in his exploration. Engaging in extensive reading and actively seeking answers to his probing questions became instrumental in shaping his evolving beliefs. Moreover, his physical relocation to the Netherlands proved to be a significant catalyst for his identity transformation. Even before leaving his hometown, Omer's religious convictions had already begun to wane, but it was in the new and unfamiliar environment of the Netherlands where the process of transitioning his identity became more pronounced. The context of being in a Western society, where Islam constitutes a minority religion, also exerted its influence on Omer's journey. The less frequent and pervasive practices and presence of Islam in this new context afforded Omer greater freedom to delve deeply into the aspects of his beliefs that troubled him and felt incongruent. As a result, his beliefs and relationship with religion underwent a profound shift. Omer no longer adheres to the belief in Allah, and he has relinquished the practices of daily prayers performed five times a day and fasting during Ramadan. During the follow-up interview, Omer's emotional intensity was palpable as he passionately discussed the evolving nature of his relationship with God and the narrative surrounding his transformed beliefs. This process of identity transition highlights the complexity of the human experience and the interplay of internal and external factors that shape one's sense of self and beliefs. In Omer's own words, his experiences serve as a testament to the transformative nature of his journey and the profound impact it had on his beliefs and religious practices.

I went through a long and tough time where I questioned everything. I used to talk to God for hours every day. But I felt that the story of Kaaba was made up and not real. To me, God is inside me, so praying didn't match my beliefs about God. I don't regret my decision; I think religion is more about culture than true spirituality.

(Omer – follow-up interview)

The narrative provided presents significant insights into Omer's introspective journey and his perspective on certain aspects of religion. His contemplation of God's existence and his scepticism towards the story of Kaaba reveal his internal struggle and his belief that religious narratives are human constructions. These thoughts have significant implications for Omer's sense of self and his evolving identity. His introspection has led to increased self-awareness and a deeper understanding of his beliefs and values. This process has empowered him to develop a stronger sense of self-efficacy and a clearer sense of purpose. Additionally, Omer's perspective on religion as a cultural practice may be influenced by his political background and the intricate interplay between religion and politics in the Kurdistan region. In a similar vein, Nina also grapples with the conflict between her family upbringing and the values she

has acquired through her education in the Western context. This clash of ideologies shapes Nina's experience of identity formation.

I hated my life because my parents raised me with a different culture and belief system. When I was young, I was prohibited from going out for a coffee or a meal with my friends. Then I went to university and realised that going to a coffee shop with friends is normal. It is an entirely different environment and culture where things are tolerable. I was not allowed to go out with my friends at home because I was told that everything is 'haram,' everything is 'ayeb.'¹⁰

(Nina – interview 1)

Nina's upbringing was characterised by a highly disciplined environment shaped by diverse cultural and religious beliefs. Within her family culture, strict rules were enforced to protect her from potential harm, leading to restrictions on socialising with friends outside the household. From her parents' perspective, such interactions were viewed as deviant and contrary to cultural and religious norms. These limitations significantly impacted her emotional well-being, resulting in feelings of isolation from her peers. The terms 'haram' and 'ayeb' used in the narrative denote a stringent religious or moral framework governing her upbringing, signifying actions deemed forbidden or shameful within her cultural context. The blurred boundaries between cultural and religious norms also contributed to stereotyping British culture. Understanding the underlying motivations behind her parents' decisions posed a challenge for Nina, as she elaborates:

I always asked myself why I couldn't be free like others. I used to cry and question my parents' decisions, but now, I look back and would probably do the same thing if I had kids. I would let them concentrate on their studies instead of participating in other nonsense.

(Nina – follow up interview)

Upon examining the narratives shared by Nina in the preceding section, which shed light on the impact of parental control on her identity, in the above story, it becomes evident that she experienced a gradual process of understanding her parents' decisions and the constraints they imposed during her formative years. She candidly expresses a sense of longing for freedom and a desire to engage in activities that were considered normal for others. Nevertheless, through a protracted struggle, a notable transformation has taken place in her belief system and sense of self. She has evolved from a young individual who constantly challenged and disagreed with her parents' upbringing and choices to a responsible adult. The

¹⁰ Haram is an Arabic word that means forbidden in the Islamic religion, while 'ayba' is an expression that means a defect or abandons, and it is usually culturally bound.

phrase 'would probably do the same thing if I had kids' demonstrates the individual's empathy and understanding towards their parents' decisions. It reflects a sense of realisation and acceptance of the reasons behind their parents' actions, indicating a shift in perspective from defiance to appreciation for parental choices. The contrast between the past and the present is evident in the transition from 'I used to cry and question my parents' decisions' to 'now, I look back.' This juxtaposition underscores the individual's evolving perspective and emotional maturity. The use of past tense and the phrase 'used to' signifies a significant change in attitude and behaviour over time.

Based on the research findings so far, it becomes evident that participants in the study have faced challenges in establishing a clear and cohesive understanding of their cultural identity (Hall, 1990; Jenkins, 2004). Their persistent efforts to present their identities coherently, they encountered confusion regarding which aspects of their personas to display, and where to manifest specific elements of their identities. This observation aligns with Hall's conception of cultural identity as a process of 'becoming' (Hall, 1990, p. 225; Jenkins, 2004, p. 17), and highlights that the notion of a 'wholeness of identity' is indeed an illusion (Ewing, 1990). Ewing (1990, p. 158) expounds that individual selves are in a continuous state of reconstruction and evolution, undergoing shifts due to both internal and external stimuli, wherein individuals, in this case, the participants, adapt and assume new and diverse identities. The stimuli delineated by Ewing (1999) are notably salient for the participants in this study and may resonate with others who have experienced migration, leading to the development of 'multiple, fractured, dual, shifting, and [hybridized]' (Bhatia, 2008, p. 302) identities while grappling with asymmetrical socio-political perspectives and discourses in their new environment.

As the research findings shed light on the multifaceted nature of participants' cultural identities and their dynamic responses to cultural norms, it is apparent that their struggles in establishing a cohesive understanding of identity resonate with the fluidity and complexity often associated with the concept of cultural identity. This dynamic perspective aligns with Hall's notion of identity as a continual process of 'becoming' and challenges the idea of a fixed 'wholeness of identity.' These complexities in identity formation, observed in this study, offer valuable insights into how individuals adapt and assume diverse identities, particularly in the context of migration and the asymmetrical socio-political perspectives they encounter in their new environment. The findings in this section so far provide insights into participants' divergent responses towards cultural norms and their adherence to cultural life scripts. The complexity of their identities became evident as these characteristics assumed diverse forms contingent upon individual circumstances. Instances of uncertainty emerged, prompting the development of multiple personas as the participants affiliated with various 'small' cultural

groups, thereby embracing identity diversity (Holliday, 2013). Despite earnest attempts to clearly define and present their identities, the participants often faced confusion when expressing specific aspects of themselves, revealing the fluid and dynamic nature of their identities characterised by fragmentation, inconsistency, vagueness, and variability. As a coping mechanism, the participants adeptly navigated through multiple personas, aligning themselves with various cultural groups to accommodate their diverse sense of self (Bhatia, 2008). Furthermore, the participants have faced difficulties in demonstrating their unified identity. This is represented by identity cards, which reflect their intended image as perceived by the outside world (Taylor, 1989). The tension between self-defined identities (avowal) and identities ascribed by others (ascribed) creates a divergence that may lead to role confusion, identity crisis, and dilemma (Charmaz, 1994; Gladden, 2017). Furthermore, the variability observed in participants' identities reinforces the understanding that identity is not static but rather fluid, fluctuating, and shifting over time (Ibarra, 1999; Oyserman *et al.*, 2012; Verschueren, 2008).

This section has brought attention to the intricate process of how the participants negotiate and navigate their identities. It is evident that the factors shaping and reshaping their cultural identities are affected by different aspects such as time, place, and situation. In the upcoming pages, my focus will shift towards examining the set of data concerning the concepts of 'home' and the 'sense of belonging'.

5.4 *Home and sense of belonging*

This section is centred around the participants' definitions of 'home' and their expressions of 'sense of belonging'. It commences by presenting the participants' perspectives, which contribute depth to the ongoing discourse on identity management. Through an extensive analysis of the participants' narratives, a clear observation emerges in which both 'home' and the 'sense of belonging' share common characteristics, characterised by intricacy and inconsistency from the participants' viewpoints. Gathered from diverse data sources, it becomes apparent that, for the participants, the concept of 'home' goes beyond its conventional meaning as a physical dwelling; it holds multifaceted significance in their perception. Despite not being presently realised in their immediate circumstances, the participants have emotionally conceptualised and embraced these abstract notions. Their comprehension is intricate, encompassing the personal significance of 'home' and the instinctive feeling of belonging to a specific group or community.

To thoroughly examine this theme, the following sections will investigate how the research participants navigate their sense of belonging. Firstly, I will explore the relationship between

home, sense of belonging, and identity. Then, the subsequent subsection, 5.3.2, will assess how mobility shapes and influences the participants' sense of belonging.

5.4.1 Home, identity, and sense of belonging: An interplay

The participants have provided valuable insights into the profound significance of 'home' and the 'sense of belonging' in their lives. Upon a thorough analysis of their narratives, it becomes evident that their understanding of these concepts is intricate and influenced by a multitude of factors. Rather than perceiving 'home' solely as a physical location, the participants view it as an evolving journey that encompasses the nurturing of relationships, emotions, and memories associated with a specific place. In contrast, the concept of 'belonging' extends to their connection with various social, cultural, spatial, or community contexts. During my interactions with the participants, I posed the question, 'where is home?' Each participant took a moment to respond, revealing a diverse range of answers. These responses unveiled the complex and varied interpretations of both concepts, highlighting their intricate nature. For instance, Kani consistently expresses a profound connection to her homeland throughout her stories, as exemplified in the following narrative.

At almost thirty-one, I made my way to the UK, where I have resided for over eighteen years. However, there are nights when I wake up in the middle of the night, and as I open my eyes, I find myself asking, 'what am I doing here?' Despite my bed being in the same position as it was back home, I cannot help but recognise that this is not my true home. This feeling has lingered with me until today. My dream remains having a small house back in Kurdistan, where I envision spending my retirement years.

(Kani – interview 1)

Despite residing in the UK for more than eighteen years, Kani continues to grapple with a sense of displacement and a deep yearning for her homeland (Altman and Low, 1992). Her longing for a 'tiny house back in Kurdistan' and her dream of retiring there signify a profound attachment to her place of origin. The experience of waking up in the middle of the night and questioning her presence in the UK underscores a profound feeling of disconnection, emphasising that her current location does not truly evoke a sense of home. This sentiment portrays the emotional and psychological impact of being separated from one's place of origin and the enduring longing for a sense of familiarity and belonging. Despite Kani's endeavours to replicate specific elements of her home in Kurdistan, such as the arrangement of her bed, these efforts fall short of completely reproducing the sense of belonging she once felt. This poignant contemplation emphasises the difficulties of establishing a genuine sense of home in a new environment and the lasting bond one retains with their cultural origins. She then continued:

Upon receiving refugee status, I was asked to vacate the accommodation provided by social services. I sought advice from others, who recommended that I approach the councils in west London and explain my homelessness situation. The experience left me feeling agitated, upset, and overwhelmed with emotion as the reality of not having a place to go sank in. It was hard to comprehend; back in my hometown, I lived like a queen, yet here I was, without a place to call home.

(Kani – interview 1)

In the preceding story, Kani's perspective on 'home' is firmly rooted in a more tangible and unchanging comprehension. For her, 'home' is predominantly linked to a physical structure—an abode that offers a sense of shelter and assurance. This viewpoint becomes conspicuous in her declaration, 'I didn't have anywhere to call home at that time,' underscoring the paramount significance of possessing a physical haven where she can seek refuge and find solace. Nevertheless, this view contrasts with Daum's (2017) interpretation of 'home.' Daum (2017) contends that while a dwelling is a corporeal edifice, a 'home' transcends this definition and encompasses the emotional attachment and solace drawn from dwelling in that place—an aspect that appears to be missing from Kani's current circumstances. Furthermore, her divergent emotions become manifest when she contrasts her former life in her place of birth, where she lived in comfort akin to royalty, with their present dilemma of not having a place she can identify as 'home.' This juxtaposition underscores the profound alterations and adversities she encountered while striving to establish a fresh sense of affiliation and stability after obtaining refugee status. Subsequently, she proceeds to expound on her conception of 'home' and articulates the following:

I firmly believe in the cycle of life and death. A few years ago, I experienced the loss of my dad, and eventually, I will also lose my mum. However, my optimism lies in the belief that there is a place I can return to and call it home. In moments of sorrow and pain that I may not wish to share with others, I find solace in the thought of visiting Goyzha and gazing at the city from the mountaintop.

(Kani – interview 1)

Kani's account reveals a notable shift in her perception of 'home.' Initially, she strongly associated her sense of belonging with her homeland, especially Kurdistan and her birthplace. Her varied and wide-ranging experiences in these locales spanned different places, periods, and environments. Her story underscores that 'home' transcends being a mere physical location; it is akin to a 'virtual place, a repository of memories from lived spaces' (Mallet, 2004, p. 63). In simpler terms, Kani now regards 'home' as an emotional and imaginative realm filled with cherished memories from her life before migration. This significant shift in her understanding highlights the intricate and multifaceted nature of the 'home' concept,

revealing its profound impact on an individual's identity and sense of belonging throughout their life journey. Furthermore, her interpretation of 'home' aligns with theories that stress the emotional and personal dimensions of this concept. It resonates with Bachelard's idea of the 'poetics of space'¹¹ (Bachelard, 1958) and is supported by research on the psychological and therapeutic effects of natural landscapes, emphasising the rejuvenating potential of engaging with the natural environment (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989; Ulrich, 1984). Her vivid portrayal of Goizha Mountain, located in Suleimani City (Figure 8), exemplifies this deep connection to nature. The transformation in Kani's comprehension of 'home' underscores its subjective and multifaceted nature. It goes beyond mere geographical or architectural definitions, encompassing a strong sense of connection, nostalgia, and personal history that shapes her identity. This perspective aligns with Mallet's (2004) concept of 'home' as a repository of memories and emotional attachments. Kani's account beautifully illustrates how the notion of 'home' evolves and gains deeper significance as it intertwines with her emotions, memories, and experiences, culminating in a unique and profound sense of belonging. Her journey captures the essence of what 'home' genuinely means on an individual level and how it becomes a cherished part of one's being.



Figure 7: Goizha Mountain in the city of Sulaimani – Northern Iraq. Photo by the researcher

¹¹ The poetics of spaces delves into the physical environment and design, aiming to comprehend how individuals navigate the world and how their surroundings shape their connection to the universe. It explores creative spaces and the utilisation of ontology, the study of existence, to foster creativity.

Goizha Mountain, located just outside Suleimani, is a popular destination for both locals and tourists, offering opportunities for picnics, sunset admiration, and hiking (Figure 7). Nestled beneath the mountain and in the valley, Chavy Land and Aqua Park provide an ideal setting to unwind while enjoying the city's evening lights. The image illustrates Goizha Mountain, adorned with lush vegetation and set against a cloudy sky backdrop. At the summit, the city's name, Suleimani, prominently features in large letters, accompanied by a Kurdistan flag. Kani's deep connection to this mountain is unsurprising, reflecting her emotional attachment and a mental representation of her heritage, including a mental map and cherished memories. For Kani, Goizha Mountain serves as a refuge (Mallet, 2004), offering solace from life's challenges. In another anecdote, she underscores Sulaimani's profound significance in her life (Figure 8). Visual data reinforces her strong attachment to her birthplace, with a photograph capturing her proudly standing in front of the 'I love you Slemani' sign at the Sulaymaniyah Governorate. This image symbolises her deep affection, profound connection, and unwavering admiration for her city. It is evident that Sulaimani holds a special place in her heart, transcending its physicality to carry symbolic meaning, expressing her profound sense of belonging (Pinet, 1988) and reflecting her identity (Sigmon *et al.*, 2002, p. 33). Furthermore, Kani's narrative extends to encompass her profound bond with her homeland, Kurdistan, as exemplified in the following passage:

I go back to Kurdistan whenever I can, and if someone asks me where I want to go on holiday, my answer is always Kurdistan, as it has become an integral part of my life; it represents my history (Figure 5.4). So, I hold the hope of returning one day, but I acknowledge that it is a challenging decision, especially when you have children. Their life system is different here, and it may not be easy for them to adapt to life in Kurdistan.

(Kani – interview 1)

Despite physical separation, Kani's experience challenges the notion that emotional connections between two places weaken over time. Her affiliation to Kurdistan remains strong and unaffected, suggesting that a sense of belonging transcends geographical boundaries (Wardaugh, 1999). This deep connection is intertwined with her social identity, encompassing her relationships with family, friends, and the community. Kani sees herself as an integral part of Kurdistan, and her emotional attachment to the land is shaped by her personal experiences and the significance she attaches to them.



Figure 8: Kani Stands by the ‘I love Sulemani’ sign, located at the from of the Sulaimaniyah governate.

This underscores the profound importance of the place itself, evoking a strong ‘feeling of home’ (Pinet, 1988). For Kani, home is not merely a permanent physical location; it also represents a space of belonging to her past and memories that she established in the city (Healy, 2020). This means that for her ‘home’ is dynamic, extending beyond physical boundaries to encompass the emotional and social dimensions defining her belonging to Kurdistan. Kani’s choice not to return to her native land is influenced by her experience juggling two different realities, aiming to shield her children from challenges caused by constant relocation. Here, the concept of home encompasses cultural norms and individual aspirations (Rapport and Dawson, 1998), which relate to her hybrid identity. Additionally, she maintains an emotional attachment to Kurdistan but finds it lacking in terms of desired living standards, both economically and culturally. In other words, she may find social connections and belonging in Kurdistan but lacks the necessary economic and cultural resources for personal and family well-being (Bourdieu, 1986). This decision highlights the complex interplay between emotional ties to one’s homeland and practical considerations influencing an individual’s sense of belonging and home. Like Kani, Saman also expresses his emotions about the concept of home and his sense of belonging. For Saman, Kurdistan holds cherished memories, despite its distant existence from his current reality. Saman voices his sentiment by stating:

It is not easy to explain how I feel about my homeland. Kurdistan is a place that is close to my heart. But now, Kurdistan is just a memory that I cannot ignore or forget. It is a place that lives with me wherever I go. Whatever I do is bound to those days I spend in my homeland.

(Saman – interview 1)

Saman's preceding account draws upon the insights of Blunt and Dowling (2006) and Brah (1996) in grasping the concept of home. Blunt and Dowling depict home as both a tangible locale and a notion imbued with emotions like belonging, desire, intimacy, violence, fear, and alienation. Conversely, Brah (1996, p. 192) envisions home as a 'mythical' realm of yearning within the diasporic imagination. Saman's profound attachment to his country of origin and the nostalgic memories he relies upon reflect his emotional and reverential connection with his homeland. This aligns with the concept of home as a means of restoring self-continuity and bridging the past and present within the diaspora and amidst significant life events. He further nurtures his past recollections through nostalgic sentiments, fostering a profound emotional connection to his country of origin.

In contrast to Saman, Nina's understanding of home and her sense of belonging are considerably more intricate. She grapples with the challenge of defining her sense of belonging and pinpointing a particular place to designate as home. The ensuing narrative illustrates her struggle in establishing a sense of belonging and locating a place to call her own.

I love Kurdistan, and Hawler (or Erbil) is very special because of my memories there. Also, my dad's family is there, and my dad is buried there. So, it is a massive thing for me, and there will always be a tie between here and there. I am firmly attached to Kurdistan even if my dad didn't bury me there. Because he loved it so much, he would take us back every year and ensure we had a good time. There is something about Kurdistan I can't explain, but to me, it is home.

(Nina – follow-up interview)

The preceding narrative illustrates the intricate interplay among individual recollections, family bonds, and a profound emotional affinity that mould one's perception of home and belonging. Nina's attachment to Kurdistan, particularly Erbil, transcends mere familial connections and blood ties. It is intricately woven with her father's memories and enduring attachment to the land, constituting a significant facet of her identity. While Nina initially equated Kurdistan with home, a deeper exploration unveiled a more nuanced viewpoint when contemplating her personal history. When asked to pinpoint a specific place to which she feels a profound attachment, her response was as follows:

Whenever I reminisce about my childhood, my thoughts invariably lead me back to our house in Manchester. It holds a special place in my heart because, during that time, my dad was still alive, and we shared wonderful moments together. That house is full of memory, the memory of my father that I cannot ignore, which hold an indelible significance that I simply cannot overlook.

(Nina – follow-up interviews)

Nina's account unveils the profound importance of her childhood residence in Manchester, where numerous cherished memories from her formative years were cultivated, particularly under her loving father's guidance. This house not only symbolises a space filled with personal experiences but also acts as a private haven where the entire family congregates, fostering a profound sense of togetherness. It becomes a comforting 'refuge,' shielded from external scrutiny and surveillance (Mallet, 2004, p. 71). Her heartfelt statement, 'that house is full of memory, the memory of my father that I cannot ignore,' vividly illustrates the profound emotional connection she associates with her father's presence in the past, surpassing the mere physical space of the house in the present. For Nina, her emotional ties to her father's memories hold far greater significance than any attachment to a specific physical location, reflecting her unique concept of home and belonging. This sentiment beautifully encapsulates how particular places can evolve into an intimate embodiment of cherished memories and a profound sense of belonging, regardless of geographical boundaries. In contrast, Murad's perception of home diverges, as he more closely associates it with his current country of residence rather than his homeland. He articulates the importance of being in a nation where he has achieved various milestones and highlights how his community plays a crucial role in strengthening his sense of belonging.

This is my community; this is my society, and Britain is my country. London is the land, the community, and the people who embraced me and gave me chances to open all doors. The UK is my real county; this is my real estate.

(Murad – interview 1)

Murad's sense of affiliation is intricately interwoven with the geographical context of his present abode, a common occurrence. However, his comprehension of belonging stretches beyond his country of origin; it is shaped by the opportunities and connections he has cultivated in his host nation, the United Kingdom. To him, this country signifies more than just a physical location or his residential dwelling; it is a realm where he has harnessed his talents, prospered, and accrued 'social' and 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986). Murad's utterances, such as 'this is my homeland; this is my legitimate estate,' and his perspectives on society and territory, clearly illuminate his robust affinity with the UK and his community, where his abilities are esteemed (Bourdieu, 1986). Nevertheless, despite his profound bond with the UK, Murad, akin to Nina, grapples with pinpointing a singular place to label as home. He unveils his emotional attachments to Kurdish-inhabited regions, the sensation of belonging to a nation, and his experience as an immigrant in the Western world, factors that impede him from attaining true tranquillity. In one of his interviews, Murad conveys the following sentiments:

For me, the most significant barrier lies in Kurdistan and my country of origin. Despite spending over 22 years in this country, a part of me remains there. My thoughts are constantly drawn back to that place. However, returning home is not an easy option, even if I deeply desire it. The decision becomes even more complex when you have children. It entails immense responsibility and requires careful consideration.

(Murad – interview 1)

Murad's protracted residency in the United Kingdom has enabled him to establish a substantial presence and successfully integrate into British society. Nevertheless, despite regarding the UK as his 'true homeland,' he still does not experience a complete sense of belonging to this nation. Murad's statement illuminates a pervasive phenomenon among migrants who often find themselves straddling the line between their country of origin and their adopted homeland, leading to a dual sense of identity (Maiorani and Mancini, 2021, p. 98). While Murad has cultivated a profound connection with his UK community, his emotional bonds with his homeland persist. Consequently, the concept of 'home' emerges as a complex amalgamation of intersecting and fluid positions and sentiments intricately linked to various contexts, locales, and spaces within his multiple cultural identities. Murad's experience of dwelling in the liminal space between these two distinct worlds has profoundly influenced his self-perception amidst the diverse tapestry of cultural realities. He occupies a continual state of 'liminality' (Turner, Abrahams, & Harris, 1969), where the concept of 'home' remains untethered to any singular realm, instead existing within an intermediary 'in-between' space. This liminal state profoundly influences his self-perception within these complex cultural contexts, highlighting the intricate nature of his identity and sense of belonging.

The analysed data thus far illuminates the personal journeys of the participants as they navigate between various locations, spaces and periods in their lives. This experience of movement encompasses not only physical mobility but also emotional and psychological transitions. The next subsection will delve into the concept of mobility and its connection to individuals' sense of belonging.

5.4.2 Mobility and sense of belonging

Another recurring theme that surfaced in several narratives delves into the concepts of 'mobility,' 'migration,' and their repercussions on individuals' perception of home and sense of belonging. While migration traditionally pertains to the physical relocation of people across borders, mobility encompasses a broader spectrum of relational dynamics, encompassing the flow of individuals, objects, and ideas. The mobility encountered by the participants has given rise to the development of transcultural or cross-cultural/national identities, equipping them with a sense of both social and economic capital. Nevertheless, for certain individuals, frequent

traversing, and a lack of attachment to a specific locale have engendered feelings of foreignness and disconnection. For instance, Hana's recurrent journeys spanning different countries and continents, propelled by her contractual affiliations with global corporations, have profoundly shaped her outlook on home and her sense of belonging. The subsequent excerpt from Hana serves as an exemplar of this intricate relationship:

In my constant back-and-forth movements between various places, my understanding of home and my sense of belonging have been greatly impacted. [...] I don't see myself attached to only one culture; I am equal, half British, half Kurdish. But at the same time, I am a mobile person. I regularly travel nationally and internationally for business reasons, and I don't have that distinction between places. I feel I belong everywhere. Wherever I go, I feel I belong to that place no matter how long I stay there, and I like that quality in myself, and it opens the doors for me to move permanently to other countries. For example, I am considering moving to the US. We left the EU, and as a country [UK], we were stuck on a small island with minimal opportunities. Also, most companies I work with are based there, which is better and more rewarding.

(Hana – interview 1)

Hana's narrative vividly portrays the profound influence of mobility on her perception of home and belonging. Her experience exemplifies a fluid and transnational identity, where she identifies herself as both British and Kurdish, without rigidly conforming to a singular culture. Her frequent domestic and international journeys for professional purposes have significantly shaped her comprehension of home, erasing the boundaries between different locations, and nurturing a sense of belonging wherever she finds herself, irrespective of the duration of her stay (Levitt and Schiller, 2004). Through her global business engagements, Hana has engaged in intercultural interactions, enabling her to assimilate various cultural influences into her identity. This continuous exposure to diverse cultural facets has woven a captivating tapestry that moulds her sense of self. She views mobility as a positive facet of her life, affording her invaluable opportunities for personal growth and the accrual of both 'social' and 'economic' capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Her contemplation of potentially relocating to a powerful nation like the United States mirrors her aspiration to further expand her social and economic horizons. Hana's journey serves as a compelling illustration of how mobility can enrich one's self-concept and broaden one's cultural experiences, resulting in a multifaceted identity that embraces diverse influences from across the globe.

In a similar vein, Omer's narrative epitomises a profound connection with multiple cultures and locales. When prompted to define his self-identity within a particular geographical context, Omer characterises himself as a 'cosmopolitan' who finds belonging in every place.

His account encapsulates his sense of belonging, which emanates from various locations that hold personal significance to him.

I often feel like an outsider or a foreigner, as if I don't completely belong to any one place. When I am in Kurdistan, my mind often wanders elsewhere, thinking about my life in the UK, where I am currently based, and where my children reside. On the other hand, when I am in the UK, my thoughts often drift back to Kurdistan, where my parents live. Additionally, my siblings are in Germany, and I have friends scattered across various locations. My childhood was marked by several instances of dispersion, which may have influenced how I perceive and experience my sense of belonging to different places. This complex web of connections to multiple locations contributes to my feelings of not fully belonging in any one place.

(Omer – follow-up interview)

Omer's sense of belonging weaves a complex tapestry of multiple spaces, encompassing both physical and symbolic dimensions. This rich tapestry of places contributes to his detachment from a singular sense of connection to any specific location, allowing him to gracefully navigate and traverse these distinct spaces. His identity transcends the confines of a particular geographical or physical site, extending across various locales, thereby challenging conventional notions of attachment to fixed places and the grounding of identity within a single society or community. The dispersion of Omer's family and friends across multiple locations, coupled with the influences of globalisation and the transnational movement of capital, further shape his unique perspective on belonging and identity (Bland and Webb, 2016; Guild and Minderhoud, 2006). Moreover, his engagement in travel and experiences of residing in various locations underscore his intercultural competence, enabling him to effortlessly embrace and embody diverse facets of his identity across different places (Leung *et al.*, 2008; Ward *et al.*, 2001). However, this attachment to multiple places has also occasioned moments of feeling foreign or disconnected, potentially contributing to the formation of a sense of foreign identity (Bredella, 2003). Omer delves further into the challenges associated with crossing borders and underscores the advantages of holding a European passport, which speeds up mobility (Faist, 2000; Joppke, 2005).

During my time in Kurdistan, the significance of possessing a passport didn't hold much weight, especially as a stateless nation where travel opportunities were limited. Crossing the Iranian borders multiple times without a passport was common. However, everything changed once I was granted Dutch citizenship, and the value of that small document became apparent to me. With my new citizenship, the world opened, and I could finally explore different destinations. This newfound mobility not only enriched my life through travel experiences but also facilitated other aspects

of my life. For instance, my Dutch passport played a pivotal role in my decision to reside here in London. The transformation from a stateless individual to a passport holder has had a profound impact on my sense of belonging and possibilities for the future.

(Omer – follow-up interview)

Omer's experience of mobility and the formation of a foreign identity can be closely linked to the absence of a recognised nation-state for Kurdistan and the absence of official documentation, such as passports, to establish Kurdish nationality. However, the acquisition of an official document from a European country, such as Omer's Dutch passport, has profoundly influenced his national identity (Fortier, 2000). This passport has granted Omer the freedom to move between various locations without restrictions or constraints, endowing him with a sense of agency and the capacity to embrace his 'bi-cultural identities' (Abu-Rayya *et al.*, 2018; Chen *et al.*, 2008; Toomey *et al.*, 2013). While Omer's Kurdish identity may impose certain limitations on his access and mobility, his Dutch identity and possession of a recognised European passport have provided him with a sense of moral fortitude and security in situations where his Kurdish identity might encounter restrictions. For instance, during his travels to places like Turkey, where his Kurdish identity could face limitations or threats, Omer's Dutch passport offers him a degree of protection, enabling him to navigate diverse global spaces, as discussed by Schapendonk (2018). This empowers him to exercise his mobility and engage with distinct cultures and environments, enriching his sense of belonging and cultural exchange. The duality of Omer's identities and the privileges conferred by his Dutch passport have moulded his comprehension of home and belonging, enabling him to embrace the fluidity of his cultural affiliations while navigating the intricacies of his multiple identities.

In summary, the findings presented in this section shed light on the relationships that the participants maintain with the concepts of 'home' and 'sense of belonging.' Their experiences of navigating a dynamic world marked by mobility, recurrent dispersals, and transitions across various locations collectively contribute to what scholars like Bhabha (1994), Hall (1973), and Smith (2008) have referred to as 'hybrid identities.' Crucially, the participants have not only embraced but also internalised their multifaceted selves within the framework of their mobile lifestyles, resulting in a flexible and adaptable understanding of their sense of belonging. Additionally, the participants' ethnic backgrounds play a pivotal role in shaping their ethnic identities and guiding their journey across different temporal phases, geographical landscapes, and spatial domains. Consequently, in the forthcoming section, the participants' data concerning the notion of 'ethnic reactivity' will be further explored.

5.5 *Ethnic reactivity*

Aligned with the overarching themes of home and a sense of belonging, another theme known as ‘ethnic reactivity’ surfaced during the data analysis process. Ethnic reactivity entails individuals’ consciousness of their ethnic identity and the sense of belonging linked to it. Throughout the interviews, the participants frequently engaged in discussions surrounding topics of belonging, origins, and ethnic identities, showcasing both deliberate and subconscious involvement with these aspects. Nevertheless, the participants’ experiences of belonging often displayed ambivalence and contradiction, with many grappling to firmly position themselves within a single ethnic category. For example, as previously mentioned in subsection 5.2.3, Hana articulated her identification as a British Kurdish woman and the sense of belonging she derived from being associated with two different places. The following excerpt offers insight into Hana’s perspective on her ethnic identity and sense of belonging.

The word Kurdish means a lot. Whoever asks me who you are, I say I am Kurdish from Kurdistan. Because it is not something that you can even argue about because even in the Quran, it says [...] nations and tribes. We are a nation [...], but I have lived here for more than 26 years and in Iraq for 24 years. So, this country has given me a lot. So, for me to say that I am only Kurdish, I don’t think it is the right thing because it is possible to be both, it is [likely] not to lose your identity as an original where you come from and who you are, but then a good part of us belongs here.

(Hana – interview 1)

Hana’s deep connection and familiarity with both places play a pivotal role in shaping her sense of belonging. She takes pride in her Kurdish heritage and links her ethnicity to the geographical location of Kurdistan. To support her views, she references a verse from the Quran, providing reassurance about her origins. Hana also acknowledges the other side of her identity, which involves being British and having lived in the UK for over 26 years. By aligning herself with two distinct ethnic groups, she has established what can be described as a ‘hyphenated’ (Hamann and England, 2011) or ‘bi-ethnic identity’ (Karssen *et al.*, 2017). Hana’s statement, ‘I don’t think it is the right thing because it is possible to be both,’ suggests that ethnic identity is flexible, and lived experiences can influence one’s perceptions of their ethnicity. However, this duality in identity can pose challenges, as the collective attachments to multiple and multiscale connections and commitments may lead to confusion and an ‘identity crisis’ (Gladden, 2017). In the context of both the UK and Kurdistan, it becomes evident that both countries serve as spaces where Hana can freely embrace the traditions, norms, and values of both cultures. This is reflected in her statement, ‘it is [likely] not to lose your original identity [...] but then a good part of me belongs here,’ implying that individuals can retain aspects of their original identities while simultaneously developing new personas

based on their lived experiences. These findings align with the insights from postcolonial literature on identity, as highlighted by scholars like Hall (1990) and Bhabha (1994). Similarly, Nina's perspective on the notion of ethnic identity offers a unique and thought-provoking viewpoint. When questioned about matters related to race, group affiliation, and her sense of belonging, her response provides valuable insight into her distinctive outlook:

When meeting new people, I find it interesting that although I feel more British than Kurdish, I always introduce myself as a Kurd rather than British. I also make sure to let people know that I am Muslim. I believe this is connected to the rise of Islamophobia after September 11. I feel a responsibility to challenge stereotypes about Muslims and show that we are not all terrorists or associated with ISIS. Through my actions, I strive to foster understanding and break down prejudices against my community. Embracing my Kurdish and Muslim identity, I hope to dispel the prejudices that exist in society.

(Nina – follow-up interview)

In this narrative, Nina adeptly manages her identity, embracing the prevailing British identity while also acknowledging her Kurdish heritage. She maintains a delicate equilibrium, revealing her Kurdish ethnicity when introducing herself to new acquaintances. This interplay between her self-perception and external perceptions significantly influences her identity in social interactions. Nina's viewpoint aligns with the notion that identity is intricately interwoven, emerging from diverse social contexts and the way others perceive an individual. It underscores the importance of situational self-positioning within specific sociocultural environments (Selby, 2021). Furthermore, her religious and ethnic identities are intertwined serving as a protective shield against potential negative stereotypes associated with Islam. Although she may not actively practise all aspects of Islam, her connection to her religious identity acts as a defence against Islamophobia, a prevailing issue in today's world, particularly in the aftermath of events like the 9/11 attacks. Through this, Nina aims to challenge and dispel the stereotypes and biases often associated with her faith (Holliday, 2011).

Additionally, Kani shared her perspective on her ethnic belonging and the significance of her ethnicity and ethnic identity in the following manner:

I was indeed born in Iraq, but my identity remains deeply rooted in being a Kurd. The first word I ever spoke was in Kurdish, and I learned to read and write in the Kurdish language. When people inquire about my origins, I proudly state that I come from Kurdistan, and my first language is Kurdish. This strong connection to my homeland, family, and friends forms an integral part of my sense of self and identity.

(Kani – interview 1)

Kani's deep connection with her ethnic community becomes apparent through her linguistic choices, a common thread she shares with her immediate family and fellow members of her cultural background. This linguistic bond that ties her ethnic identity to her homeland and her close circle of family and friends solidifies her sense of belonging within a minority group that upholds shared cultural traditions and values. In her pursuit of reaffirming and validating her ethnicity and ancestral heritage, Kani underwent an ancestry test, openly sharing the results on her Facebook account (Figure 9). Intrigued by her post, I reached out to her to delve into her written work and gain insights into her reflections on the test's outcomes. During our conversation, she expressed the following sentiments:

My children have always had a keen interest in discovering their heritage, particularly the countries they originate from. When a friend in Kurdistan asked me how they could take the test, I too became curious and decided to take it. After waiting for a few weeks, I am delighted to announce that the results are in, and I am 99.3% Kurdish. However, amidst all this, it's essential to remember that being human holds far greater significance than any ethnic identity. My hope is that we can all coexist in harmony and peace in a world where justice and everlasting love prevail.

(Kani - follow-up interview and written narrative)

In this passage, Kani's profound bond with her ethnic heritage shines through as she proudly aligns herself with the Kurdish nation. Yet, she also underscores her fundamental identity as a human being, elevating it above the significance of her ethnic affiliation. Throughout this chapter, Kani's narratives vividly depict the fluid and dynamic nature of her personal, social, and cultural identities. They underscore how her self-concept and connections to various facets of her identity evolve over time. Amidst this ongoing evolution, Kani maintains a robust emotional connection to her ethnic community. This attachment impedes complete assimilation into the mainstream culture and underscores her unwavering dedication to preserving her ethnic identity.

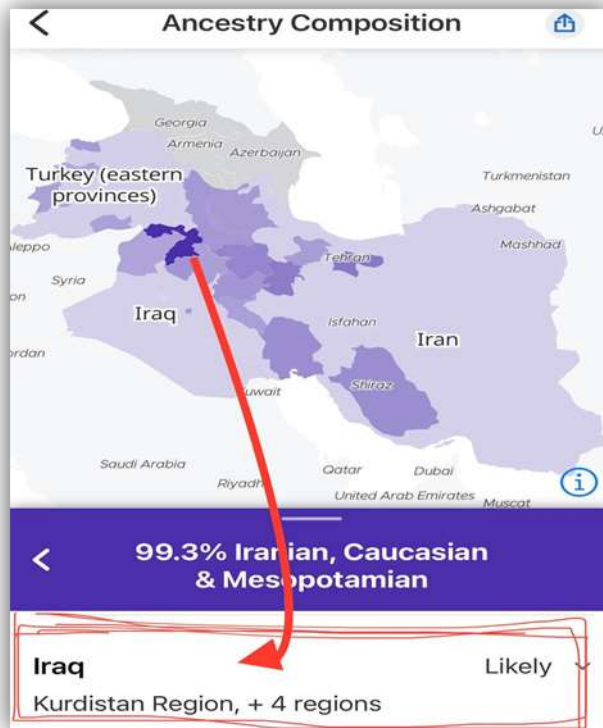


Figure 9: Kani’s ansestry test result.

The results of Kani’s ancestry composition (Figure 9) further fortify this sentiment by prominently showcasing her Kurdish heritage at 99.3%. This genealogical evidence aligns seamlessly with her portrayal of her ethnicity and ethnic identity, which resonates consistently throughout her narratives, whether spoken or visual. Additionally, she adds:

I have no intention of forcing my ethnicity on others. For instance, within an Iraqi group I belong to, I choose not to disclose my Kurdish background to avoid any assumptions or biases about my identity. Even when negative comments about Kurds arise, I opt for silence, refraining from reacting. If I were to embrace my Kurdish identity, it is more appropriate to do so in my homeland, Kurdistan, rather than here. In this country, valuing humanity takes precedence over identifying as a Kurd, Arab, or British.

(Kani – interview 1)

Notably, Kani exhibits a profound connection to her ethnic group, yet she purposefully conceals her ethnic identity, especially when interacting with the Iraqi Arab community. Even when confronted with discriminatory remarks directed at her ethnic group, she opts for a composed response and avoids engaging in confrontations. This behaviour can be attributed to the historical tensions between Kurds and Arabs in Iraq, which have led to strained relations between these two communities. The protracted political conflict has moulded power

dynamics, with the Iraqi Arabs, as the majority, often asserting their perceived superiority over the Kurdish minority. Foucault's concept of 'power' (1972) becomes particularly relevant here, shedding light on how the dominant group wields its authority over the minority, resulting in entrenched beliefs about the Kurds held by the Arabs. In the presented narrative, it becomes evident that the Iraqi Arab community feels entitled to voice their opinions about the Kurds. As the sole Kurdish member within the group, Kani lacks the power to openly defend her ethnic group. Fearing potential consequences, such as exclusion from the group, erosion of trust, or confrontations, she chooses to maintain her silence. Instead, she relies on her actions and behaviours to silently advocate for herself and her ethnicity. In contrast, for some other participants, their ethnicity appears less ambiguous and more distinct. For instance, Murad initially identifies strongly with his ethnic and religious backgrounds (see section 5.2.1). However, later in his narrative, he expresses discontent and reveals a contradiction in his feelings about being a Kurd.

I am not proud to be a Kurd because I don't believe in this. It was not my choice, I was born as a Kurd and a Muslim, and I didn't choose. It is a fact, and I cannot change that, but that does not mean I am ashamed. However, the first thing people know about me in my community is that I am Kurd, and I have mentioned this in almost every meeting.

(Murad – interview 1)

Murad's exploration of his identity and sense of belonging reveals conflicting perspectives regarding his ethnic heritage, fluctuating between self-identifying as a Kurd and grappling with a sense of inadequacy in his ethnic pride. This intricate interplay of his ethnic identity is illuminated through various theoretical lenses. His acknowledgment that being a Kurd was not his choice, but a circumstance of birth resonates with theories of identity formation, emphasising how individuals categorise themselves and others into social groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Murad's proactive mention of his identity and the community's perception of him could be linked to identity management, where he strategically navigates his identities in social interactions (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Further, his acceptance of his Kurdish identity without pride suggests a complex relationship with his self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965). He may be negotiating societal perceptions of his ethnic background, impacting his self-worth. This internal struggle might be reflected in his statement, indicating how societal attitudes and perceptions regarding his ethnicity could influence his self-esteem and self-perception (Rosenberg, 1965). Murad also demonstrates an awareness of how dominant ideologies influence societal norms, subtly challenging these perspectives concerning his ethnic identity (Gramsci, 1971). This implies that Murad's struggle with his Kurdish identity might be influenced by these hegemonic cultural forces and his resistance against them. His narrative

about acceptance and lack of pride might indicate the challenges he faces in constructing and managing his multiple personas (Bruner, 1991). These references offer nuanced insights into Murad's complex feelings and the societal dynamics influencing his experience of ethnic identity.

5.6 Chapter summary and discussions

In this chapter, I explore the complex nature of individual identity and the dynamic process of negotiating and navigating such complexities. The findings reveal diverse participant perceptions of themselves within various sociocultural contexts. Through their narratives and experiences, I unveil the rich tapestry of factors influencing their evolving sense of self, emphasising the dynamic nature of identity. This exploration underscores the essence of the participants' lived experiences as they navigate the complexities of identity within the context of migration. It sets the stage for a deeper examination of the implications of these intricate identity negotiations on their overall well-being and assimilation into their newfound cultural milieu.

The findings from the first section underscore the complexity of personal identity and the challenges associated with defining it within a specific context. Individuals' identities are not solely self-determined but are also shaped by external influences, indicating a lack of complete control over their identities. For example, Murad's ethnic identity is imposed on him by his nation, and Nina's religious identity is influenced by her parents. These disparities between self-perceived and externally imposed identities contribute to confusion, exacerbated by cultural traditions and familial expectations. The examination of identity reveals diverse perspectives, highlighting its multifaceted nature. In the second section, we delve into the interplay between home and a sense of belonging, emphasising their significant roles in shaping one's identity. The narratives shared by participants illuminate nuanced discrepancies in self-perception and belonging. One notable inconsistency arises from the tension between ascribed and self-defined identities. Participants often struggle with external factors, such as ethnicity or religion, conflicting with their personally constructed identities. This tension leads to variations in self-perception, influenced by lived experiences. Participants often express attachment to multiple locales, reflecting the complexities of their identities. These perspectives underscore the dynamic nature of identity, shaped by experiences within the context of migration.

The multifaceted nature of 'home' emerges from participants' diverse descriptions, including terms like an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983), 'imagined homeland' (Rushdi, 1996), a 'contested space' (Murphy and McDowell, 2023), or a 'mythic place of desire' (Brah, 1996), resulting in disparities in how they relate to the concept of home and belonging, influenced by

their individual experiences and cultural backgrounds. The broader cultural and societal context significantly influences participants' self-perceptions, their sense of belonging, and their decisions regarding revealing or concealing their ethnic identities (Smith, 2005; Simmons, 2010). Historical tensions between ethnic groups, exemplified by the Kurds and Arabs in Iraq (Smith, 2005), often lead to inconsistencies in participants' behaviour and responses, resulting in a fluid concept of home subject to diverse discourses (Hall, 1990). This fluidity means an individual's sense of belonging can evolve over time and across different spaces. For instance, the participants' level of attachment to their homeland is closely intertwined with the strength of their ethnic identity. Take the case of Kani, who, despite occasionally concealing her ethnicity to avoid confrontation, maintains a profound connection to her homeland. Her strong ethnic identity is reflected in her unwavering bond with her homeland, demonstrating the intricate relationship between ethnic identity and the concept of home. However, while ethnicity and ethnic identity have paramount importance for some, for others, it is impossible to adopt a singular ethnic identity, and instead, they embrace multiple or 'hybrid ethnic identities' (Simmons, 2010). For example, Hana and Nina indicate that they cannot simply define themselves as purely Kurdish or British; instead, they have blended or mixed identities that reflect their transnational embodiments. Additionally, Omer attached a 'foreigner' identity to describe the dynamic nature of his identities. These hybrid identities contribute to a sense of community and continuity, marking a challenging phase in the process of negotiating and navigating identity.

These findings reflect participants' fragmented perceptions of home and associated emotions, including feelings of helplessness and a yearning to return. Furthermore, the participants' personal identities undergo a complex change, influenced by the multifaceted narratives they provide. The outcomes consistently underscore the divergences between self-declared and externally assigned identities, resulting in the emergence of multiple facets or personas. While this chapter delves into the examination of individual identity and the participants' adept negotiation and traversal of identities within the diaspora context, it is grounded in theories surrounding identity, home, and belonging. In contrast, Chapter Six shifts its focus towards a holistic exploration of the participants' migration experiences, with a particular emphasis on the challenges encountered throughout the journey and the profound repercussions on identity decision-making.

6 Migration Experiences: Past, Present, and Future

6.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I examined how the participants negotiate and navigate their identities. In this chapter, I will continue my exploration of identity negotiation by analysing participants' migration stories and their narratives concerning the challenges they faced while adjusting to life in the UK. The objective of this chapter is to address the following research question:

What challenges do the Iraqi Kurdish migrants face in the United Kingdom, and how do they cope with them?

The participants candidly shared their migration and adaptation experiences across various stages of data collection, portraying these experiences as profoundly challenging. Their narratives centred on the pervasive theme of 'othering,' encapsulating instances of discrimination and racism. They eloquently expressed how their limited language proficiency and physical appearances significantly impacted their sense of belonging and overall well-being. Moreover, their lack of prior knowledge about cultural norms, values and beliefs created a backdrop of uncertainty and confusion concerning their personal, social, and cultural identities while grappling to navigate their new living situation. Parenting and family upbringing in the UK emerged as poignant issues, resonating with multiple participants. Each narrative unveiled the formidable hurdles encountered during their migration journey and the enduring struggles they faced. Amidst these challenges, they also shared inspiring success stories and moments of pride, reflecting their resilience and ability to overcome adversities.

In structuring this chapter for precision and coherence, I have organised it as follows: firstly, I will look at the participants' experiences of 'culture' and 'language.' Then, in section 6.3 under the heading 'Othering: The Politics of the Self and Other,' I meticulously explore the participants' varied encounters with different forms of othering, encompassing ethnocentrism, stereotypes, discrimination, and racism, among other issues. This exploration delves into the profound impact of these experiences on their adaptation, scrutinising how being branded as 'other' significantly influences one's cultural identity and overall well-being. These points are vividly illustrated through a plethora of narratives from diverse research participants. Following this, I delve into a comprehensive discussion of the primary findings, aligning them with the existing body of literature in the social sciences and humanities disciplines. This discussion draws on fields such as intercultural communication, social psychology, and migration studies, weaving a comprehensive tapestry of understanding. To

illuminate the participants' migration experiences and adaptation to the UK, I will present multimodal data, incorporating spoken, written, and visual materials for a nuanced and holistic exploration.

6.2 *Experiencing culture and language*

All the participants encountered various challenges in their new environment, ranging from transportation differences to language barriers, including accents. They unanimously recognised the significance of culture and language in facilitating the adaptation process. As previously discussed in Chapter Three, subsection 3.2.1, there is a strong interconnection between culture and language. Culture is conveyed through language, which serves as a representational system encompassing all components of a culture (Hall, 1997). Therefore, I will address these two concepts together under the subtheme of 'language difficulties and cultural challenges.' This approach acknowledges the inseparable intertwining of language and culture, where language functions as a communication system utilised within a specific country or community.

Based on the available data, it is evident that all the participants experienced moments of confusion, stress, and anxiety due to their unfamiliarity with the culture and limited language proficiency. Their unrealistic expectations and lack of familiarity with the surroundings, coupled with feelings of loss regarding language, cultural norms, values, and settings, restricted their freedom. The harsh realities of the new environment contributed to psychological and linguistic disorientation. However, driven by the desire for acceptance from the host society, the participants gradually began to accept the reality and realise that their experiences were not permanent. Nevertheless, upon delving deeper into the participants' accounts, additional issues emerged concerning culture and language, commonly known as 'culture shock' - a feeling of powerlessness in the new environment during the transition between two cultures - and 'language shock' - the shift from one language environment to another (e.g., Kurdish to English) and the associated changes in ways of being (Taft, 1977). These will be further explored in the following pages. The participants' encounters with culture and language will be delved into in greater detail in the following sections.

6.2.1 Language difficulties and cultural challenges

Within the researched community, participants shared their narratives revolving around language and culture-related challenges. Many participants revealed that their choice to settle in the UK was heavily influenced by their familiarity with the country's spoken language. Despite having no real-life exposure, they had limited access to the language via Hollywood movies with Arabic subtitles and weekly language lessons at school. However, their

experiences in the UK did not align with their initial expectations. Linguistic disparities and their preconceived notions about English evolved into significant barriers rather than pathways to integration into their new environment. These disparities, coupled with unrealistic expectations, sudden changes, and unfamiliarity with cultural norms, profoundly impacted their sense of belonging. I term these experiences as 'language shock' (Agar, 1994) and 'culture shock' (Oberg, 1960; Berry *et al.*, 1987).

In the participants' narratives, 'language shock' (Agar, 1994) stemmed from linguistic aspects such as unfamiliarity with the new language environment, inability to speak the local language, or limited knowledge thereof. It also encompassed sociolinguistic elements such as exposure to different accents and dialects, along with socio-pragmatic norms related to cultural expectations in social situations. Consequently, the introduction to a new language and culture triggered various anxieties and uncertainties. For instance, Saman recounted his experience with culture and language as follows:

Language proved to be the most significant challenge I faced. Despite having an educational background prior to my arrival in the UK, my comprehension was severely limited. I can vividly recall the moment I encountered English in the UK. It was within London's underground, and suddenly, a voice emanated from the speakers. I attentively listened to the announcements, but not a single word made sense to me. The language felt familiar, yet incredibly distinct. Everything surrounding me appeared vastly different, from the individuals to the architecture. Witnessing a train for the first time overwhelmed me. However, with the passage of time, I managed to overcome these hurdles.

(Saman – interview 1)

The excerpt above offers a glimpse into Saman's encounter with the new language and culture. Despite his educational background, he underwent a period of uncertainty while adjusting to the unfamiliar cultural context and his new life in the UK. Saman's limited prior language knowledge, combined with the significant shift in the social environment, led to heightened 'stress' (Kim, 2001). Moreover, his lack of access to private English classes before arriving hindered his English proficiency development. Saman found the experience of encountering a train for the first time and navigating the underground system overwhelming, evoking a mix of amusement and shock. However, his feelings of stress gradually lessened as he familiarised himself with the linguistic and social 'differences' (Ager, 1994, p. 77) and became acquainted with the new location, people, and 'cultural realities' (Holliday, 2010). It is noteworthy that Saman's language-related challenges stemmed from disparities between his mother tongue (Kurdish) and the host language (English), encompassing differences in semantics, morphology, syntax, pronunciation, and other language elements. Similarly, the shared

personal story by Kani vividly portrays her overwhelming distress upon arriving in the UK, particularly in her struggles to comprehend conversations in English. The following excerpt provides insight into her experience:

Upon my arrival in the UK, I visited WH Smith to purchase some water. However, the customer service representative had a peculiar and pronounced accent that I couldn't quite place. I presumed he hailed from either Africa or South America. I politely asked the gentleman, 'Can I have a bottle of water?' Unfortunately, both of us appeared bewildered, as we struggled to understand each other's words. This disconcerting interaction left me in a state of distress, I left the shop and cried a lot. I began questioning my abilities and the decision to migrate to a country where everything seemed unfamiliar. It took me considerable time to acclimate to the situation, and eventually, I came to the realisation that London is a diverse and multicultural city. With millions of inhabitants, each group and community possess its unique language patterns, and people speak differently from what I was accustomed to [standard English].

(Kani – interview 1)

The language miscommunication between Kani and the shop assistant has resulted in significant psychological challenges. Kani's difficulty in successful communication stemmed from the variations in English rather than a lack of language proficiency. Ager (1994) emphasises that language learning cannot be solely achieved through the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary from dictionaries. While Kani had learned the grammatical structure of English at home, she had limited opportunities to engage in spoken language within an English-speaking context. The uncertainty surrounding language and the feeling of linguistic inadequacy created emotional and mental turmoil. Despite having some exposure to English prior to arriving in the UK, she had minimal awareness that language usage varies among individuals and across diverse social, geopolitical, and geographical contexts. Furthermore, she was unaware that individuals from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds employ language in distinct ways.

The experiences of Saman and Kani illustrate the interplay between language and culture as predominant means of communication (Peoples and Bailey, 2014). For both participants, culture is deeply embedded in language, as Agar (1994) asserts, 'language is loaded with culture' (p. 28). So far, the data highlight a clear connection between participants' language learning experiences and sociopsychological factors (e.g., motivation, personal interest, confidence level, and talent), as well as physiological factors (e.g., age). These findings align with existing research on language learning and second language acquisition, which explore the link between language learning and an individual's social, psychological, and physiological factors such as motivation, age,

mental capacity or intelligence, cognitive style, and aptitude (Brodkey and Shore, 1976; Dörnyei, 2005; Zafar and Meenakshi, 2012), to name a few. The subsection 6.2.1.2 will further examine the age-related factor in relation to language learning, while the upcoming subsection 6.2.1.1 will delve into the socio-psychological factors in exploring participants' language experiences.

6.2.1.1 Socio-psychological and physiological factors

Not all the participants' challenges can be attributed solely to linguistic differences. Nevertheless, some participants emphasised socio-psychological and physiological factors that hindered their ability to engage in effective intercultural communication. In the following excerpt, Murad elaborates on his experiences and emotions when conversing with people in English.

While I am talking, I still think. I try to be careful not to make mistakes and structure my sentences. I don't need to do that in Arabic or Kurdish; you speak your mind. This is one of the biggest challenges I have found. Suppose you are one of the illegal moves. In that case, this is the biggest challenge you will face. You must be incredibly careful about cultural differences and try to express yourself in a way people in this culture will understand without any need for interpretation.

(Murad – interview 1)

Murad's language struggle does not stem from his inadequate command of the target language; instead, it is rooted in foreign language anxiety, which refers to a specific anxiety response when someone communicates in a second or third language (Tzoannopoulou, 2016). The main challenge for Murad lies in his lack of self-confidence in his linguistic abilities and the fear of making mistakes while interacting with others. This inability to manage his language anxiety during English conversations can lead to interpersonal discomfort, embarrassment, social isolation, a diminished sense of self-worth, and negative psychological consequences (Machan, 2009). A study conducted by Sevinç and Backus (2017) corroborates the idea that anxiety may arise when bilingual or multilingual individuals use their weaker language while conversing with strangers or engaging in professional interactions. Similarly, Machan (2009) suggests that people's fear of making grammatical errors is connected to their social standing rather than their linguistic proficiency. For Murad, who has worked hard to establish a respected position within his community, making language mistakes can result in negative evaluations, including judgments, disapproval, unfavourable impressions, and a compromised reputation. Moreover, his fear of making errors while speaking his third language is associated with negative evaluation. These findings align with previous research on foreign language anxiety (e.g., Bailey, 1983; Tzoannopoulou, 2016; Zhang, 2019). He

subsequently emphasises the importance of his social and political responsibilities and the influence of language on his performance, thereby corroborating the notion that language has the potential to enhance or diminish an individual's self-esteem and identity.

Because my work involved writing, and the things I am talking about are deep and [profound] educational matters. Expressing them is difficult if you don't master the language. Letting people judge you based on your spoken and written language is not a good idea. I am working in an environment where everything you say counts. You cannot justify yourself when you say something wrong; people [his colleagues] take advantage of your words.

(Murad – interview 1)

According to Murad's perspective, the act of making language errors is strongly discouraged, as such failures in the language of the host country may lead to exclusion, stigmatisation, and being perceived as an outsider (Reidpath *et al.*, 2005). Consequently, being able to fluently use the target language allows him to communicate with others, thereby mitigating the power imbalances resulting from his inability to employ language accurately. Additionally, by utilising language effectively, he can avoid being assigned different identities and ensure that his colleagues perceive him in a manner that aligns with his authentic self. Similarly, Omer emphasises the significance of utilising the language of the host country as it serves as a gateway to reclaiming one's sense of self and autonomy.

Ever since relocating to the UK, my primary goal has been to achieve proficiency in English and effectively utilise the language in my conversations, writing, and academic pursuits.

(Omer – interview 1)

Omer made efforts to maintain his social status by utilising the language of the host community. Engaging in written communication in English has empowered him internally, enabling him to delve into the depths of his thoughts and ideas. Employing the target language in personal, social, and academic contexts has granted him a sense of 'agency' (Bandura, 2018), allowing him to exert control over the environment in which he resides.

However, it is worth noting that not all participants' language experiences revolved around sociopsychological factors; some participants viewed age as a physiological barrier and a predominant factor hindering their complete acquisition of the second language (English). Throughout the interviews, a consensus emerged among most participants regarding the connection between English proficiency and age (Roberts and Meyer, 2012). While certain studies highlight the positive impact of bilingualism on acquiring a third language, some participants expressed concerns in this regard. They believed that age played a significant role in impeding their complete mastery of English. As individuals grow older, their cognitive

abilities pertaining to language tend to decline (Wu, Yu, and Zhang, 2020). The participants also discussed other variables strongly associated with age, such as personal interest and motivation. For instance, Murad elaborated on the challenges he faced in acquiring English upon his arrival in the UK, detailing the struggles he encountered and the extensive efforts he exerted to facilitate the language-learning process.

My Kurdish and Arabic language skills are on the same level. When using these languages, I can express myself freely without needing to think. However, English is my third language, not my second. If you arrive in a new country during your teenage years, it is possible to become proficient in English or the country's primary language. However, I came to the UK when I was 31, which makes it more challenging. It is not easy to learn languages after the age of 30. I have encountered individuals who have been living here for 50 years, yet they struggle to construct a clear sentence due to lack of attention. In contrast, I have a natural affinity for languages and have mastered Arabic, even surpassing native Arabic speakers in my writing skills. I write better in Arabic than in Kurdish because I have a deep love for the language. However, I haven't yet achieved the same level of fluency and linguistic playfulness in English as I have in Kurdish or Arabic. Therefore, mastering English poses a significant challenge for me.

(Murad – interview 1)

Murad is a native speaker of Kurdish and acquired Arabic during the critical period of language development, allowing him to learn both languages thoroughly and become proficient in them. However, learning English did not come easily to him. He encountered difficulties in acquiring English during his adulthood. Murad's experiences and beliefs align with research on migration and second language acquisition. For instance, studies by Chiswick and Miller (2001) and Hu (2016) demonstrate that younger generations, particularly those who arrive in the host country at an early age, have a natural ability to develop proficiency in the language of the new society, often reaching a native or near-native level of control effortlessly. Furthermore, a more recent study conducted by Hartshorne et al. (2018) indicates an age-related decline in English proficiency among both immersion and non-immersion learners. Murad's own journey towards becoming a competent English speaker required dedicated effort. He openly shared the considerable time, effort, and energy he invested in practising the language. While Murad possesses fluency in English, he hesitates to label himself as a competent English speaker. Instead, he critiques his language proficiency and aligns with the 'native speakerism ideology'¹² (Holliday, 2006). This ideology revolves around the belief in the linguistic superiority of native speakers and the subsequent discrimination against those

¹² The native speaker ideology is not a strictly linguistic one. According to Toke (2013), native speaker ideology is located within a framework of power. It conjoins with the postcolonial theory, which is often understood in racialised terms, with physical appearance (Liddicoat, 2016).

considered non-native English speakers (Holliday, 2006). In Murad's case, the native speaker ideology manifests as a social construct and a performance of his identity. Similarly, Kani shares a similar perspective, suggesting that she would have mastered English if she had arrived in the UK at a younger age. However, she recognises that migrating to a foreign country at a particular stage in life can pose challenges and restrict one's language acquisition abilities. The following excerpt highlights Kani's viewpoint on this matter:

Upon my arrival in the UK, I was thirty years old, and I often find myself wishing that I had come to this country as a child. The experience and overall outcome would have been significantly different if I had arrived at a younger age. Younger immigrants tend to have better access to education and an improved overall lifestyle. Despite facing numerous obstacles upon my arrival, I persevered and managed to pursue studies and work opportunities in this country.

(Kani – interview 1)

Kani's arrival in a well-established country at a later stage in life has imposed limitations on her opportunities, resulting in various consequences that have impacted her life. Her yearning and aspiration to have settled in the UK during her younger years indicate that she is currently facing some struggles. This also highlights the difficulties of adjusting and adapting to a new cultural environment without being perceived as an outsider due to language limitations. Kani's fervent desire to integrate into British society has become a compelling motivator for her to pursue further education and employment, which has had a significant impact on her economic and social integration. In other words, each challenge she has overcome has contributed to her skill development in the unique environment and aided in the accumulation of *human capital* (Becker, 1993). Relatedly, Omer has also experienced challenges with language proficiency due to his age. He suggests that his ability to acquire specific languages like Dutch and English has been negatively influenced by his age. Omer posits the following viewpoint:

After spending several years in the Netherlands, we made the decision to relocate and settle in the UK due to the superior education system. I was aware that language would pose a challenge, especially considering my age. I arrived in the UK at an advanced stage in life with the purpose of pursuing further education, and mastering English was a necessary step in that process. Therefore, my language learning journey has been primarily focused on academic purposes. Despite my educational background, I openly acknowledge that I still encounter difficulties with certain colloquial expressions. There are moments when my children use words that I don't understand, but that does not mean I am unable to communicate in the language.

(Omer – interview 1)

Omer's proficiency in English is primarily driven by his academic pursuits, as he has developed a strong command of the language due to his educational background and his motivation to further his studies. However, like many economic immigrants, he has missed the advantages of learning the language in a natural social context. Consequently, he encounters difficulties in comprehending certain words and sentences when engaging with the public. Nevertheless, Omer's elevated self-esteem and confidence in his abilities have enabled him to cultivate a stable and well-rounded state of mental and psychological well-being. This finding aligns with the argument put forth by Man *et al.* (2004, p. 368), who contend that having a positive self-esteem is associated with mental well-being, happiness, adjustment, success, academic achievements, and satisfaction.

Another participant, Karim believes that age is not the sole determinant of his language learning difficulties. Other factors, such as the living conditions of his family in their home country and limited financial resources have significantly influenced his language abilities.

Focusing on language becomes challenging when faced with other pressing issues, such as limited income. The difficulty is amplified when one is aware that their family back home is also experiencing hardship due to a lack of financial support. Nevertheless, despite these circumstances, I felt compelled to act and make sacrifices for the well-being of my family.

(Karim – interview 1)

The lack of financial resources has hindered Karim's access to formal language courses and therefore, limiting his opportunities. It is widely acknowledged by researchers that language proficiency is associated with improved employment prospects and higher wages (Dustmann and Fabbri, 2003) as well as the development of human capital (Chiswick and Miller, 2001, 1995; Becker, 1993). However, despite his limited exposure to language learning opportunities, Karim did not find it difficult to actively engage with society. This contradicts certain sociological beliefs that emphasise the importance of language skills and fluency in the host country's language for building cross-ethnic friendships and navigating various community practices (Alba *et al.*, 2011; Martinovic *et al.*, 2009). Despite many challenges, Karim has become a well-known poet in his region, thanks to his friendly demeanour, creative mindset, and persistent dedication. He expresses his experience by stating:

Being in the UK has presented numerous opportunities for me. I have gained recognition in the local community as I actively participate in various activities within the town. For instance, I share my poems with individuals from diverse cultures and receive language support from those who attend these events.

(Karim – follow-up interview)

Through active engagement in his town, Karim has developed strong relationships with numerous individuals, despite his limited language skills. His ability to connect with a diverse community demonstrates that language proficiency is not the sole determinant of successful integration. Karim utilises his connections to gain both human capital (Becker, 1994) and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) through the language support he receives. This experience can be viewed as a transformative practice in which language plays a crucial role, but it is not the sole factor for achieving acceptance within the target group(s). So far, participants' discussions about their cultural and language experiences have revealed the emergence of the theme of othering. The upcoming section and its subsections are dedicated to examining this theme.

6.3 Othering: The politics of self and other

This section is dedicated to a comprehensive exploration of the participants' data concerning the concept of othering, alongside closely intertwined ideas such as discrimination, racism, and stereotypes, among others. Through the course of interviews and data analysis, the theme of othering emerged prominently. In Chapter Three, section 3.5, I defined othering as the experience of being labelled as not fitting the norms of a social group, creating a clear distinction between oneself and others. This often results in the elevation of one's own identity within certain groups, while simultaneously marginalising and excluding others.

According to the findings the concept of othering is multi-faceted. In multiple instances, the participants utilised the term '(white people)' to signify individuals who are part of the native British population – those whom they identify as indigenous white people. However, the findings also underscore the process of othering is not confined solely to dynamics between majority and minority groups. Some of the participants experienced othering from members of other minority groups. I refer to this type of othering as 'interracial othering,' which encompasses interracial racism and discrimination (see subsection 6.3.2). The instances of othering were precipitated by limited language proficiency and a deficiency in intercultural contact or competence. As articulated by the participants, these circumstances gave rise to multifaceted manifestations of othering, exerting a notable influence on both their sense of identity and overall well-being (see subsection 6.3.4). However, there was a common agreement among participants that the impact of othering on their well-being exhibited a transient nature (see section 6.4). Remarkably, these encounters with othering assumed the role of a 'catalytic impetus,' (Ilott, 2015, p. 10) compelling participants to critically re-evaluate their motivation for departing from their homeland and to engage in introspection regarding their evolving identities. In the forthcoming sections, an intricate exploration of diverse forms

of othering will be presented, commencing with a meticulous analysis of participants' narratives encompassing ethnocentrism and stereotypes.

6.3.1 Ethnocentrism and stereotypes

Under the broader theme of othering and based on the participants' data and the research findings, a distinct subtheme has come to light: the interplay between ethnocentrism and stereotypes. Ethnocentrism refers to the belief that one's own cultural or ethnic group is superior, leading to a biased view of the world. This perspective can result in attitudes of condescension or hostility towards individuals from different backgrounds, potentially causing misunderstandings and conflicts. During the interviews, some participants shared instances where they experienced mistreatment from members of the dominant society. One participant, Kani, recounted a specific incident involving a conversation with a headteacher at a primary school in London almost eighteen years ago. According to Kani, this incident had a lasting negative impact on both her and her family members. To accurately portray the nature of the incident and provide readers with a clear understanding of the context, I will present the following information in the form of a dialogue, reflecting Kani's original account during the interview.

Headteacher: Where are you originally from?

Kani: I am a Kurd from Iraq. (Kani emphasises that the headteacher's facial expression shocked her because of her knowledge of psychology and ability to read body language).

Kani: Is being a Kurd a problem?

Headteacher: We will not offer your son a place at our school. We are tired of Kurdish families in the area. They misuse the education system, neglect their education, and are not punctual. We anticipate that you will do the same, and we cannot handle another parent from the Kurdish community¹³.

(Kani – interview 1)

In the above dialogue, the headteacher's inquiry into Kani's background and subsequent refusal to admit her son to the school exemplify a clear instance of othering. The headteacher's perception of Kurdish families is shaped by her previous experiences with them, leading to an ethnocentric and essentialist viewpoint that fails to recognise individual differences (Holliday, 2011). By singling out Kani and denying her son's admission based on their ethnicity, the headteacher perpetuates a discriminatory and exclusionary attitude. The headteacher believes that implementing strict rules and barriers for children and parents from the Kurdish

¹³ A written version of the narrative can be found in Appendix 10. 6.

community will protect the school from what she perceives as inattentive and irresponsible students. This is evident in her statement about Kurdish families abusing the education system, neglecting education, and lacking punctuality. The headteacher's negative experiences with Kurdish individuals have influenced her perception, leading her to unfairly generalise and label all Kurds as lazy, illiterate, and uneducated. Her orientalist perspective, which idealises Western culture, has trapped her in ignorance regarding the diverse Kurdish diaspora and their distinct communities (Said, 1978). In contrast, Kani's surprise and inquiry about her Kurdish identity being a problem demonstrate her awareness of being subjected to unfair treatment due to her ethnic background. This interaction highlights the detrimental effects of othering on individuals and their sense of belonging and inclusion within a larger community. It serves as an example of how othering can result in discrimination and the exclusion of individuals based on their cultural or ethnic identities.

Recognising and challenging such attitudes is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and accepting society. However, the headteacher demonstrated a lack of intercultural competence, as she formed biased and prejudiced opinions about the Kurdish population based on limited or no prior knowledge. Her judgments were influenced by her limited interactions with a few individuals, leading her to perceive all children from a Kurdish background as unworthy of fair treatment. In her perspective, they were seen as inherently troublesome and capable of causing turmoil that would tarnish the school's reputation. The conversation between Kani and the headteacher becomes even more intriguing when Kani challenges the headteacher's behaviour and her erroneous assumptions.

Kani: You don't know me; you don't know my son. How can you make such an assumption? We are educated people, and I have worked with children for several years!

The headteacher: I don't care. I have made my decision, and I will not change it. Go and look for other schools.

(Kani – interview 1)

The above narrative highlights the intense yet attention-grabbing conversation between both parties. The interaction reflects the power dynamics and potential prejudices that can exist within educational institutions, where individuals from marginalised backgrounds may face discrimination based on stereotypes and biased judgments. The headteacher exerted her 'power' within the school to discriminate against Kani, her son, and the community (Foucault, 1972). In response, Kani rejects the ascribed identity imposed by the headteacher (Jackson, 2014), refusing to be labelled as lazy, illiterate, and uneducated. She counters this perception by demonstrating her education and extensive work experience with children. Although Kani

initially faced failure, her determination to prevail in the battle against the headteacher remained strong. The following excerpt illustrates this:

I was deeply upset at the time, and tears welled up in my eyes. I felt an overwhelming sense of worthlessness, one of the most distressing emotions. However, upon arriving home, I resolved to act and not allow the headteacher to triumph in this battle. Drawing on my extensive experience in the field of education, I knew that the education department in the [...] borough in London could address such reprehensible behaviour. I promptly contacted them, providing a detailed account of the situation to the designated person responsible for handling such matters. Surprisingly, mere hours after the incident, I received direct call from the school, confirming that they will take my son. Over time, I managed to implement notable change within the school system. I volunteered as an interpreter, conducted regular meetings with Kurdish families, and organised workshops aimed at raising their awareness of the vital role of education and its profound impact on their children's future.

(Kani – interview 1 and the written story)

Finding a solution to the problem and reaching out to the appropriate authorities demonstrate Kani's proactive approach to addressing the issue at hand. It highlights her resilience and determination not to be overwhelmed by the emotional impact of the encounter with the headteacher. This situation highlights the persistence of racism within Western society, with power imbalances contributing to the construction of a dominant in-group ('us') and an out-group ('them' or 'other') dichotomy (Holliday, 2011). Negotiating her role as both a parent and an educator, Kani sought to find a resolution and avoid unfavourable consequences. This reflects her understanding of the importance of navigating dissimilar roles and responsibilities to achieve her desired outcome. Running workshops for Kurdish families exemplifies Kani's sense of responsibility towards her community and her desire to challenge individual beliefs. By promoting the value of education and dispelling misconceptions, she aims to empower parents to recognise the benefits of education for their children. Through these activities, she strives to foster fair treatment, equity, and awareness of how others perceive and treat them, thereby promoting a more inclusive and just environment for all parents.

Hana, a participant with a significant educational background, recounted an experience that she identified as racism. This incident challenged the conventional definitions discussed in Chapter 3, revealing nuanced layers of discrimination and bias. Hana (interview 1¹⁴) states:

Last year, I sent a package to America, specifically to a large, internationally recognised billion-dollar corporation. The intended recipient of the package,

¹⁴ The written version of the story is located in the |Appendix 10.8.

as well as myself, both have Islamic surnames. However, to my surprise, the customs department decided to hold the shipment for over a month, insisting on seeing the ID or passport of the recipient before releasing it. This situation was in stark contrast to a previous experience where I had sent a similar package to someone with a Western name, and no ID verification was required. Eventually, the package was released and successfully delivered to the intended company. That is a typical example of how racism could occur.

Hana's experience provides deep insight into the intricacies of discrimination, surpassing traditional definitions of racism. While racism traditionally centres on racial or ethnic discrimination, Hana's perception of unfair treatment due to her Islamic surname sheds light on intersectionality. Her complex identity, shaped by her religious background and potentially her racial or ethnic heritage, converges to influence her experience, showcasing that discrimination can result from a combination of factors. Moreover, Hana's encounter highlights the impact of stereotypes and biases associated with names and surnames. Though not always explicitly rooted in racism, these biases can lead to unjust or discriminatory actions. In recent times, discrimination against Muslims has risen in the West (Helbling, 2013; Stasio *et al.*, 2019), marginalising those whose identities diverge from prevailing Western norms. Additionally, post-9/11, Islamophobia has intensified in Western countries, amplifying experiences of racism and discrimination for Muslims. Choudhury's analysis of Islamophobia's role in shaping Muslims into a racialised collective resonates with Hana's experience, where her Islamic faith becomes a focal point for racial bias. In the academic sphere, Choudhury's exploration of the emergence of Islam as a racial category (Choudhury, 2022) and Pennesi's research on the significance of names in signifying social categories (Pennesi, 2017) offer valuable insights.

It is essential to note that the phenomenon of othering can impact individuals irrespective of their societal standing or educational background, and various forms of othering can also occur within minority communities. This dimension will be further elucidated in the forthcoming subsection.

6.3.2 Interracial discrimination as a new form of othering

While the previous subsection sheds light on significant data regarding white supremacy racism, this section focuses on another form of othering, wherein individuals or groups within a minority community assert their superiority over another minority individual or group. This can manifest through verbal or physical means, and I refer to it as 'interracial othering,' which encompasses interracial racism and discrimination. This specific type of othering emerged in the data provided by some participants, who shared instances of experiencing racism from

members of other minority groups. One such example is from Kani's narrative, wherein she recounts multiple experiences of racism. What struck her was that some of these racist incidents were perpetrated by individuals from other minority communities, subjecting her to the dynamics of othering on several occasions. Kani's first encounter with this occurred over fifteen years ago while she was using public transportation in London. The following extract illustrates this incident:

One day, as I rode the bus with my young son, an upsetting incident unfolded. It's important to note that mentioning the person's race is merely for context and not intended to be racist. In this incident, a Black individual shouted at me, saying, 'You don't belong in this country; you can't ride this bus!' To my surprise, a white man supported him, making a derogatory comment about people like me, claiming, 'These people destroyed our country the only thing they know is to get pregnant and have children.' Feeling deeply hurt, I chose to ignore their hurtful words and decided to leave the bus. Reflecting on the incident, I realise the importance of standing up against such behaviour. Looking back, I wish I had reported the incident to the police.

(Kani – interview 1)

The above narrative underscores the pervasive nature of 'othering,' where individuals can be marginalised, excluded, or subjected to discriminatory attitudes based on various aspects of their identity, such as race, ethnicity, culture, and social standing. The initial incident of a Black individual targeting Kani on a public bus demonstrates racial 'othering,' projecting a sense of exclusion based on certain physical features. Although Kani is not wearing Hijab, and she has a light skin, other physical features like dark hair has classified her as 'other' according to men's perceptions. Numerous studies indicate that Black people have endured global racial injustice for many years (Carter *et al.*, 1996; Coupland, 2010; Iverson, 2007). However, the shared story challenges the widespread assumption and emphasises that anyone, regardless of their background, can harbour prejudiced attitudes and exhibit racism towards others. This is evident in the Black man's words to Kani: 'you don't belong in this country; you can't ride this bus.' In this instance, the Black man used his position to belittle Kani and deprive her of her rights. Furthermore, the white man's use of racist discourse was more implicit as he did not directly address Kani. Instead, he attributed certain characteristics, such as being worthless, incapable, and having no purpose other than getting impregnated, to people who do not share his cultural background. He strategically expressed his sentiments indirectly, employing phrases like 'these people destroyed our country' and 'the only thing they know is to get pregnant and have children.' In this context, 'they' is used as an indefinite pronoun, referring to migrants in general (Pennycook, 1993). By utilising plural pronouns like 'these' and 'they,' he stereotypes and overgeneralises migrants, manipulates the situation, and

exploits the system for his own benefit. This language also serves to separate or distance himself and his 'group' from Kani and other migrants. Through their actions, both men assert a sense of superiority over her (Karapetjana, 2011). Nonetheless, the attitudes of the men involved in the incident may be more closely related to gender differences rather than race or physical appearance. London, being a multicultural city, is home to many individuals who are either foreign-born or have foreign parents. Additionally, as an international city, it attracts a diverse range of visitors and tourists, making racial differences less visually prominent. The men, leveraging their positions of power, discriminated against Kani based on their perception of her as powerless and unable to defend herself. When I inquired about the response of the bus driver and other passengers, Kani reported that no one intervened. Consequently, she felt compelled to remain silent and disembark the bus. Kani also highlighted that she did not report the incident to the police due to a lack of evidence to substantiate her case. It is worth noting that the incident occurred after she had relocated to her new residence in London, suggesting that she might have faced language-related challenges. Despite her comprehension of the men's intentions, she was unable to voice her concerns or defend herself, ultimately opting to remain silent.

Nina also shared her encounters with 'othering,' detailing two distressing incidents that she identifies as examples of this phenomenon. In the initial incident, she faced verbal abuse and physical assault from a boy of Pakistani heritage. The second incident involved a group of girls wrongly perceiving her as Pakistani. Nina's reflection on these experiences unfolds in the following story:

After I arrive (sic) in the UK, I started school. In the school I went to, there was a Pakistani boy who would repeatedly pull my hair, kick my leg, and call me derogatory names. His actions were driven by racism, as he knew I was unable to defend myself and communicate the situation to my teachers due to my limited English proficiency.

(Nina – follow-up interview)

Although Nina's interpretation leans towards identifying the above story as a manifestation of racism, the narrative effectively illustrates a situation of bullying. Her observation suggests that within the context of Manchester, the Pakistani community exercises notable influence over other minority groups like Kurds or Arabs, potentially fostering a sense of hierarchical superiority. Nina attributes the boy's behaviour directed at her to the compounded effects of language barriers and the potential influence of gender dynamics rooted in prevailing Asian cultural norms. This phenomenon resonates with academic discourse that highlights how power dynamics and cultural norms can intersect to influence perceptions and behaviours. As highlighted by scholars such as Johnson and Johnson (2017), power imbalances within

communities can exacerbate feelings of superiority and inferiority, contributing to instances of bullying or discrimination. While Nina's perspective lends itself to interpreting the incident through the lens of racism, it remains crucial to acknowledge that the conclusive determination of intent poses challenges. The nuanced nature of individual motivations and the complex interplay of factors calls for careful examination, as underscored by the works of Richman and Leary (2009) and Smith and Jones (2018) in their exploration of the intricate dimensions of bias and prejudice. The second incident took place in Manchester town centre, where according to Nina, she encountered racism from a group of Black girls.

When I was young, I wore a hijab. One day, I went to the town, and at that time, a group of Black¹⁵ girls stood outside one of the big retailers in the Manchester town centre. The girls, aged between fourteen to seventeen, behaved in a very inappropriate manner. When they saw me, they started talking nonsense. I ignored them, but they followed me and shouted, saying, 'Hey you, you f...king Pki, take your scarf away.' I quickly left the area and went somewhere safe. To this date, I have always experienced racism from members of minority groups rather than the majority.

(Nina – interview 2)

Nina recounts her personal encounter with racial discrimination, as she became the target of derogatory comments from a group of girls in the bustling center of Manchester. It is notable that these girls, who themselves have experienced racial prejudice, engage in discriminatory behaviour towards Nina, using a taboo language 'f...king' with a pejorative term 'Paki'¹⁶ to grasp her attention. Although Nina does not have a Pakistani background, her hijab-wearing appearance at the time led the girls to racially categorise her based on her physical appearance. The use of the racial slur indicates the expression of hate and animosity. However, it is important to emphasise that the actions of this group of girls should not be seen as representative of the entire Black community. There may be underlying factors or socio-psychological influences contributing to their behaviour, such as educational background, upbringing, age, social status, or even social class. Unlike Nina, Murad initially denied experiencing any form of othering during the first interview. However, in subsequent interviews, he acknowledged subtle discrimination in his workplace. This shift in Murad's narrative indicates the evolving nature of identity and highlights how individuals' identities can be shaped by their contexts and circumstances. The following exemplifies this:

¹⁵ In this thesis, the term 'Black' is employed, not as a racist remark, but to identify a distinct racial group. This usage is consistent with several instances throughout this chapter where it is utilised purely as a descriptor to denote people of a different race.

¹⁶ 'Pki' is a derogatory racial term employed to encompass individuals with South Asian heritage (e.g., people from Indian, Pakistan, and Bangladesh).

As the leader of the opposition party within the Labour group in London, I consider my journey as an asylum seeker who didn't speak English to be a significant accomplishment. However, I am confronted with constant obstacles from racist individuals within my own party. They may appear pleasant and friendly on the surface, but their actions behind my back are deceitful and harmful. It feels as though they wear a mask of kindness while harbouring malicious intentions.

(Murad – follow-up interview)

According to Murad, there is a presence of covert racism within his political party, particularly among privileged members who possess advantages based on their skin colour, primarily being white. Murad refers to this form of racism as 'colonial racism,' drawing parallels to Said's concept of 'orientalism' (Said, 1978). Like the dynamics of orientalism, those in positions of power within the party passively create barriers and perpetuate issues that disproportionately affect people of colour. They prioritise protecting and consolidating their own authority while simultaneously diminishing the power and agency of others. This understanding suggests that racism is deeply ingrained and normalised within the framework of colonisation which is heavily discussed by (Said, 1978), Gilroy (1993), and Bhabha (1994). In his depiction of his colleagues, Murad employs the contrasting terms 'angel' and 'devil.' The term 'devil' symbolises the presence of hostile and destructive power that undermines their benevolent actions. Murad proceeds to share a recent incident that exemplifies this dynamic.

The group under my leadership has become divided into two distinct subgroups. The first subgroup aligns themselves with [...]s ideology, while the other subgroup identifies as moderate and rejects extremism. There exists a deep disagreement and animosity between these two factions. As the leader, I have exerted significant effort to foster peace and unity among them. Prior to the election, two members reached a consensus to vote against me and obstruct my ascension to the position of opposition leader. However, despite these challenges, I emerged victorious in the election.

(Murad – follow-up interview)

The differing ideologies within the two subgroups have led to conflicts and disagreements. Murad has faced racism from certain members who exploited his sympathetic and amiable nature. They used their privileged position as white individuals to act against him and undermine his chances of winning the election. Such behaviour violates international human rights standards, as politicians and political parties are expected to uphold and protect the rights of their members, preventing acts of othering, racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance (OHCHR, 2023). Despite their efforts, the two individuals were unsuccessful in their attempt to prevent Murad from emerging as the victor in the election. When asked about his feelings, Murad expressed a sense of relief and gratitude, emphasising that one's abilities should not be determined by their skin colour or race.

Similarly, Karim briefly touched upon his experiences of being othered, specifically mentioning that he had encountered racism from a group of individuals of white ethnicity. However, upon further examination of his journal, it becomes evident that his narratives revolve around instances of interracial othering. In one written story, he highlights the uncertainties he faced while encountering racial injustice in a restaurant owned by a South Asian individual. The written narrative below expresses Karim’s reflections on independence, freedom, and the emotional challenges he encountered while working in an Asian takeaway (Figure 10).

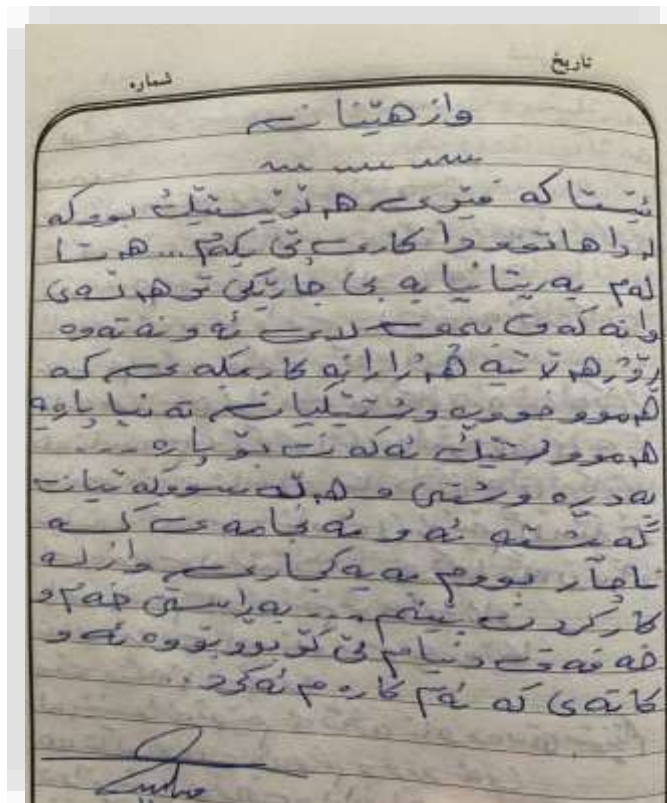


Figure 10: A screenshot of Karim’s journal.

The following account is the translation of what Karim has written (Figure 10).

I have learned a valuable lesson: I will never work for foreign nationals from the East while I reside in this country. My experience with them has led me to believe that they prioritise money over morals and are willing to do anything for financial gain. Their rude attitudes and behaviours drove me to leave my job. As a result, I now feel a sense of relief and comfort in my own skin.

(Karim – a journal sample narrative)

The above story unveils a disturbing reality about Karim's relationship with his co-workers. Although he does not explicitly mention the nationality of his employer, he implies that the restaurant owner is also a migrant. Karim portrays the employer as money-focused and lacking ethical standards, prioritising financial gain over morals. By using the plural demonstrative 'those,' Karim generalises and stereotypes all individuals from the East based on his experiences with one person, his employer. This oversimplification reflects an orientalist perspective, as described by Said (1978). Karim's negative experiences have had an impact on his socio-psychological well-being, which aligns with previous research on perceived discrimination and its effects on psychological distress among marginalised populations (Kessler *et al.*, 1999; Thoits, 1985). Jang *et al.*'s (2008) statement supports Karim's experience by establishing a connection between discrimination and psychological well-being, highlighting how discrimination can negatively impact one's well-being. However, his sense of feeling comfortable in his own skin indicates a change that occurred after leaving his job. This piqued my curiosity, and I proceeded to inquire further about this incident and its emotional effects on him. In response to my questions about the written narrative, Karim (follow-up interview) provides the following insight:

I worked as a cleaner in a restaurant owned by an individual from a South Asian background. Unfortunately, the owner subjected me to discrimination and treated me as if I were a slave. He would frequently shout at me without any valid reason, and whenever a customer had a complaint, I was always the one to be blamed. He took pleasure in belittling and devaluing me, he even paid me a mere ten pounds for a ten-hour shift. Throughout my time at the restaurant, a part of me was gradually lost, but I felt compelled to endure the mistreatment due to my need for the job. It took me a while to fully comprehend the gravity of the situation, but eventually, I reached a breaking point and had no choice but to leave the job.

Karim's encounter with direct and indirect racism from the restaurant owner is evident in his story. The owner's behaviour can be understood through the lens of power dynamics and societal hierarchies. Lie and Bodenhausen (2017) support this observation by suggesting that economic prejudice often leads to the formation of class-based mental images that are characterised by negative psychological attributes. The restaurant owner may perceive Karim as an undocumented immigrant, positioning him at the bottom of the social order without legal rights. This perception grants the owner a sense of control and allows him to dehumanise Karim as he pleases. Furthermore, the owner's treatment of Karim as an 'outsider' or deviant other helps maintain the owner's idealised self (Holliday, 2011), creating social, relational, psychological, and emotional distance. These attitudes have a detrimental impact on Karim's sense of identity, leading to an identity crisis (Jim, 2006). However, this situation prompts Karim to reflect on his well-being and navigate his dignity to forge new identities. The

narrative can also be analysed in the context of language. The restaurant owner exploited Karim's migrant status and limited proficiency in English, being aware of Karim's struggle to communicate effectively in the target language. As a result, the owner exerted control and engaged in discriminatory behaviour, which made Karim feel a sense of worthlessness. These findings align with the research conducted by Nelson and Dunn (2017) on racism and anti-racism in Australia. Despite these challenges, Karim's limited social integration, knowledge of employment laws, and expectations of fair wages presented a significant advantage to the business owner. The experience of othering in relation to language proficiency and the use of English resonated in participants' data. This aspect will be further explored in the following pages.

6.3.3 Xenophobia, racism, and the role of language

Language proficiency plays a significant role in the experiences of certain participants, as they have faced discomfort and awkwardness because of their limited language abilities. Limited exposure to the language upon their initial migration has led to challenges, with 'native English speakers' criticising and scrutinising them for their inability to communicate effectively in English. Many participants have also shared instances of othering, including xenophobia and racism, in which they have been subjected to exclusion, harassment, bullying, humiliation, and degradation. Saman's story provides an example of how an elderly woman in London discriminated against him based on his language proficiency. The following account illustrates this encounter:

I lived in a multicultural neighbourhood in East London, and one day, my wife and I went shopping at a local market to buy groceries. As we conversed in Kurdish, an elderly woman suddenly shouted at us, saying, 'why don't you speak English? You are in England, and you should speak English' (Appendix 10.7).

(Saman – interview 1)

Saman's narrative serves as a poignant illustration of language discrimination, also referred to as 'glottophobia' (Gil and Marsen, 2022), within the diverse urban landscape of London. Language discrimination encompasses the unjust treatment of individuals based on their native language, accent, vocabulary, or grammatical proficiency (Roberts *et al.*, 2014). It emphasises the linguistic dimensions of individuals rather than their physical appearance or racial background. In Saman's account, the woman associates national identity with language and perceives the use of a minority language as a potential threat to her own sense of national identity. Consequently, she reacts defensively to safeguard her country. The woman's choice to employ the interrogative adverb 'why' and the auxiliary verb 'have to' reflects her expectation of conforming to specific behavioural norms, specifically the use of English, within the societal context. From her vantage point, Saman and his wife are seen as having

transgressed the established social norms of the United Kingdom, which emphasise the use of the country's language in public spaces, regardless of their immigration status, legal circumstances, or language competence. Additionally, according to the woman's perspective, migrants are expected to acclimatise to life in the UK. Saman proceeds to discuss the personal and societal implications of the incident as follows:

We were shocked as we didn't understand the reason behind her behaviour. We attempted to calm her down, but our efforts were in vain. Initially, it was difficult to comprehend, but over time, we became accustomed to such reactions from people, and they no longer have an impact on us.

(Saman – interview 1)

The above excerpt provides insight into the emotional reaction of Saman and his wife to the racist response from the woman, as they were initially shocked and perplexed by her behaviour. However, repeated experiences of a similar nature have led them to develop a perception that the problem does not reside within themselves, but rather within the prejudiced attitudes of others. They have become accustomed to such situations and have developed a specific understanding and level of acceptance in response. Being a part of the largest stateless nation poses numerous challenges, ranging from the absence of a defined national identity to limited opportunities to travel. Although the focus of this thesis is not on nationhood and national identity, the data revealed compelling narratives that cannot be disregarded. One story from Omer has captured my attention.

In 2017, I visited Kurdistan. As a Kurd myself, I encountered a four-hour detainment at the Turkish border, during which they conducted an extensive investigation. Eventually, they discovered a photograph of me taken during a demonstration against the Turkish government in London. In the image, someone can be seen standing behind me, capturing a picture of Öcalan. This was sufficient evidence for them to label me as a terrorist. I vividly recall being repeatedly referred to as a terrorist, but fortunately, my passport came to my rescue, saving me from imprisonment.

(Omer – follow-up interview)

The preceding account sheds light on Turkey's treatment of its Kurdish citizens, depicting Turks as superior and relegating non-Turkish individuals to a lesser status. This highlights a pervasive racial ideology in Turkey, where Kurds are distinctly labelled as a racialised group. Historically, republican modernisers devalued Kurdish traits, deeming them inferior to those of 'white Turks' (Ergin, 2008; Ferguson, 2014). Omer's experience of discrimination due to his Kurdish heritage is not an isolated incident but rather a reflection of the enduring political tensions between Kurdish and Turkish populations in the region. Despite being the majority in the area, Kurds have long faced denial and marginalisation by the Turkish government. The

prevalence of Kurdophobia, or anti-Kurdish sentiment, further compounds the challenges faced by individuals of Kurdish descent. The Turkish government's attempts to control and suppress the Kurdish population, exemplified by the implementation of the Kart-Kurt theory (Zeyneloglu *et al.*, 2016, p. 33), perpetuate this discrimination. According to this theory, Kurds are considered an inseparable part of the Turkish identity, and dissent against it carries severe consequences. Even today, those who challenge the Kurt-kart theory encounter racism and discrimination from the Turkish population at various levels, with Omer being one of its victims.

While most participants acknowledged that othering experiences were unpleasant, they also perceived them as temporary and lacking long-term consequences. In the following section, I will delve into the participants' perspectives on racism and discrimination, as well as their coping mechanisms. Notably, the participants held diverse views on the nature of racism and discrimination. For individuals like Karim, Kani, and Nina, othering experiences had significant personal and emotional repercussions (see 2.2.2). On the other hand, Hana regards othering as a cruel act perpetrated by some individuals against others. She believes that racism is an enduring and indomitable deviant behaviour. In the following excerpt, Hana expresses her viewpoint:

If I have found myself in a situation where I didn't handle racist issues appropriately, it is my responsibility to address it and not place blame on others. It is essential to adapt and grow wherever we find ourselves. Ultimately, allowing trivial matters to hinder our progress in life is counterproductive. Therefore, it is best to ignore such negativity and continue moving forward.

(Hana – interview 1)

Hana's statement reflects a sense of personal accountability and resilience in dealing with racist issues. Her courteous manner stems from her experiences of facing racism multiple times while working for various institutions. Nevertheless, there is a clear emphasis on personal growth and adaptability in any situation, indicating a proactive approach to overcoming challenges. Similarly, Karim shared his story of being the target of a hate crime. One afternoon, while walking home, he was verbally and physically assaulted by a group of white individuals. In Karim's own words:

I remember that day after work when I was heading home. Along the way, I noticed a group of young men gathering near the town centre. As soon as they saw me, they immediately started hurling offensive insults and derogatory remarks. It was clear to them that I was a foreigner, given that the town was white and had only a few people of colour. Despite feeling tired, I could not control my emotions and ended up responding to their offensive

comments in a similar manner. This only escalated the situation, and eventually, the men approached me, leading to a physical assault. In hindsight, I realise that despite their actions, I bear some responsibility for what transpired. I could have kept my temper in check and chosen to ignore them, but I failed to do so.

(Karim – interview 1)

Karim resided in a town where the dominant population was of white indigenous people, resulting in anyone outside this category being perceived as a foreigner. This reflects the manifestation of prejudice based on group identities, particularly whiteness (Harris, 1993). The men in question asserted their white status and resorted to using derogatory language to gain control over Karim's actions. They assumed authority and justified their power based on his race, demonstrating ethnocentric views towards migrants. Their perception of Karim as inferior and incapable of defending himself was a misjudgement influenced by their own limited understanding. In their actions, the group violated social norms by imposing their white identity to assault Karim, engaging in a hate crime. Interestingly, despite the emotional and physical harm inflicted by the men, Karim holds himself accountable for his own hostility and impatience. He believes it is his responsibility as a migrant to show respect to those who are considered native to the land, such as in the case of the UK. This highlights Karim's struggle with a 'weak self-concept' when faced with individuals who consider themselves fortunate and privileged due to their skin colour or race (Dalkir, 2005, p. 188). Saman also recognises the rights of the landowners and emphasises the importance of minority groups respecting the established rules, norms, and values of the host society. He shares his views on discrimination, xenophobia, and racism, expressing the belief that certain individuals deserve to be targeted in hate crimes, particularly those who do not adhere to the societal standards. The following narrative exemplifies this perspective:

I don't blame British people if they dislike or reject us. However, it is often the case that some Kurdish individuals misbehave, exhibiting aggression and a lack of respect towards the original inhabitants of the land. It is important to acknowledge that this is their country and their community, and as such, we should show respect accordingly.

(Saman – interview 1)

In Saman's perspective, individuals within minority groups, such as Kurds, bear responsibility for their actions. They must be open-minded and make sincere efforts to bridge the gap created by the 'us' versus 'them' ideology (Holliday, 2011; Staszak, 2008). Saman knows that othering promotes prejudice and disruptive behaviour, and disrespecting the rights of others only exacerbates the situation and undermines community relationships. It becomes a barrier to successful integration, adaptation, and fosters social exclusion (Elik *et al.*, 2017).

The findings presented in this section indicate that most of the participants have encountered various forms of othering. They agree that othering has had a negative impact on their lives and overall well-being. The discussion so far has focused on certain types of othering, such as white supremacy racism, where individuals with white privilege exert their power over other minority groups. This aligns with existing theories on othering, which highlight how individuals with power marginalise and discriminate against others (Fanon, 1963; Connolly, 1985; Said, 1978). However, this study has identified a new form of othering known as ‘interracial othering’, which encompasses interracial racism and discrimination, as evident in the narratives of Kani, Nina, and Karim. This form of othering occurs when members of one minority group marginalise and discriminate against members of another minority group. It is a complex phenomenon that involves power dynamics and the construction of stereotypes and prejudices. While interracial othering exists, it has received less attention compared to the discourse on white supremacy in the existing literature. Furthermore, the analysis indicates that othering has had an impact on the participants’ emotional and psychological well-being, highlighting the need for further investigation in this area. The upcoming section moves beyond the participants’ perspectives on othering and explores the effects of perceived discrimination on adaptation and overall well-being. By examining this theme, we can gain a deeper understanding of how the participants perceive racism and its implications for their overall welfare.

6.4 The Effect of perceived discrimination on adaptation and well-being

In the preceding section, I examined the concept of othering and its implications for the participants and how they experience culture and language, particularly in relation to their well-being. This section builds upon those discussions and delves more deeply into the participants’ lived experiences within the diaspora, offering additional layers of understanding. By sharing the participants’ stories, this section aims to demonstrate the interconnectedness between othering and well-being. This study views well-being as a multidimensional construct encompassing various aspects that contribute to a fulfilling life. These include ‘material well-being, such as income and wealth; physical and psychological well-being, encompassing health and happiness; and educational opportunities and the ability to engage in civil society through democratic processes and the rule of law’ (Deaton, 2015, p. 14). Most participants acknowledged that language difficulties and experiences of othering had a significant impact on their psychological well-being. They perceived these challenges as part of the natural process of migration, albeit temporarily affecting their social and psychological well-being. In subsection 6.3.3, I discussed Saman’s experience of encountering a racist incident in the borough where he resided in London. I shared an extract from his narrative to

illustrate the issues he raised. The following excerpt presents Saman's viewpoint on the same incident, emphasising the concept of othering in relation to well-being¹⁷:

The incident that occurred in the market was both shocking and unsettling. Initially, we were unable to comprehend what had transpired, and it took us a considerable amount of time to recover from the emotional impact. However, as we encountered similar incidents in London on multiple occasions, we gradually came to realise that this was a common experience in the process of migration. Eventually, we were able to overcome these challenges and invest our skills and capabilities to thrive and prosper as a family.

(Saman – interview 1)

The unpleasant situations experienced by Saman and his family had a slight impact on their perception of living in the UK. However, as these incidents recurred, they served as a pathway to their greater understanding of their unfamiliar environment and society. Saman's determination to improve his life enabled him to ascend the social ladder, gain acceptance, and be recognised by various communities within the host society. In a similar vein, Karim described how his working conditions at the restaurant had adversely affected his physical and mental well-being. The following excerpt illustrates this:

After a long battle, enduring a prolonged struggle and facing challenges with my employer, I made the decision to leave my job and embark on a transformative journey. As a result, I have found happiness and a sense of belonging in society. Through my various endeavours and contributions, I have earned the recognition and respect of others for who I truly am. This newfound sense of acceptance has empowered me, and I no longer perceive myself as a victim. Instead, I consider myself an integral part of the community, I am one of them [...]. Living in the UK has afforded me numerous opportunities and opened doors that were previously inaccessible. The people in my town, specifically in [...], have come to know me due to my active involvement in various activities. For instance, I share my poetry with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, and I am fortunate to receive language support from attendees of these events.

(Karim – follow-up interview)

It is evident that Karim went through a challenging period while working in a restaurant, which left him feeling devastated, as depicted in his narrative of 'after a long battle.' However, his decision to quit his job enabled him to regain what he had lost, namely his dignity. Consequently, he managed to establish strong connections with individuals within his community and actively participate in societal affairs. Karim's openness towards various cultures and people from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds has facilitated his navigation

¹⁷ See section 6.3.3, for more on Saman's experience on othering experiences.

of different experiences and fostered acceptance by the respective target groups in his town. The introspection of his identity and the transformative encounter with his employer have contributed to his personal growth. Through integration, he has transformed into an individual who is valued and respected by the local community. It is evident that Karim now experiences 'happiness' within his own identity, and the feeling of being victimised is no longer valid (Wakefield *et al.*, 2017). His sentiment of being 'one of them' signifies his successful integration and adaptation journey (Wakefield *et al.*, 2017). In a similar vein, Murad shared his experiences of racism and discrimination. Despite initially denying any encounter with race-related issues during the first interview, he later voluntarily disclosed stories and discussed situations in which he had personally experienced racial injustice. The following narrative exemplifies this:

During my election, I ventured into uncharted territory for the party. With another candidate, we formed a close friendship, but only I emerged victorious. In the 2020 election, my vote count surged by 80% and I successfully ousted the Tory councillor, replacing them with a candidate from our party. Notably, in the 2018 election, I was the only candidate who secured an additional seat for our party.

(Murad – follow-up interview)

Murad migrated to the UK in search of a brighter future. His optimistic outlook, belief in societal progress, and commitment to assisting individuals irrespective of their backgrounds reflect a positive state of social well-being (Keyes, 1998). His unwavering determination and perseverance have earned him a respected position within his community. Serving as a councillor and advocating for the interests of his constituents for more than seven years exemplifies his dedication and genuine concern for the welfare of others. By fulfilling his responsibilities and fostering meaningful relationships, he has created a supportive environment that promotes collaboration and social connectivity.

Some participants faced additional challenges such as social isolation, involuntary separation, and feelings of loneliness. Upon arriving in the UK, they encountered a period of considerable stress. The constant fear of being detained or deported due to lack of proper documentation, limited access to necessities like housing and finances, and various other factors had a detrimental impact on their well-being. Furthermore, the fear of being alone, the physical and emotional distance from family, friends, and their homeland, also took a toll on their overall sense of well-being. Moreover, some participants experienced anxiety stemming from the distressing loss of social status and traumatic experiences they had endured. Most of the participants expressed that they were pushed into situations of desolation, facing risks to their physical safety. These risks included dangers encountered during their migration journey as

well as engaging in hazardous and unsatisfying employment. Consequently, these experiences had a detrimental impact on their mental and psychological well-being. However, despite the challenges they faced, the participants acknowledged that the entire migration process served as a learning experience. It led to their personal and social growth, facilitating a better adjustment to their new lives.

In the upcoming paragraphs, I will delve into the data regarding the participants' encounters with uncertainty and grief upon their arrival in the UK. I will explore how these experiences had a negative impact on their health and well-being, as well as the positive outcomes they had on their adaptation process. For instance, Kani shared her struggles in adapting to a new culture, language, and environment in subsection 6.2.1. During our initial meeting, she expressed moments of sorrow when reflecting on various unpleasant situations. However, she openly discussed the challenges of crossing borders alone with her son and the distress she felt upon leaving her hometown. Despite describing the experience as problematic, she acknowledged its life-changing nature. According to Kani:

It took me two months to arrive in the UK with my two-year-old son. Throughout the journey, we encountered numerous difficulties and challenges. The two-month duration felt incredibly long, as time seemed to move at a sluggish pace. Each night I spent alone felt like an entire week, and the days seemed never-ending, with twenty-four hours stretching endlessly.

(Kani – interview 1)

The narrative above portrays the profound uncertainty and challenges that Kani faced during her journey. Traveling thousands of miles and crossing borders alone with her two-year-old son to escape danger was an immensely tragic and daunting experience. However, she recognised the necessity of providing a safe environment and a better future for her small family. Yet, this harrowing journey took a toll on Kani's emotional well-being. She experienced deep sorrow, emptiness, and loneliness as she lost her support networks, including her community, family, relatives, and friends. The lack of control over time exacerbated her fear and anxiety, making each night feel like a week, and the days seemed longer than usual due to the unfamiliar time difference between the Middle East and the West. The stress she endured led to the establishment of a temporal illusion¹⁸, further complicating her psychological perception of time. Kani also discussed the grief of leaving behind her family and loved ones as she followed her heart to migrate. Establishing a new life abroad came with its

¹⁸ Temporal illusion is a perversion in the perception of time that occurs for several reasons, due to different kinds of psychological uncertainty such as stress.

consequences, and she bravely faced the challenges of starting afresh in a foreign land. In the following story, Kani shares her perspective on the complexities of her migration journey.

I feel a strong emotional connection when discussing these experiences because it was incredibly difficult to leave everything behind, particularly my family and my homeland. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have a loving and supportive family. At times, I believe that God has rewarded me with a better life in the UK, but it has come at the cost of being separated from my family. However, despite all the challenges, I am content and have no regrets about the decision I made [to migrate].

(Kani – interview 1)

Based on the narrative, Kani finds herself caught between two contrasting realities: pursuing better life opportunities in a new place and the difficult decision of leaving her family and loved ones behind. The portrayal of space in her story is intertwined with emotions and memories of past experiences. The emotional turmoil arising from the uncertainty between these two realities has prompted Kani to reconsider her migration journey. Through personal reflection, she has managed to carve her own path and build a new life away from her homeland. Saman's journey also involved moments of grief and uncertainty as he transitioned and migrated to a new country. He acknowledges that the separation from his family had an impact on his overall well-being. The following excerpt highlights this aspect:

I arrived in the UK some time after my family did. Unfortunately, my eldest son didn't recognise me. The physical distance between my family and me was just a two- to three-hour flight, but emotionally it felt like a long and challenging journey. Reflecting on that moment, it brings back painful feelings [...]. I was juggling work and studies simultaneously. The job was extremely demanding, and I could only manage to sleep three to four hours a day given my circumstances. This situation had a significant impact on my health and my family relationships. However, I had to do it because I needed to support my family and pursue my education. I had ambitious dreams of making positive changes and my priority was building a better future for myself and my family.

(Saman – interview 1)

Saman, like Kani, also faced significant challenges and experienced trauma during his time apart from his immediate family, including his wife and son. This separation required him to display patience and perseverance to overcome the hardships. The prolonged social isolation and fear of losing his family took a toll on his psychological well-being, leading to a sense of disconnection and emotional detachment. Additionally, the physical distance and extended separation resulted in an unexpected consequence: his eldest son did not recognise him. Upon seeking asylum in the UK, he faced issues related to his social status and language proficiency,

which forced him to take on risky employment, leading to physical exhaustion (Wang and Geng, 2019). This finding aligns partially with the study conducted by Hawkey and Cacioppo (2013) Cacioppo *et al.* (2003), which suggests that prolonged isolation can have negative effects on both physical and emotional health. However, Saman's determination to create a better life for his family remained his top priority, and his role as the primary provider motivated him to stay focused on his objectives. Through utilising his skills and energy, he was able to overcome his struggles and grief, generating a sense of empowerment. The loss of social status also impacted the adaptation experiences of other participants, such as Murad and Omer, who had previously worked as lawyers in their hometown. Both individuals acknowledged the difficulty of leaving their careers behind but were determined to find alternative paths. The following story provides a glimpse into Murad's experience:

In the past, I had the privilege of working alongside coalition forces in Iraq, where I provided legal and cultural guidance. It is undoubtedly challenging to leave a job that you are passionate about, isn't it? However, when it comes to survival and striving for a better life and future, we are willing to make sacrifices. Along the path to self-development, we inevitably encounter obstacles and difficulties.

[...]

For several years, I transitioned into the construction industry, but in May 2014, I had the opportunity to become a councillor in [...]. Despite this change in profession, I still find ways to apply my legal expertise daily. Additionally, I am dedicated to assisting and advocating for the people in my community, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs addressed.

(Murad – interview 1)

This passage highlights the individual's professional journey, cultural adaptation, and their commitment to well-being and community engagement. Murad initially mentions his experience of working alongside coalition forces in Iraq, where he provided legal and cultural guidance. This suggests a strong connection to his professional identity and expertise in these areas. Leaving such a job, which he is passionate about, is acknowledged as a challenging decision. This indicates that their professional identity plays a significant role in shaping their sense of self and overall well-being. Murad also emphasises the individual's motivation for survival and striving for a better life and future. This demonstrates their resilience and willingness to make sacrifices in pursuit of their goals. The journey of self-development is acknowledged as having its share of obstacles and difficulties, which further reinforces his determination and adaptability. Furthermore, Murad expresses his dedication to assist and advocate for the people in their community as a councillor. This demonstrates his engagement in community affairs and their desire to ensure that the voices of community members are

heard, and their needs are addressed. This engagement with the community is not only an act of service but also contributes to the individual's own sense of well-being and fulfilment. Similarly, Omer worked as a lawyer for several years. However, upon leaving Kurdistan, he had to accept jobs that did not align with her skills and knowledge. Omer expresses:

It is not easy to leave your job, status, and position, but when you find yourself in a place where you cannot envision any future, you must take that risk. I have always aspired to reach the highest point. Unfortunately, back home, I was unable to achieve that, so I had to take the leap and migrate. Looking back, I can confidently say that I made the right decision and have reached the position I had always desired.

(Omer – interview 1)

Similarly, Omer also acknowledges the difficulties that come with relinquishing status, prestige, and social ties upon leaving their homeland. However, Omer does not regret his decision to migrate. Instead, he sees it as a pivotal step that allowed him to manifest his aspirations, acquire a superior education, enhance his reputation, and uphold his integrity. Omer's commitment to education played a vital role in cultivating stronger social bonds, nurturing his talents and interests, and developing valuable social capital—all contributing factors to the overall well-being (Piazza-Georgi, 2002). This underscores the undeniable importance of human connection and its positive implications for happiness and health (Mental Health Foundation, 2023).

6.5 Chapter summary and discussions

In this chapter, I have discussed the various migration experiences of participants and their consequential impacts on participants' adaptation and overall well-being. The discussion thus far has revolved around presenting the formidable struggles and challenges that participants have faced during their process of adaptation in the UK, a portrayal supported by the presented data. Within the first thematic exploration, which centres on experiences related to culture and language, a compelling correlation between language proficiency, instances of racism, and occurrences of discrimination has emerged. This chapter also delves into how participants position themselves within this context of adaptation and the broader socio-cultural landscape. In the subsequent thematic section, an extensive examination of the concept of othering has been undertaken, illuminating how experiences of racism and discrimination can lead to temporary psychological issues. This section further explores the effect of perceived discrimination on well-being and the intricate relationship between these experiences and the imperative role they play in facilitating or impede the process of adaptation.

Age was identified as a significant factor affecting language acquisition, with the participants noting the influence of their age upon arrival in the UK. This finding is supported by Lenneberg's (1967) critical period hypothesis, suggesting that younger learners have an advantage in acquiring a new language, although older learners can still develop language skills at a different pace. These findings emphasise the complex relationship between age and language proficiency among migrants. Furthermore, the data revealed a connection between language, racism, and discrimination. The participants with lower language proficiency experienced various forms of othering, including racial and discriminatory experiences. This study challenges the notion that racism is solely perpetrated by white individuals, highlighting that racism is a universal activity that can occur among individuals with different physical features and within different minority groups.

The participants with limited language skills often encountered various forms of othering on multiple occasions. Furthermore, othering was found to be associated with participants' names (as seen in Hana's narrative in 6.3.1) and physical appearances (as observed in Nina's narrative in 6.3.2). While existing literature heavily emphasises the prevalence of white supremacy racism (Essed, 1991; Cross, 2020), with numerous studies highlighting the involvement of white individuals in racist acts (DiAngelo, 2019; Milner, 2007), this study reveals that racism is a universal phenomenon that can manifest among individuals with different communities regardless of the racial and physical attributes (e.g., White vs. Black) and within various minority groups (e.g., Black vs. Muslim, Muslim vs. Muslim, or Black against people of colour) .

The findings of the chapter further highlight the interconnectedness between migration, othering, and well-being. The participants faced challenging realities in their new environments, and these experiences had an impact on their overall well-being. However, it is important to note that these experiences varied among individuals. The adverse effects of othering manifested in participants' feelings of uncertainty and confusion, subsequently impacting their well-being. This observation is consistent with existing research on migration and othering, which highlights the detrimental impact of othering experiences on the well-being of minority groups (Berry & Hou, 2016, 2017; Safi, 2010). Nevertheless, the analysis of several stories revealed the effects of othering on well-being are temporary rather than permanent, indicating that participants' social and psychological well-being were affected for a certain period but did not have long-lasting impacts. This finding challenges the prevailing literature on othering and well-being, which focuses on the long-term psychological and mental effects on individuals' well-being, overlooking the diverse capacities of individuals in dealing with specific life issues that make us unique.

Furthermore, participants' positive attitudes towards self-acceptance, self-determination, autonomy, and positive interpersonal relationships contributed to their psychological well-being (Gómez-López *et al.*, 2019). Despite facing racist issues primarily stemming from their migration status and language barriers, these factors did not prevent the participants from establishing meaningful relationships with individuals from different backgrounds. The preservation of their social well-being, characterised by optimal functioning and social participation, was evident (Keyes, 1998). With a desire to integrate into British culture and society, the participants were able to transform their negative experiences into positive ones through cultural learning, which involves acquiring culture-specific and culture-general knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for effective communication and interaction with individuals from diverse cultures, and thus lead to successful adaptation (Kuo, 2014, p. 19). Lastly, learning a new language and adapting to the norms and values of the host society played a crucial role in participants' process of re-evaluating their identities and actively engaging as members of the society. Additionally, it is important to note that the stressful situations experienced by interviewees were temporary, and the resolution of these conditions relied on the individuals' personal attributes and skill sets.

7 The Intersection Between Material Culture and Identity: The Kurdish Case

7.1 Introduction

This chapter, the third findings chapter, focuses on material culture and identity. Its aim is to uncover the significance of ‘stuff’ (Miller, 2010) or objects for the participants and their role in negotiating and navigating their identities. This chapter addresses the following research questions:

- How do Iraqi Kurdish migrants in the United Kingdom experience changes in their identity, and what is the role of material culture in easing this process?
- How do Iraqi Kurdish people define themselves in terms of nations and groups?

In the initial stages of my fieldwork, the concept of material culture was not at the forefront of my research considerations. However, after meeting the participants and spending time with them in their private dwellings and personal spaces, I realised the significant meaning that objects hold for most of them. During the interviews, the participants consistently connected their experiences to the items and objects they regularly used or kept around them. They highlighted the importance of clothing, food, and celebrating cultural traditions in preserving their sense of identity and unity.

To gain a thorough understanding of how participants in this study use material objects to express their multiple identities and navigate identity negotiation, the research delves into the realm of material culture. It closely examines the meanings embedded within cherished possessions in participants’ adopted ‘homes away from home.’ By analysing these objects rigorously, the objective is to understand how they facilitate social and cultural performances and, consequently, how these performances shape participants’ identities. Through this examination of personal artifacts, valuable insights are gained into how material culture serves as a medium for self-expression and identity preservation (Mahmud, 2024). This exploration sheds light not only on the tangible aspects of culture but also on deeper layers of human connection to objects and a sense of belonging.

This chapter is structured as follows: First, I will examine participants’ choice of material artifacts (e.g., arts, vintage items, and personal diaries) concerning their identity under the overarching theme of ‘artifacts as art.’ The second section explores data related to the theme of ‘place attachment and identity.’ Next, in section 7.3, I will analyse data regarding the power of place and identity. In section 7.4, ‘clothing as a form of identity expression’ will be examined. Section 7.5 covers the theme of preserving participants’ cultural identity through

celebrating cultural traditions, focusing on participants stories about food and the ritualisation of specific food items within the scope of the current study.

7.2 *Objects as art*

Some participants used the word ‘art’ when discussing different objects; they asserted that the collected objects carry memories and portray various art forms. Therefore, I borrow their word – ‘art’ to generate the title for the first theme. Material objects as art demonstrate the ornamental objects the participants collect, keep, and use daily.

The findings unveil a consistent pattern among all the participants concerning their utilisation and perception of objects, aligning with broader trends observed in migrant communities. Objects are imbued with a spectrum of meanings and are regarded as tools for imagination, encompassing both abstract and tangible representations. Additionally, the collected objects by the participants serve as reminders of what has been lost or missed, wielding symbolic power, and moulding the participants’ sense of belonging to specific places, spaces, and social circles. These objects also play a pivotal role in mediating and preserving individual and collective identities within their new sociocultural contexts. The multi-faceted nature of these objects is further underscored in the subsequent sections, where I will delve deeply into the intricate connections between these unique objects and the formation of identity in the diaspora. My aim is to illuminate how these objects contribute to the participants’ comprehension of self, home, and belonging within the context of their migration experiences.

7.2.1 Participants’ use of artefacts and their impact on identity

Regardless of their personal history and the purpose of migration, the participants arrived in the UK with limited possessions. To create a sense of home in their new surroundings, they began collecting or replicating items, metaphorically ‘carving out new landscapes of belonging’ (Tolia-Kelly, 2010, p. 5). Like most people, they used personal belongings to decorate their homes. However, what makes the collected objects unique to them is the hidden emotional significance that reflects their multiple identity. During the interviews, most participants emphasised the importance of artifacts in creating a ‘home atmosphere.’ They hung pictures and displayed cherished personal objects in designated spaces within their private dwellings. For them, these possessions acted as triggers, facilitating memories, and evoking their personal histories. The collected objects became souvenirs that represented the journey they had travelled and signified narratives of their past (Tolia-Kelly, 2010).

A compelling case in point is Kani and her husband, who arrived in the UK as refugees over two decades ago leaving their possessions behind in pursuit of safety and a fresh start. However, upon establishing a permanent residence in West London, they embarked on a

mission to recover items reminiscent of those they once owned in Kurdistan. Their quest led to the accumulation of a wealth of Kurdish artifacts, meticulously displayed throughout their home, which I found both visually captivating and aesthetically pleasing. These artifacts were procured during their visits to Kurdistan and interactions with family and friends across Europe. As a fellow Kurd, I keenly appreciated the distinctiveness and rarity of these possessions. Notably, these items included a black retro dial telephone adorned with a unique gold disc or dial on its front, alongside a Viceroy film box camera dating back to the 1960s (Figure 11). Both artifacts were thoughtfully positioned adjacent to the living room sofas. The retro dial telephone, a device designed for voice communication over a wired network, is characterised by its prominent gold disc and a distinctive rotary mechanism employed for selecting routing numbers. Additionally, the Viceroy film box camera, manufactured by Haking in the 1960s in Hong Kong, serves as an integral part of the decor in Kani's living space, imbuing the room with a particular ambiance. These objects hold deep sentimental value for Kani, evoking cherished memories from her childhood spent with loved ones.



Figure 11: Vintage Rotary Telephone and Viceroy film box camera positioned at one side of Kani's living room. The data is collected via visual ethnography.

On the opposite wall, she has chosen to exhibit two Dafs (Figure 12). The Daf, also known as the Dayereh and Riq, is a traditional musical instrument widely employed in both popular and classical music. It features a circular wooden frame with a delicate, translucent membrane typically crafted from animal skin, such as fish or goat skin. Traditional Dafs are often adorned with small rings or chains, resembling a tambourine, and produce sound when the membrane is struck with these rings or chains. The Daf finds application in numerous countries across the globe, including Iraq, Iran, Syria, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kurdistan, Pakistan, Afghanistan,

Kuhistoni Badakhshon of Tajikistan, and various other Middle Eastern regions. Within the Kurdish community, the Daf holds profound cultural significance and is revered as one of the most cherished musical instruments. Its distinctive texture, unique design, and the captivating sound it produces contribute to its esteemed status among the Kurdish populace (Mahmud, 2024). Upon seeing the object, I was captivated by the desire to uncover the story behind it and understand its significance for the participants. In relation to this, Kani expressed the following sentiments:

I have many items representing our culture, each with a special meaning to us. A few years ago, we visited our relative in Sweden. I came across the Telephone, and I liked it. I remember touching it every time I passed by and became attached to it very much. The item gave me a special feeling and took me back to childhood. At the end of our journey, my relative bestowed it upon me. We had one, and the girls in our neighbourhood used it to talk to their romantic partners [...]. I remember, my mother used to lock it with a small padlock to prevent unauthorised usage, specifically by the girls in our neighbourhood. [...] I am aware that the retro dial telephone is not an exact replica of the one I played with as a child, but it bears resemblance. The camera reminds me of my childhood and the good old days. Also, the Dafs are essential in our living room because they signify our culture. When we get visitors, they immediately know who we are and where we come from.

(Kani – interview 1)

Kani is actively engaged in the process of recreating her pre-migration past by integrating vintage items and replicating material possessions. She firmly believes that the retro dial telephone and vintage camera maintain a profound link to her childhood memories, effectively bridging the gap between her previous life and her current abode. Through these cherished artifacts, she can establish a tangible connection with her loved ones and engage in nostalgic reflections on her past experiences. By prominently displaying these treasured mementos in her living room, Kani adeptly negotiates her cultural identity and expresses multiple facets of herself within her domestic space. The exhibition of these items allows her to assert a plethora of identities—personal, social, and cultural—while unveiling her deeply ingrained values and preferences. Furthermore, Kani underscores the cultural significance of the Dafs as decorative elements in her living room. Each carefully chosen item brings her immense joy and provides a means for her to articulate her unique personal taste and social standing. These objects also function as conduits for her to maintain a profound connection with her culture and cultural heritage (Mahmud, 2024).

Throughout her narratives, Kani consistently employs personal pronouns such as ‘we,’ ‘our,’ and ‘us’ when expounding upon the significance of these artifacts. This linguistic choice

signifies her role as a spokesperson for her family and suggests the presence of a collective identity, underscoring her vital position within her culture (Heersmink, 2021).



Figure 12: Traditional Kurdish Frame Drum, Def or Dayereh and Riq. The data is collected via visual ethnography.

For the participants, personal objects, such as paintings and artworks, serve as expressions of ‘cultural resistance,’ a concept involving the use of cultural meanings and symbols to challenge and confront dominant powers, often creating an alternative worldview through objects (Duncombe, 2007; Sheumaker and Wajda, 2008). Saman, an artist hailing from Suleimani, skillfully deploys his artistic talents and imagination to refract elements of his past. His paintings and ceramic creations serve as vessels for the revitalisation of memories connected to places he inhabited or visited prior to his migration to the UK. These finished artworks, characterised by his choice of art styles, colours and materials, serve as palpable manifestations of his deep emotional connection and nostalgia for the memories of his childhood and homeland. Notably, adorning one of the walls in Saman’s living room is a specially crafted artwork dedicated to his wife (Figure 13). In the subsequent account, Saman provides a comprehensive elaboration of the concept underlying the painting, offering insights into the symbolism of the door and window. He places particular emphasis on the profound emotional significance conveyed by the artwork. Furthermore, he delves into the unique features and materials he strategically employed to reimagine and reconstruct the ephemeral connection between their grandparents’ house and the treasured memories of his childhood. The old caravanserai door, flanked by a window (Figure 14), offers a striking visual representation closely mirroring Saman’s artistic creation

I created the artwork displayed on the wall specifically for my wife, and it holds a distinctiveness of its own. Intentionally, I incorporated two key elements, a door, and a window, as they evoke a sense of nostalgia and represent the stories of the past. Together, my wife and I cherish our childhood memories through these symbols. You cannot imagine how many times I have walked through that door and found myself in my grandparents' house. Thus, each time I pass through it, it holds a special significance, and I perceive a different version of myself within it.

(Saman – interview 1)

Saman's artwork, as depicted in Figure 13, features a door and a window. These elements are not merely utilised by the him for background composition; rather, they carry deeper symbolism. The opened door serves as a metaphorical representation of hope, acting as a gateway to the past and allowing Saman to traverse into the unknown. His choice of language when describing his feelings upon passing through the door and recalling childhood memories signifies the transformative nature of this experience. The meticulous attention to detail within the artwork reflects a profound emotional investment, establishing a connection between the artist and his memories and bridging the spatial and temporal dimensions of the past and present. Phrases such as 'went past that door' and 'ended up in my grandparents' house' illustrate the metaphorical journey Saman undertakes, navigating between two temporal spaces through the door and embodying multiple evolving selves. When he claims 'every time I travel through the door [...] I see a different me,' underscoring the notion that an individual encompasses not only 'countless versions in the mind of others' but also within their own inner self (Joseph 2013, p. 38). Furthermore, the use of emotional qualifiers such as 'good old days' conveys Saman's sentiments towards moments of the past imbued with a sense of glory. These expressions may also reflect feelings of homesickness or nostalgia for bygone times.

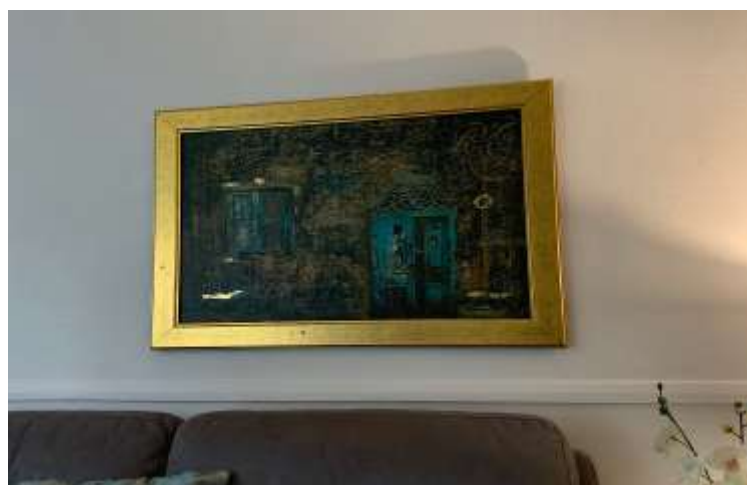


Figure 13: The artwork that Saman created for his wife. The data is collected via visual ethnography.



Figure 14: An old house in Iraqi Kurdistan. The house is in Erbil Citadel, closely imitating Saman's original artwork¹⁹.

Based on the presented data, both Kani and Saman demonstrated deliberate efforts to cultivate a 'homely ambiance' within their new living spaces through photographs, artifacts, and cherished personal belongings strategically placed throughout their respective houses. The term 'homely ambiance' refers to the atmosphere or feeling of comfort, warmth, and familiarity that one creates within their living space, making it feel like a home. It encompasses the elements, decorations, and personal touches that contribute to a sense of contentment and belonging (Hockey, 1999). While the decorative items they utilise may not precisely replicate the original objects, they possess the capacity to evoke the significance, power, and memories associated with those objects. These collected items serve as a bridge between their diasporic existence, encompassing both the reality and idealised notions of home. By utilising material possessions, commonly referred to as 'stuff' (Miller, 2010), they reconstruct their memories of childhood, homeland, and anticipated selves within their current place of residence. This reflects their desire to establish a sense of home in their new surroundings. Other items such as laurels and journals also serve as tangible representations of the participants' identities, a topic that will be further explored in the following section.

7.2.2 Laurels and journal as a material culture

For some individuals, the act of accumulating physical mementos from their homeland might not be feasible due to factors such as distance, limited access, or personal circumstances. However, they may find alternative ways to maintain a connection to their past and memories. Certain participants placed considerable emphasis on personal items imbued with sentimental value, such as achievement awards and written journals, which came to hold significant

¹⁹ The photo is taken by Richard-Wilding. Available via <https://www.richardwilding.com/portfolio-item/erbil-citadel/attachment/richard-wilding-kurdistan-erbil-citadel-008/>. Accessed on [25th of April 2023].

importance in their lives. During an interview conducted with Hana in her office, my attention was drawn to a prominently displayed glass award. She had received it from the Kurdish Regional Government Representative (KRG) in the UK as recognition of her accomplishments and innovation (Figure 15). Hana provided insights into the reasons for receiving the award and expressed her appreciation for the recognition bestowed upon her by the KRG. However, my curiosity was piqued regarding the award's significance in relation to her identity and its prominent placement within her office. Subsequent passages will delve further into these aspects.

This award holds tremendous significance for me as it represents a validation of my hard work and unwavering commitment. The recognition I have received serves as a powerful motivator, inspiring me to continually pursue excellence and instilling hope in the potential of a prosperous future. Being acknowledged for one's accomplishments is among the most powerful incentives one can receive. It provides me with a platform to serve as an example for others, including my children, encouraging them to strive for success and build a promising tomorrow.

She further expressed:

Whenever I gaze upon the award, a sense of pride wells up within me. It imparts strength and serves as a poignant reminder of my journey and the considerable milestones I have achieved. The appreciation and respect I have garnered for my dedication and hard work bring about a deep sense of gratification.

(Hana – follow-up interview)



Figure 15: Hana's dedication award. The data is collected via visual ethnography.

For Hana, the award carries profound significance, representing not only acknowledgment and appreciation for her exceptional contributions but also symbolising her successful journey of innovation. It serves as a mirror reflecting her identity, shaped by past experiences, and functions as a tool for introspection, allowing her to contemplate the challenges and triumphs encountered on her path to success. Further, the award becomes a source of immense pride, bolstering her spirit. It stands as a poignant reminder of her personal journey and the significant milestones achieved, embodying the recognition and respect earned for her unwavering dedication and hard work, resulting in profound satisfaction. When she uses the adjective 'proud' in her discourse, it signifies not only her socio-psychological state but also her robust self-esteem and profound connection to this prestigious position (Leary and Tangney, 2012). Through this expression of pride, she asserts her confidence and stature in her field, further enhancing her professional standing.

For another participant, Karim, his journal embodies significant meaning and personal value. In his stories, Karim places particular emphasis on the profound role of journaling in navigating his emotions. This perspective aligns with existing literature, notably echoed by Kahn (2006), who characterises journaling as the practice of documenting one's thoughts, serving as a bridge connecting an individual's inner world with the external realm. In addition to this function, journaling sharpens cognitive processes and establishes a direct link to one's identity, enabling the tracking of the development of the self over time (Kahn, 2006). During our initial interview, Karim shared a diary that spans over twenty-two years (Figure 16). Initially, I did not fully grasp the significance of this object. However, my understanding evolved after reading Cooper's (2013) article titled 'Keeping a Journal: A Path to Uncovering Identity and Keeping Your Sanity.' This article underlines the capacity of journaling to structure thoughts, facilitate self-discovery and self-reflection, and foster a sense of communal belonging. Inspired by Cooper's insights, I conducted a comprehensive review of Karim's journal and embarked on a critical examination of its contents. Upon close scrutiny of its entries, I came to realise the profound wealth of information it contained. Each time I revisit the journal, I am confronted with the writer's multifaceted identities and emotions intricately interwoven within diverse narratives. In relation to his journaling practice, Karim articulates the following:

The journal is very dear to me; it is my closest companion and has remained by my side since 1999. When I made the decision to embark on my journey and leave my hometown, I made the choice to document the experience of crossing borders [...]. Therefore, these written records capture a specific event and provide a description and definition of who I am as an individual.

(Karim – interview 1)

He further expressed:

Journaling has been instrumental in finding inspiration and allowing my imagination to soar. It has also helped me alleviate stress and anxiety, particularly when facing challenging situations during my journey to the UK. However, the most significant aspect of my journal is its ability to enhance my memory.

(Karim – follow-up interview)

In Karim’s narrative, his journal assumes a multifaceted role. Firstly, it serves as a receptacle, akin to medication, enabling him to organise his thoughts and emotions at a manageable pace. The notebook’s blank pages provide a canvas, affording him a space to unload his mind by transcribing emotional clutter onto the written pages. Secondly, through his writings, Karim utilises the journal as a therapeutic outlet to alleviate past pain, trauma, and negative thoughts. Thirdly, journaling empowers Karim to articulate his feelings and explore his imagination in a profoundly poetic manner. Through his selection of narratives and diverse experiences, he establishes a deep connection with his mind, exploring the interplay between these experiences and his emotions. In addition to that, journaling significantly contributes to the enhancement of Karim’s psychological well-being, emancipating him from negative emotions. Lastly, Karim utilises his journal to counter intrusive thoughts related to unpleasant events, enhance his working memory capacity, and nurture mindfulness, rendering it a vital tool in his journey towards emotional and mental well-being.

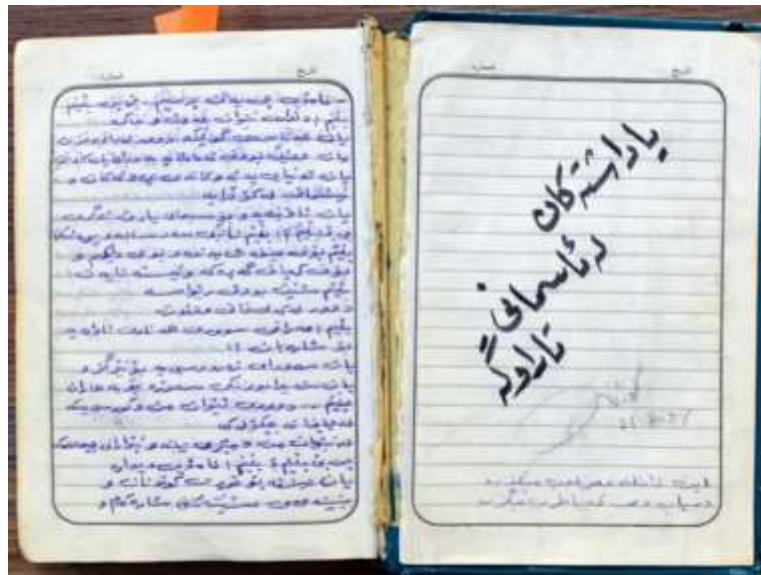


Figure 16: Karim’s journal dated back to 1999²⁰.

²⁰ Some of the contents from Karim’s journal entries presented here have also been published in a book chapter titled ‘Why do “Things” Matter: Kurdish Material Culture and Identity.’ (Mahmud, 2023). The reference pertaining to this chapter is in the reference list.

Karim delved into various segments of his journal and offered insights into his writing journey. He underscored the importance of a series of narratives he penned over a decade ago. Chronicling his migration experiences has become an asset in Karim's life, enabling him to trace his emotions step by step. He also assigned names to each segment and provided descriptions based on his experiences as he traversed borders. For example, the initial segment is dedicated to his time in Tehran, Iran – a place he described as 'jejune' and seemingly endless. According to Karim, his journey through Iranian territory was drawn out, with uncertainty shrouding the number of days, weeks, or even months remaining until he reached his desired destination. The story then transitions as he delves into the discussion of the second station - Istanbul, Turkey. To Karim, Istanbul symbolises the land of 'freedom,' offering abundant opportunities despite the cultural disparities in norms and values. The third chapter unveiled Karim's tales in Athens, which he portrayed as the land of the destitute due to the scarcity of resources such as money and food. His fourth stop was Rome - the city of beauty, architecture, and the epicentre of civilisation. This is followed by his fifth destination - Paris. Karim depicted Paris as a captivating, elegant, and sophisticated city with a unique culture, a place he longed to call home. Finally, he arrived at his ultimate destination, London. Karim portrayed London as the city of dreams and happiness, characterised by an intense sense of community spirit and abundant opportunities for skills development (Figure 17).



Figure 17: A collection of photos from Kari' journal indicates different migration 'stations'.

Karim's journal also served as a platform for documenting the challenges and emotions he encountered at various stages of his migration journey between these destinations. He extensively chronicled his experiences and emotions, capturing the breadth of his struggles and triumphs. For instance, he detailed the adversities faced in Iran, encompassing issues such as shelter shortages, famine, and poverty. Moreover, Karim documented narratives concerning the hurdles of adapting to culturally divergent environments, the tribulations of navigating life in a foreign country, cultural misinterpretations, and the emotions of fear, loss, and sorrow (Mahmud, 2023). In one poignant recounting, he described a harrowing incident where he narrowly evaded a potentially fatal collision with a train. Through immersing oneself in these narratives and scrutinising his prose, one can discern the profound emotional upheaval he endured while relentlessly endeavouring to reach his intended destination. Karim's attempt to record very detailed stories resonates with the insights presented by Pennebaker and Evans (2012), who delve into the therapeutic potential of writing as a means of coping with traumatic events. Essentially, Karim utilised his journal as a tool to navigate the daunting experiences encountered throughout his migration journey, evident in the language employed to depict specific events or encounters.

Furthermore, each destination chronicled in Karim's journal is accompanied by an array of literary genres that delineate varying patterns of character, interaction, and events. These genres encompass poetry, prose, and hybrid forms drawn from esteemed Kurdish and Persian poets (Figure 18). The verses within each poem encapsulate narratives of lost love, sentiments of solitude, and admiration for the landscapes and vistas of his homeland. These emotive expressions reflect a transformation in Karim's character throughout the narrative progression. Each literary work reveals a unique aspect of his persona, shedding light on various dimensions of his identity—personal, social, and cultural—and encapsulating specific moments in time. Karim's choice to include Kurdish and Persian poetry further emphasises the potential complexity of his hybrid identity, as well as his emotions towards loved ones and enduring recollections of past relationships.



Figure 18: A selection of Karim's written record - poems.

He expands upon his narratives by detailing the challenging experiences he faced while caught at the border between France and the UK. Specifically, he recounts the nights spent in Calais²¹ and the profound sense of betrayal he endured.

I have been here by the seashore for over a week, trying to cross the channel. Not to escape this town [Calais] but to skedaddle from a smuggler, those who cannot write their name correctly [...]. I am very annoyed at those bootleggers and traffickers who have no mercy on anyone [...] Alas to these young boys, beautiful girls, and families detained under these smugglers' clemency.

(Karim – journal)

Karim's written testimonies vividly depict the arduous ordeal he endured while attempting to cross the English Channel. His language and lexical selections poignantly convey the trials and tribulations he faced on his journey to reach his desired destination. This is evident in phrases such as 'evading smugglers' and being subject to the whims of certain individuals. Within Karim's narrative, the use of the pronoun 'those' to describe the human traffickers may suggest a sense of collective exclusion or denigration of the 'out-group' (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). In this context, Karim perceives the individuals in Calais through an 'us versus them' paradigm. He harbours resentment towards the smugglers, portraying them as uneducated and

²¹ Calais is a port town in the North-West of France. It shares a small border with the English county of Kent.

incompetent individuals unable to even write their own names proficiently. However, he demonstrates empathy and compassion towards individuals similar to himself, particularly young boys, captivating girls, and families. Karim appears to highlight the victimisation of young boys and captivating girls, indicating a form of ingroup alignment (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) stemming from shared experiences and mutual hardships (Mahmud, 2023). He proceeds to detail his encounters during border crossings in subsequent narratives, shedding light on the adversities he faced in various locations. He describes the harsh winter conditions, lack of shelter, and challenges of being a foreigner in Iran and Turkey. Additionally, he articulates the trauma he endured due to the actions and behaviours of the smugglers, which endangered his life. In his own words:

After a long journey and crossing multiple borders, I am ashamed of my days in Iran, being homeless and working in freezing weather. What about the fear and the blames I had from people in Istanbul, the distress and horror I encountered upon my arrival to Greece and dealing with the ruthless smugglers [...]. I am finally here [London], now I can resume my hobbies and live my life. I hope this station helps me to achieve all my dreams and arrive at a stage where I can find contentment and serenity.

(Karim – narrative from his journal)

Karim's narrative serves as a poignant exploration of his migration experiences, illuminating key incidents that have shaped his journey. He begins by detailing the adversities and sorrows encountered in various countries along his migration route. Particularly striking are his accounts of the trauma associated with interactions, notably with smugglers who were ostensibly meant to facilitate his border crossings. Despite these challenges, Karim's narrative takes a hopeful turn as he declares, 'I am finally here,' symbolising a turning point away from past suffering towards the pursuit of happiness and fulfilment. Additionally, he expresses his newfound ability to engage in hobbies and lead a fulfilling life, emblematic of his evolving identity. Through these activities, Karim reconnects with his authentic self, confronts migration-related trauma, and embarks on an identity quest in his adopted homeland, the UK (Mahmud, 2023). Also, his experiences illustrate the resilience and adaptability inherent in identity as it responds to new environments and circumstances. From tales of suffering and trauma to displays of fortitude and optimism, Karim's narrative reflects a dynamic journey towards a sense of belonging and self-realisation in his new home. Ultimately, his story underscores the transformative power of storytelling in comprehending and embracing one's identity amidst adversity and change.

I can't believe what has happened; I was lost somewhere else in the world and where I am now. I see the silhouette of people, I love dancing in the air.

I wish to return to those times and my childhood domicile [...]. It is not easy to be alone [...], and I would not have been able to continue without seeing the dear birds flying above my dark roof.

(Karim – Journal)

Karim's profound sense of wonderment and disbelief upon his settlement in the UK reverberates throughout his narrative. Employing expressions such as 'where I was' and 'where I am now,' he underscores the profound spatial and temporal transition in his life brought about by his relocation to a Western country. This journey, both physical and metaphorical, stands as a testament to the transformative power of crossing borders and its profound impact on individual identity (Al-Abas, 2019). Karim's narrative encapsulates a liminal state of in-betweenness, wherein he grapples with the complexities of a transnational identity. Moreover, his stories serve as a conduit, bridging his past, present realities and aspirations for the future. Through these narratives, he envisages a trajectory that resonates with his subconscious desires and individuality. Karim's journal assumes a multifaceted role as a versatile instrument for self-discovery and introspection, offering insights into latent needs and aspirations. In essence, these narratives unearth layers of his personal history while illuminating the contours of his evolving identity. These findings resonate with Cooper's (2013) assertion that journal-keeping facilitates a deeper connection with one's identity, fostering personal growth and bolstering self-esteem. Subsequently, the narrative delves into a specific episode from Karim's past wherein he was nominated by his college as an immigrant who transformed his life through participation in a language course.

The college provided free language courses for asylum seekers and migrants, which I attended and completed in six months. At the end of the academic year, the college organised a graduation party for the students and their families. Over two hundred families attended the event, and I was the only immigrant to be nominated and awarded a gift during the ceremony.

(Karim – interview 1)

Karim radiates optimism and genuine emotion as he recounts an experience where he received recognition and appreciation for his unwavering dedication and diligence. His assertion of being the sole immigrant nominated and honoured with a gift during the ceremony underscores a profound sense of pride, uniqueness, and being thrust into the limelight. According to Karim, the language course in which he actively participated served as a conduit for acquiring a new language, refining linguistic proficiency, and fostering interactions with individuals from diverse backgrounds. This experience significantly bolstered his self-assurance in engaging with people who possessed disparate life experiences. The inclusive environment of the college played a pivotal role in expediting his integration into a new milieu, equipping him with invaluable life skills to navigate the challenges accompanying relocation.

Karim's stories also shed light on the therapeutic benefits of journaling on his overall well-being. Journaling emerged as a vital outlet for him to unburden himself from fears, address looming concerns, and confront the pangs of loneliness often accompanying a migration journey. It provided a platform for constructive self-reflection and the identification of detrimental thought patterns that surfaced during this transitional period. Furthermore, the participants' profound attachment to their personal belongings underscores the enduring significance of heirlooms as catalysts for cherished memories. This theme will be elaborated on in the subsequent subsection.

7.2.3 Heirlooms as memory objects

The participants fervently engaged in an exploration of the profound significance imbued within heirlooms, regarding them as conduits of memory pivotal in shaping both individual and collective identities. Within this realm, a diverse array of inherited items emerged, encompassing decorative artifacts, attire, imagery, and substantial possessions such as vehicles and residences. Beyond their mere monetary value, these objects held sentimental significance, serving as catalysts for cherished reminiscences and encapsulating the essence of bygone eras. Further, these heirlooms transcended materiality, embodying deep emotional ties that resonated with themes of familial heritage and cultural lineage. From their perspective, these items assumed symbolic importance, shedding light on shared histories and origins, intricately contributing to the tapestry of their identities across various stages of their life trajectories. The concept of patrimony emerges as paramount, underscoring the profound connection between these objects and their personal and collective selves (Cieraad, 2010). An illustrative anecdote is provided by Kani, whose sojourns to Kurdistan yielded a plethora of items emblematic of her national culture—garments, accessories, culinary delights, and literary works. Each item exuded a distinct aura, serving as a living embodiment of Kurdish artistic, musical, and literary traditions. These artifacts unfurled narratives about her community and subjective experiences, offering insights into her cultural identity. A poignant instance is exemplified by the simple yet deeply meaningful act of presenting a white jersey to her son, forging an indelible bond between him and their cherished homeland (Figure 19).

The shirt does not mean anything to me, but he likes football. So, I thought buying him a shirt depicting the Kurdistan football team was a good idea. I know the shirt was not expensive, but to me, the value of a gift lies in the spiritual bond that the piece creates between two people, and I think the shirt did that.

(Kani – follow-up interview)

Gifts serve as poignant manifestations of personal sentiment, offering nuanced insights into an individual's intrinsic identity. Kani's narrative aptly illustrates the transcendence of gift-giving beyond mere economic transactions, evolving into a conduit for the establishment of profound emotional bonds, particularly with her children. Her deliberate selection of a gift for her son carries profound cultural weight, evident in the design, patterns, and vibrant colour palette inherent in the flag. Each hue within the emblem of Kurdistan symbolises a distinct feature of the region's rich heritage and enduring values. Through this heartfelt gesture, Kani not only expresses her deep affection for her son but also imparts the profound cultural significance and enduring values intrinsic to her heritage. The symbolism linked to the jersey's design further amplifies its significance, fostering a profound connection to their ancestral homeland.



Figure 19: The Kurdistan national football team jersey.

Kani also brought back a traditional turban, known as Mishki or Miškî²², from her hometown (Figure 20). Mishki, crafted from lightweight patterned fabric, holds cultural significance and is traditionally worn by individuals, particularly men, either draped over their shoulders or adorning their heads. It serves as a distinct embellishment for personal and social events such

²² Miškî, a traditional scarf, is commonly worn by both Kurdish men and women during cultural festivities. Its popularity particularly thrives in the Hawraman and Garman regions of Central Kurdistan.

as weddings and cultural celebrations like Newroz and National Clothes Day²³. Available in a variety of colours, Mishki selection is often influenced by personal preferences. In Kani's case, she chose purple and green varieties, as depicted in the figure. For her, the inclusion of these traditional pieces carries paramount significance in preserving and honouring Kurdish heritage. Interestingly, Kani's decision to embrace Mishki contradicts prevailing trends, as its popularity has waned in many parts of Kurdistan, with younger generations often unfamiliar with this artifact.

In Southern Kurdistan, also known as Iraqi Kurdistan, the traditional scarf *Miškî* is undergoing a gradual decline in cultural prominence, giving way to alternative items such as *Jamana* (Figure 21) in contemporary Kurdish society. As previously noted, *Jamana* has emerged as a substitute for *Mishki* across many Kurdish regions. Primarily worn by men, *Jamana* is available in various colour combinations, with popular choices including black and white or red and white. Kurdish men in the Kurdistan region incorporate *Jamana* into their attire in various styles, either as a turban adorning their heads or elegantly draped over their shoulders. Interestingly, women have also begun integrating *Jamana* into their everyday wardrobe as a fashionable and visually appealing accessory. While *Jamana* holds cultural significance in Kurdish clothing, the selection of colours can also convey specific political affiliations or ideologies prevalent in different Kurdish areas. For example, the black and white *Jamana* is frequently worn in the Suleimani region, reflecting alignment with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. In contrast, the red and white *Jamana* is more prevalent in Erbil and surrounding areas, associated with the Democratic Kurdistan Party. This regional distinction reflects the contemporary political landscape of the Iraqi Kurdistan region, demonstrating how individuals express their political sentiments through the adoption of specific traditional ethnic garments.

²³ National Clothing Day is an annual celebration observed in Southern Kurdistan, also known as the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, occurring on March 10th. During this event, individuals don traditional Kurdish attire as they go about their daily activities. The streets come alive with festivity, and educational institutions such as schools, colleges, and universities also participate in the celebrations.



Figure 20: Mishki that Kani bought from Kurdistan. The data is collected via photovoice technique.



Figure 21: Different coloured jamana. the data is collected via the corpus of material objects²⁴.

Kani also transported several items from Kurdistan that she deems significant, including a Tasbih (prayer beads) and a metal bowl. The Tasbih, traditionally a strand of beads, serves as a tool for tallying while reciting the 99 names of Allah or for logging sacred recitations and Zikir in Islamic practice. However, transcending its religious utility, the Tasbih holds profound

²⁴ Traditional attire is explored in section 7.4.

cultural resonance within Kurdish heritage, esteemed by individuals across all age demographics (Figure 22). What renders these possessions particularly precious to Kani is their lineage; they have been inherited from her parents, thereby accruing layers of sentimental value in addition to their cultural and religious importance.



Figure 22: Atasbih and a bowl Kani kept in memory of her parents. The data is collected via photovoice technique.

During the follow-up interview, Kani elucidated the significance of these items, providing insight into her decision to retain them.

I brought the tasbih because it belonged to my father. Touching it was so unique. It gave me an extraordinary feeling. When I held it in my hand, I felt like I was touching my father's fingers, and I am sure I will get the same sense if I use it again.

(Kani – Follow-up interview via WhatsApp)

Kani's narrative choice of verbs, such as 'belong,' 'touch,' 'feel,' 'felt,' and 'get,' underscores the profound emotional connection she harbours toward the inherited objects. For Kani, the tasbih transcends mere physical possession; it serves as a social catalyst, evoking memories and facilitating remembrance. The phrases 'I felt' and 'touching my father's fingers' epitomise the tasbih's transformation into a poignant artifact, forging a spiritual bond between Kani and her deceased father. This transfer of ownership from her mother to Kani imbues the tasbih with emotional significance, eliciting reflective memories and nurturing deep affection for her father (Marschall, 2019: 254). Additionally, Kani recounted the story of a vintage metal bowl adorned with Quranic verses, gifted by her mother following a pilgrimage to Makkah (Mecca). While Kani may view the bowl as a simple item evoking memories of her parent, her mother

attributes healing properties to it, insisting that Kani keep it as a safeguard against discomfort and pain. Over time, the bowl has evolved into a mnemonic device for Kani, serving as a poignant reminder of her mother's presence (Marschall, 2019: 254).

For participant Omer, material possessions contribute significantly to the formation of his 'hybrid identity' as delineated by Bhabha (1994). This concept denotes the amalgamation of memories from one's homeland with the present reality of living in a diaspora context. During an exchange on Facebook Messenger, I queried Omer regarding any items he had brought from Kurdistan or cherished possessions with personal significance. In response, he shared a document featuring two images: a samovar and a piece of art²⁵. The samovar, pronounced as [səmə'var]²⁶, emerged as the focal point of our discussion.

When I moved to the Netherlands, I purchased a samovar (Figure 23). The samovar is one of the symbols I have preserved in my house as a reminder of my grandfather. During my childhood, I spent a significant amount of time with him, and he had a samovar in his parlour. This is why the samovar holds great significance to me and is connected to numerous cherished memories, particularly those involving my grandfather, who had a direct impact on my life. Additionally, the object represents the traditions of Eastern societies, specifically the distinct traditions of the Kurdish people.

(Omer – photovoice²⁷)

Although the samovar originates from traditional Russian culture, Omer imbues it with symbolic significance, interpreting it as a cultural emblem representative of his Kurdish nationality and heritage. By linking the artifact to memories of his grandfather, Omer establishes a nexus between material objects, cultural identity, and familial legacy. Additionally, Omer shifts his attention to another item gifted by his daughter: an artwork depicting Choli Munara and the Citadel in Erbil, iconic landmarks within Iraqi Kurdistan (Figure 24)

²⁵ For the images and the full descriptions of the objects in Kurdish Sorani see Appendix 10.17.

²⁶ The samovar, also known as samawar, denotes a metal receptacle historically employed for heating and boiling water. Originating in Russia, this vessel has disseminated across Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and regions such as Iran, Kashmir, Afghanistan, and Azerbaijan. Omer provided an initial photograph of this item.

²⁷ See Appendix 10.17 for the written version of the narrative.



Figure 23: Samawar or [səmə'var].



Figure 24: Omer's artwork – the historic cities in Erbil.

Omer's connection to Hawler (Erbil) is deeply rooted in his family's historical ties and their experiences within the city. Displaying these artifacts in his home serves not only as a privilege but also as a mechanism to maintain his cultural roots and heritage, thereby fostering a sense of belonging even in a foreign environment. These objects serve as catalysts for his collective identity, evoking memories and preserving his cultural essence. Furthermore, the accumulation of these items allows him to navigate and articulate his hybrid identity within the diasporic context. Through the exhibition of these objects in his London residence, Omer

symbolises his complex and multiple identities, which encompasses reminiscences from the past alongside his present existence within the diaspora.

The findings presented in this section, along with its subsections, underscore the participants' reliance on material objects to establish connections with loved ones and cultivate a sense of belonging. These artifacts serve as tangible representations of their past experiences and act as 'souvenirs from the traversed landscapes of the journey, signifiers of narrations of the past' (Tolia-Kelly, 2010). Possessions from home serve as 'triggers' that evoke memories and aid in re-establishing a sense of belonging (Tolia-Kelly, 2010, p. 1). Other items, such as journals, serve as material codes symbolising the diasporic journey, while others, like Saman's artwork, serve as points of connection to significant different spaces (Soleiman, 2017, p. 197). Moreover, these objects facilitate the incorporation of 'other lives, lands, and homes' into the participants' current reality (Tolia-Kelly, 2004, p. 323). Furthermore, the participants emphasised the role of place in shaping their identities, suggesting that locations holding personal memories can also be regarded as material objects. This theme will be further explored in the following pages.

7.3 *Place attachment and identity*

The participants highlighted the significant importance of specific locations and expressed their deep emotional connection to these places. They shed light on the complex and multifaceted nature of these connections, providing a nuanced understanding of the role of place in shaping their lives. In academic discourse, place attachment often refers to the emotional bond individuals form with particular geographic areas, such as villages, towns, or cities (Di Masso et al., 2019; Erfani, 2022; Giuliani, 2003; McEwen, 2014). However, the participants approached the concept of 'place' from a dual perspective – encompassing tangible elements intertwined with their attachment to distinct locations and the idea of 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983). All participants agreed that visiting or immersing themselves in specific locales gave rise to various meanings, both socially and personally. These places, according to their accounts, became representations of their identity, resonating across personal, social, and cultural dimensions. The complexity of this relationship makes it difficult to define 'place identity' definitively, as the concept includes various sub-identity categories (Peng *et al.*, 2020, p. 3).

To gain deeper insight into how the participants crafted, navigated, and negotiated their identities anchored in specific place, the subsequent subsection will show the place-related data. Here, I will undertake an in-depth examination of the complex interplay between place and space. Additionally, the analysis will explore the influence of socially constructed place significance on individuals' emotions. This exploration is significant as, according to the

participants' perspectives, the concept of place demonstrates its adaptable and versatile nature, serving various purposes. Therefore, it is essential to examine how participants' thoughts, emotions, and actions are influenced by their surroundings. This comprehensive perspective encompasses the places they currently inhabit or have previously lived in, including architectural elements such as buildings, streets, and entire cities.

7.3.1 The power of place and identity

Throughout the interviews, participants highlighted connection between emotion, place, and people, as well as the memories associated with them. Certain locations naturally exert an influence on their identity, significantly shaping their sense of self. In this context, the concept of 'power' assumes robust significance. Here, 'power' refers not to the dominance of one person or group over others, as discussed in Chapter Six of this study, but rather to the agency and capacity that objects possess in shaping our identities and enabling positive action. As I delved into the participants' narratives, I became increasingly convinced of the notion that objects have a social life (Appadurai, 2006). I also contend that places and buildings can be considered material objects, as they, like any physical entities, possess the potential to influence our behaviour, attitudes, and beliefs. Whether it is the place itself or the memories attached to it, both have the power to impact our emotions and, consequently, influence and transform our identities. A detailed examination of the participants' data reveals that this belief resonated in their narratives. A pertinent illustration is derived from Ari's narrative account. Ari articulated his feelings and thoughts regarding structures and their surrounding environments, expressing how specific elements of a building, such as its colour and architectural style, influence his emotions and simultaneously reflect his identity (Figure 25). The following excerpt underscores this perspective:

I like visiting places with unique buildings and architecture because it relates to my field. But I love exploring historical sites too. Luckily, in the UK, many historical architectures are protected by the law, which I visit whenever possible. I also went to other places overseas. I love what I do; I always meet new people from different backgrounds and make new friends. When you enter any historical site, you visualise how people lived in the past and how they dealt with their daily routine.

(Ari - interview 1)

Ari's inclination to explore places with distinctive architecture, particularly historical sites, reveals a profound connection between this aspect of his identity and his interests. His appreciation for architectural uniqueness is aligned with his professional field, indicating the potential influence of one's career on their identity. Moreover, his fondness for historical sites reflects a curiosity about different cultures and an identity shaped by a desire to understand

history. Additionally, his experiences visiting both local historical sites and international destinations underscore a broader identity characterised by curiosity for the world, a willingness to embrace diverse experiences, and an ability to establish connections with individuals from various backgrounds. For instance, in the initial image (Figure 25), historical terrace houses are showcased, distinguished by their small windows and traditional doors. The front of these houses features an authentic antique cobblestone pathway and a reclaimed limestone verge, creating an inviting and warm street ambiance. The addition of plant pots, flowers, and foliage further enhances the welcoming atmosphere. In the second image, the name 'Robin Bill' is elegantly inscribed in an Old English font, indicating the name of one of the houses depicted in the first image. These two images illuminate captivating facets of Ari's personality, interests, and identity.

Through his visits and explorations of historical sites, Ari engages deeply with the histories of these structures, delving into the experiences of those who once owned and inhabited these spaces. As Qazimi (2014) posits, places encompass both tangible and intangible attributes, including associations and emotional responses elicited from exposure to an environment. For Ari, his passion for travel and exploration serves as a reflection of his architectural and explorer identity. His involvement in these pursuits aligns him with a specific social cohort—the community of explorers, individuals who share a fervour for discovering and traversing the world. Furthermore, these interests have facilitated Ari in forming connections with like-minded individuals, providing him with essential emotional and social support (Doll, 1996). The formation of new friendships grounded in shared interests plays a pivotal role in Ari's cultivation of diverse identities and the expansion of his global perspective.



Figure 25: Image 1 - A historical town in Kent; Image 2 - A listed building in the Kent region. The data is collected via photovoice technique.

Ari's perception of various places and buildings is notably influenced by specific attributes such as colour and external aesthetics. During our conversation, he navigated through his memories by sharing a photograph of a house with a captivating façade (Figure 26). This house boasted a charming blue entrance, windows adorned with ivy, lush greenery, leaves, and vibrant blossoms (Mahmud, 2023).

[This building] is beautiful; it is beyond my imagination—the house with the blue door and the windows stuck in my head for a long time. The house and its features remind me of myself and connect me with some interesting memories of someone I used to be in love with. You know, when you are young, you engage in many things, they were good memories, then thinking about those memories, you realise that nothing is permanent [his relationship].

(Ari – interview 1)



Figure 26: Ari took the photo in a town fifty miles away from London a few months before the interview. The data is collected via photovoice technique.

In the provided passage, Ari engages in a discourse concerning a particular house, critically examining its attributes with particular emphasis on the colour 'blue,' drawing from his personal experiences. For Ari, the colour 'blue' is intertwined with memories of a significant figure from his past, namely his former girlfriend, establishing a profound connection between 'blue' and his emotional attachments. Importantly, Ari highlights the dynamic nature of his identity, underscoring the transformations he has undergone over the past two decades. He asserts that he no longer identifies with the same persona he once embodied, with his beliefs, interests and aspirations having evolved. These insights challenge essentialist perspectives that regard identity as a fixed and immutable concept. Ari's narrative further accentuates the notion that various internal and external factors contribute to the development and evolution of one's identity, including age, education, life experiences and societal influences among others. The house itself assumes significance in Ari's narrative, epitomising the concept of a 'sticky place,' imbued with emotions and memories associated with it (Ahmed, 2014; Badwan and Hall, 2020). This concept posits that certain locations leave a lasting impact on individuals, evoking deep emotional connections and serving as repositories of associated memories. While it is indisputably true that places can influence an individual's emotions, it is imperative to acknowledge that individuals exercise agency in selecting where they go and stay, guided by their subjective experiences and preferences. Through the act of choosing specific places, individuals attribute significance to these locations and assume diverse

identities in relation to their unique encounters. Consequently, it becomes highly probable that places can shape our perceptions and cognitive processes.

For certain participants, discovering the appropriate environment carries considerable importance in nurturing a sense of self-esteem and inclusion. This sentiment resonates strongly in Karim's narrative as evidenced by the following excerpt:

This place is like any other place where the primary function is to make money, but to me, it is more than that. It is a place where I can meet people from diverse socioeconomic and socio-cultural backgrounds [...]. After a long day at work, I needed to be where I could feel respected, wanted, or valued, and I found that location. [...] What I like about this place is the cultural and social events that occur three to four times a month. Those events allow me to express myself freely without thinking about people and their judgments. Because most people who arrive here are foreigners, they are like me, and with a small click, you can relate and connect with them. As a result, I feel free and can be who I want to be without pressure, so I regularly come here to be myself (Figure 27).

(Karim – follow-up interview 1)

Karim's profound attachment to a specific location is evident in Figure 27. As delineated by Shumaker and Taylor (1983, p. 233), attachment refers to the positive emotional connection individuals establish with their residential environment. This bond is tied to both the physical space itself and the community that coalesces within it (Giuliani, 2003). The locale of paramount significance to Karim is formally recognised as Eleto Café, a versatile establishment operating as a café and restaurant during the day, transitioning into a lively venue in the evenings. The physical and social dimensions of this café/venue, including its ambiance, culinary offerings, and, notably, its clientele, play essential roles in satisfying Karim's social and psychological requirements. Also, the café/venue actively contributes to the formation of his personal, social, and place-based identities (Uzzell et al., 2002). Essentially, Karim has developed both individual and communal identities by affiliating himself with the community defined by the locale, its patrons, and the various social gatherings hosted there. The café/venue serves as a communal hub where Karim and others can openly embrace diversity and inclusivity without fear of judgment, affording them the opportunity to express diverse personal and social identities through active participation in specific activities.



Figure 27: Karim’s favourite place in his town. the data is collected via visual ethnography method.

Additionally, the café/venue’s capacity to unite individuals from various backgrounds has significantly bolstered Karim’s adaptability and contributed to his social and psychological well-being. Within this milieu, the café/venue serves as a sanctuary or a ‘place ballet,’²⁸ where individuals converge to partake in interpersonal and intercultural dialogues, extend mutual support, and seek emotional solace and camaraderie. During the initial follow-up interview, Karim stresses the pivotal role of the café/venue in shaping aspects of his social identity, particularly highlighting a specific seating area that delineates his identity as a writer and poet (Figure 28²⁹). While seated beside a window in the café/venue, he suggested relocating to another table upon his arrival. As a researcher, I accommodated his request, and he promptly explained his rationale:

I always sit here [at the back], calling it my magic table. I tried the other tables but didn’t like them. Although this table is positioned at the back, it is close to the stage area. Here, I can relax, socialise, and watch people perform. Or simply detach myself from everyone, where I can read and engage in writing.

(Karim – follow-up interview 1)

²⁸ The term ‘place ballet’ originates from David Seamon’s work, *A Geography of the Lifeworld: Movement, Rest, and Encounter* (1979). It encapsulates the regularity of place, encompassing habits, routines, and the supportive physical environment that defines it.

²⁹ The blue circle highlights Karim’s favourite seating area.



Figure 28: The inside of Karim’s favourite cafe/bar. The data is collected via visual ethnography.

The narrative above highlights the significant role of place and material objects in shaping an individual’s identity. In Karim’s case, the unassuming café/venue and its material components, such as the table and its specific location exert a profound influence on both his personal and social identities. These objects could evoke specific emotions and influence his decisions, particularly in terms of where he opts to sit. Over time, influenced by life events and experiences, Karim has developed a reinforcing attachment to these objects and the space they inhabit. Furthermore, his belief in the table’s connection to improved writing has strengthened his commitment and created a barrier to exploring alternative options elsewhere. This observation aligns with the findings of Dozier and Ayers (2021, p. 106), who suggest that life events can alter individuals’ perceptions of their possessions over time. For instance, Karim may view the table as his own due to his years of patronage at the café/venue, and the potential loss of his preferred seating spot might evoke feelings of loss or apprehension about relinquishing certain aspects of his identity.

In summary, this section makes clear the important role of place, space, and entities in shaping the identities of the participants. The data reveals how place significantly influences individual identities and how the physical environment actively contributes to one’s self-conception. The participants’ attachment to specific places, akin to a sense of ‘stickiness,’ emerges from their social and personal interactions, establishing a mutually constitutive relationship between their sense of self and various locales (Ahmed, 2014, p. 92; Badwan and Hall, 2020). Consequently, their identities are partially enacted through repeated engagements and

experiences with these places, influencing the accumulation of affective value, as evidenced by Kamo's attachment to a specific table within the café/venue. Furthermore, places serve as triggers for recollection, encapsulating narratives of social and cultural heritage, wherein 'other textures of landscapes, narratives, and social histories resonate through their presence' (Tolia-Kelly, 2004, p. 327).

Other material artifacts, such as clothing, ethnic attire, and food, hold significant importance for the participants. The narratives emphasise the pivotal role of traditional clothing in demarcating personal identity and accentuating one's cultural heritage. Subsequent sections will undertake a comprehensive exploration of the interconnection between traditional artifacts like clothing and food, thereby demonstrating their influence on shaping the identities of the participants.

7.4 *Clothing and identity*

This section examines the significance of attire and clothing, particularly in establishing a connection between clothing, traditional costumes and identity. Clothing serves as a tangible covering that not only provides physical protection but also plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' self-perception and perceptions of others within various social and cultural contexts. As discussed in the conceptual framework chapter (Chapter Three), traditional costumes encompass a wide range of styles for both men and women, varying across different regions within Kurdistan and even within the same province. It is important to note that this thesis focuses on exploring the cultural identity of a specific group of Iraqi Kurds. Therefore, the discussion primarily revolves around the traditional costumes worn by individuals within the Iraqi Kurdish territory, without extensively addressing evolving fashion trends. The subsequent sections will further delve into the significance of clothing in relation to the participants' identities.

7.4.1 *Apparel, clothing, and identity*

The theme of clothing and its correlation with identity emerged prominently in the narratives of the participants. Many participants emphasised the significant personal and cultural value attached to clothing, particularly traditional clothing and accessories, on both individual and social levels. From their perspectives, clothing functioned as a tool for identification, assisting in demarcating boundaries between themselves and others. Moreover, wearing traditional Kurdish clothing in the diaspora was perceived as a proud assertion and reinforcement of their cultural identity. However, there was no consensus among the participants regarding the circumstances under which ethnic clothing should be worn, as this decision was influenced by

various factors. For instance, Nina portrayed clothing as an art form, highlighting its capacity for creativity and self-expression.

What you wear does reflect you to a certain extent. Do you know how some people dress? They say it is an art, and that is their form of expression. Sometimes it gives you a bit of the person's character. I like wearing traditional clothing because it is nice and pretty. I like the colours, and it reminds me of Indian clothes but is slightly different.

(Nina – Interview 1)

For Nina, traditional clothing holds significant importance as a visual representation of her unique cultural background within a multicultural society. It symbolises her pride in her culture and allows her to maintain a connection with her roots while embracing her heritage. During a follow-up interview, Nina articulated that traditional clothing serves not only as an aesthetic expression but also as a symbolic delineation between herself and others. She explained that wearing Kurdish clothing while socialising with individuals from different ethnic backgrounds serves as a means through which people can learn about her nation's culture and history (Mahmud, 2024).

Wearing traditional clothes makes me feel different. They give me a sense of happiness and pride, and I think I belong somewhere. So many people have started to look up to and learn about my culture through me. My friends also know about our history; they understand who we are and our struggles as a nation.

Nina (follow-up interview)

Similarly, Kani articulates her viewpoint on the dress code and its impact on her self-perception. She explains how maintaining a connection to traditional clothing has been instrumental in safeguarding her ethnic identity:

I am always conscious of my clothing choices because they have the power to define me in some way. Every day, I carefully select my dress code based on the specific places I am going. I try to uphold my heritage by wearing ethnic clothing. I reserve them for events that are linked to my culture or for special occasions such as birthdays, weddings, and family gatherings. It is through these garments that we assert our identity and proudly highlight our roots as a nation.

(Kani – interview 1)

Kani's clothing choices are greatly influenced by the specific context in which she finds herself, such as her workplace and family events. Traditional attire plays a significant role in shaping her ethnic identity, allowing her to express her sense of belonging to both her ethnic heritage and the multicultural society at large (Figure 29). Kani demonstrates a deep understanding of

what clothing is appropriate for various purposes, showing her social and cultural existence. By seamlessly transitioning between ethnically influenced outfits and mainstream British attire, she bridges her distinct identities, including her ethnic, social, and national identities. Ethnic clothing serves as a symbolic affirmation of her ethnic identity, reminding her of her heritage and roots. Conversely, her everyday clothing style reflects her assimilation into British culture, highlighting her ability to embody multiple aspects of her identity across different times and places. The figure below presents a depiction of Kurdish clothing worn by a group of Kurdish women.



Figure 29: In London, Kani and her friends donned traditional Kurdish clothes, celebrating their cultural heritage at an event. The photo is taken and forwarded by the participant.

Traditional Kurdish attire is characterised by its layered composition, and the style can vary across national borders, as well as from one town or village to another. In the participants' region of origin, women typically wear a vest, a long-sleeved jacket, or a long overcoat over a gown known as Kras. Additionally, an underdress and puffy pants are worn beneath the gown. Usually, the younger generation often replaces the underdress and puffy pants with a sleeveless maxi dress worn beneath the gown. Depending on individual preferences, a belt may also be worn over the gown. Some women also wear Kurdish hats adorned with coloured

stones, beads, and gold pieces (Figures 30 and 31³⁰). The choice of colours in the clothing can vary depending on the age of the individual. Typically, younger women and girls wear brightly coloured dresses decorated with beads and sequins, while older women opt for darker hues. Traditionally, older adults would wear a cape known as kolwana; however, in recent years, it has also become a popular trend among young girls and women.



Figure 30: Layers of traditional Kurdish clothing for Women

³⁰ The photos are drive from the H & L Design official Facebook account. Permission was granted from the owner (see Appendix 10.11).

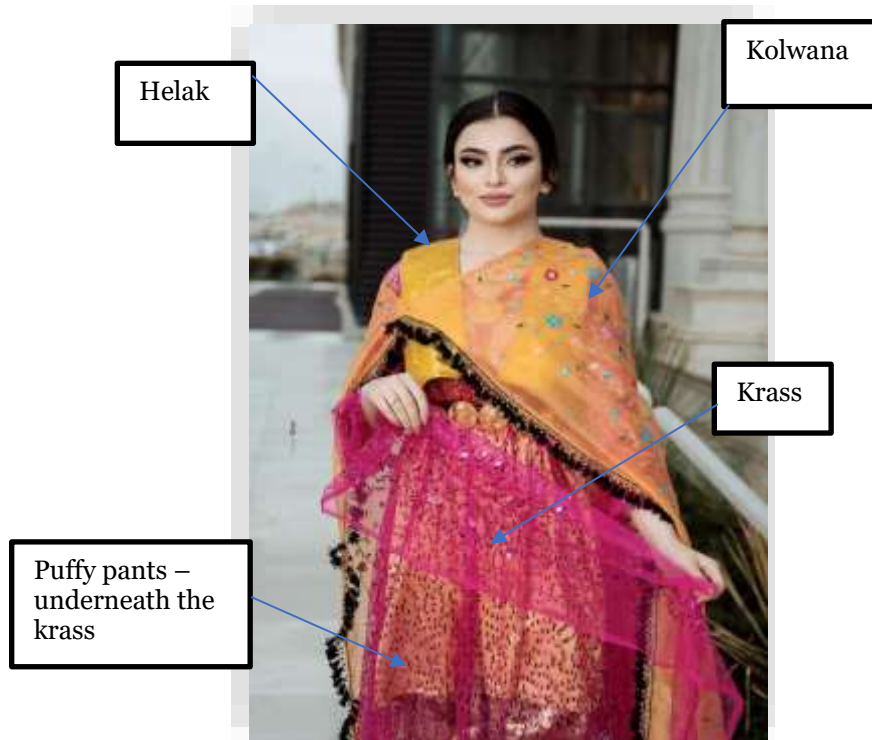


Figure 31: Layers of traditional Kurdish clothing.

However, traditional ethnic attire holds less importance for the male participants. During interviews, Saman emphasised the significance of preserving his cultural heritage through Kurdish cuisine and cultural festivities. However, he pointed out that wearing traditional garments is often impractical for him. In subsequent interviews, Saman further explained that his profession requires him to wear formal clothing, making traditional attire less practical for his daily life.

I like traditional clothing, but it is not easy to work with them, because my job involves a lot of movement and playing with colours. So, I don't think working while wearing traditional Kurdish clothing is practical or even a good idea.

(Saman – follow-up interview)

Saman's perspective offers insight into the intricate factors influencing personal clothing choices and identity expression. He views clothing as a potent cultural symbol deeply rooted in his heritage, emphasising his profound connection to Kurdish attire. However, the complexity arises due to the layers inherent in traditional men's clothing (see Figure 32). This includes components such as the long-sleeved jacket, sharwal trousers, shirt, and pshtwen or cummerbund, which, while culturally significant, poses practical challenges. The sheer number of layers can impede movement, making the attire less practical for daily activities, especially in contexts requiring agility and versatility. This struggle between the cultural

significance of the attire and its practical limitations reflects a broader theme present in many individuals' lives, encapsulating the delicate balance between preserving cultural identity and adapting to the demands of contemporary life. The clash between tradition and modernity, cultural pride and practicality, material comfort, and historical symbolism illustrates the multifaceted nature of personal choices. Moreover, this dilemma is not solely about clothing but mirrors the complex interplay of identity expressions in everyday life. Saman's experience highlights the nuanced decisions individuals make, navigating the intersection of tradition and practicality, showcasing the complex layers that constitute personal identity choices. Similarly, Omer shares the belief that wearing traditional clothing is unnecessary and that individuals can express their ethnic identities through alternative means, such as speaking their native language.

Why bother using clothing as a means of self-definition? From my perspective, it is crucial to safeguard our language since it serves as a guardian of our cultural identity, traditions, and heritage.

(Omer – follow-up interview)

However, additional factors may dissuade Saman and Omer from wearing traditional Kurdish attire, including societal norms and perceptions surrounding gendered clothing. Traditional clothing for female participants may be intricately linked with their sense of femininity and gender identity, perceived as a facet of beauty (see Nina's narrative). For example, earlier in this section, Nina highlighted her emotional connection to traditional clothing, describing it as 'nice' and 'pretty' and expressing feelings of happiness and pride when wearing it. In contrast, Saman expressed a simpler appreciation for traditional outfits, while Omer questioned the utility of donning them. These findings align with previous studies indicating that clothing holds greater significance for women, with their clothing choices playing a crucial role in representing their multiple identities (Loughnan and Pacilli, 2014; Ward *et al.*, 2018).

According to the participants, Kurdish ethnic clothing is worn mostly during special occasions such as Newroz, weddings, and Eid. In the subsequent section, I will explore the participants' cultural identity through their active engagement in celebrating cultural traditions.

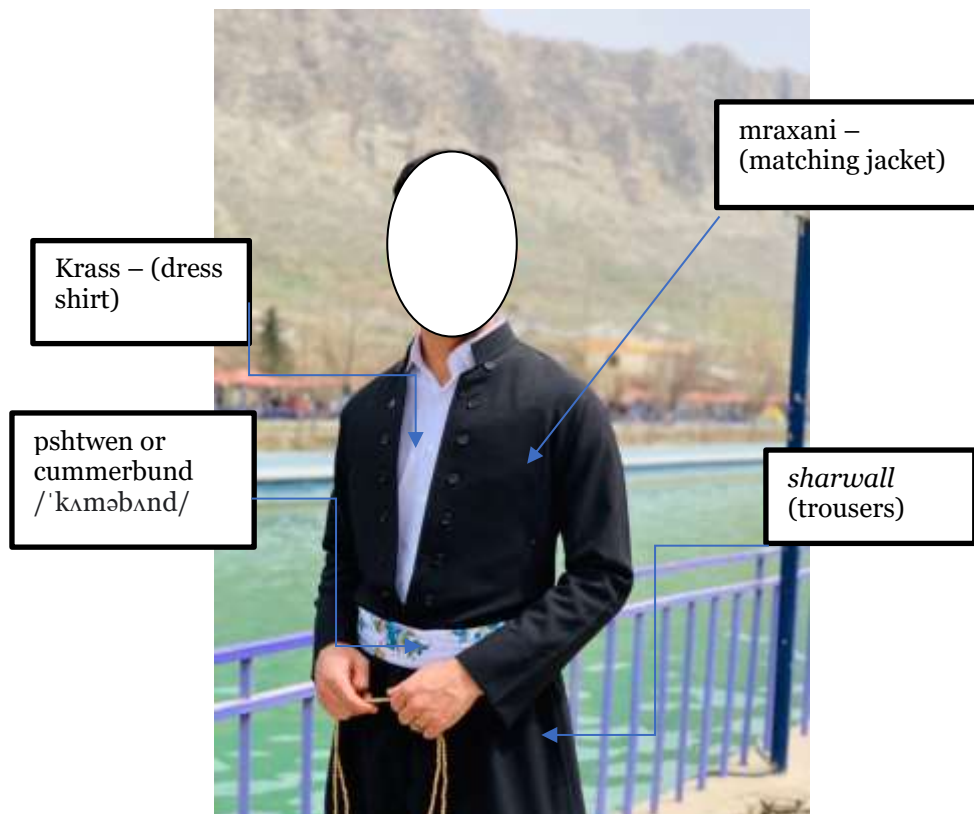


Figure 32: Layers of men’s Kurdish clothing – Kurdish Central³¹. The data is collected via corpus of material culture

7.5 Preserving participants’ cultural identity through celebrating cultural traditions

Various avenues exist through which individuals can assimilate into the host society’s culture while simultaneously preserving and practising their own cultural traditions and beliefs. When exploring how the participants uphold their collective identity, they unanimously concurred that celebrating cultural traditions plays a pivotal role in maintaining their awareness as an ethnic group and nurturing a sense of unity (Cohen, 1997; Safran, 1991). Moreover, they acknowledged that by partaking in various cultural traditions and commemorating special occasions, they unearth fresh layers of significance and representation within the contemporary cultural milieu. Nevertheless, variations exist in the participants’ perspectives concerning the topic under investigation. Their interpretations of cultural events are intrinsically linked to their belief systems and identities. For instance, some individuals prioritise events associated with their nation over religious traditions, while others hold the opposite viewpoint. In the ensuing sections, I will delve into how the research participants celebrate traditions in the UK and assess the impact of these events on the preservation and establishment of their collective identities.

³¹ For more men’s traditional Kurdish items see Appendix 10.12.

7.5.1 Kurdish diaspora in the UK: imagined community

During the interview sessions, I posed the question, ‘what constitutes the Kurdish community?’ Each participant paused, reflecting the complexity of defining the concept of the ‘Kurdish community.’ Nonetheless, their responses revealed a multi-layered understanding of community, marked by diversity, generational disparities, regional origins, and places of residence. They described it either as a geographically bounded entity or the intricate web of interactions among individuals. Throughout our dialogues, all participants underlined the significance of cultural celebrations within the Kurdish diaspora, not just for themselves but also for future generations and descendants. One cultural celebration that garnered unanimous agreement and ignited extensive discussion was Newroz, the Kurdish New Year. For the majority, celebrating Newroz in the UK was considered pivotal in preserving the essence of their Kurdish national identity.

Newroz is a revered cultural tradition observed by various nations, including Iran, Afghanistan, the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the Central Asian Republic (Gunes and Zeydanlioglu, 2013, p. 71). It holds particular significance for Kurds as it marks the beginning of the Kurdish new year, traditionally celebrated on March 21st. Originating from the Kurdish language, the term ‘Newroz’ combines ‘new’ and ‘roz,’ signifying ‘new day.’ This festive occasion symbolises the renewal of nature and the victory of light over darkness, embodying the concept of ‘universal beauty’ (Mirawdali, 2012, p. 241). Newroz carries deep cultural and political implications for Kurds, intertwining the Kawa legend, the formation of Kurdish identity, and expressions of unity and pride through celebratory rituals. The Kawa legend, central to the Kurdish observance of Newroz, recounts the heroic struggle of Kawa, a goldsmith, against the Assyrian King Dahhak, leading to the liberation of the Meads, ancestors of present-day Kurds (Gunes and Zeydanlioglu, 2013, p. 72). This legend and the Newroz celebrations hold profound significance for Kurdish people, especially in the realms of politics and identity formation.

In major UK cities like London, Kurds gather to commemorate Newroz, often dressed in traditional ethnic attire. The observance of Newroz contributes to the construction of an ‘imagined community,’ as theorised by Benedict Anderson, emphasising the role of cultural practices in fostering a sense of shared identity among Kurds (Anderson, 1983). Saman, one of the participants in the study, emphasises the importance of Newroz in shaping national and ethnic identities among Kurds. He also stresses the necessity of discussing historical events like the Halabja genocidal massacre and the Anfal campaigns, considering them vital for acquainting the global community with Kurdish history and struggles.

As a family, we made every effort to preserve and uphold our culture by observing significant dates on our calendar, particularly Newroz, Halabja, and Al-Anfal³². When it comes to commemorating Halabja and Anfal, the Kurdish community in London organises annual events and activities. We hold conferences aimed at educating our younger generation about these historical occasions. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were unable to have physical commemorations this year. However, we were able to publish a magazine focusing on Halabja before 1988³³(Figure 33).

(Saman – interview 1)

Saman's dedication to preserving his cultural identity is evident in his commitment to safeguarding cultural heritage within the Kurdish diaspora. He believes it is a fundamental duty, both within families and the broader community, ensuring the transmission of knowledge to younger generations. The annual commemoration of Halabja and Anfal in London holds immense significance for the Kurdish community, prompting them to organize various activities and educational events.

Saman's diverse range of roles reflects the complexity of his identity, transitioning seamlessly between them, from a father to an educator. This highlights the fluidity of individual roles and identities. Saman's active involvement in commemorating and educating about significant cultural events demonstrates a deep sense of belonging and pride in his cultural heritage. Through his efforts, he plays a crucial role in preserving and transmitting his cultural identity to younger generations. His actions underscore the importance of recalling and comprehending the history and collective experiences of his community, strengthening their cultural identity for generations to come.

The usage of the pronoun 'we' in expressions such as 'we tried' and 'we run' signifies a collective sense of belonging and identification with a particular national culture. As noted by Saman, certain events like Halabja were unable to be physically celebrated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, a magazine titled 'Halabja in the Golden Days' was produced as a commemorative measure. This collaborative endeavour involved the UK charity Gulan and the Kurdish Community in Portsmouth, with contributions from various regions across the UK. The magazine featured insightful interviews, thought-provoking essays on Halabja's culture, and artistic contributions from individuals connected to the region. This illustrates Saman's commitment to preserving and transmitting the collective memory and experiences associated with these events.

³² The magazine can be accessed and downloaded via the following link <https://artreach.org.uk/case-study/halabjainthegoldenda>.

³³ See Appendix 10.13, 10.14, & 10.15.

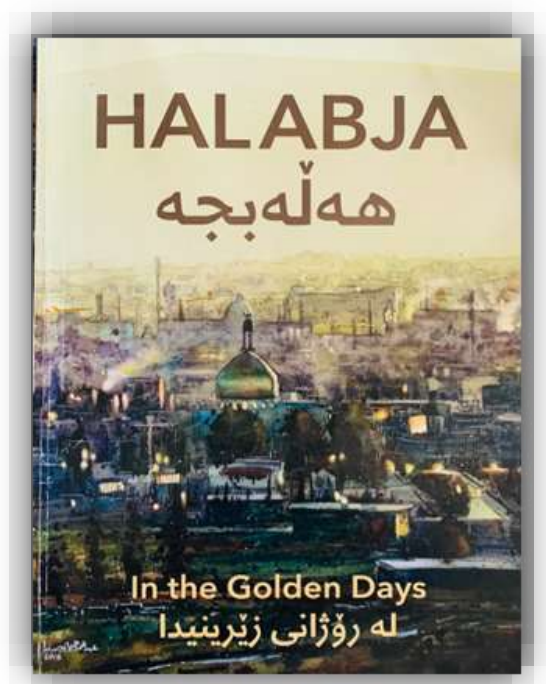


Figure 33: Halabja Magazine in collaboration with the Kurdish Community in Portsmouth and other Kurdish communities across the UK.

Similarly, Kani underscores the importance of commemorating cultural events, while acknowledging the challenges inherent in organising such celebrations within the diaspora.

As a mother, I feel it is crucial to pass on the same cultural values that I was brought up with, as our culture is incredibly unique. While I acknowledge that some traditions may not perfectly align with the living situation in the UK, I believe in the importance of preserving our cultural traditions and practices for the development of our children's personalities. Specifically, Newroz holds immense significance as the most important cultural festival, and we always make sure to celebrate it (Figure 34).

(Kani – interview 1)

Kani's steadfast commitment to preserving her cultural identity and imparting cultural values to the next generation is paramount. She recognises the exceptional uniqueness of her culture and emphasises the importance of safeguarding and transmitting these values to her children. Despite the challenges of integrating certain traditions into the UK context, Kani places significant value on upholding Kurdish cultural traditions and practices. She believes that this continuity plays a crucial role in shaping her children's personalities. Additionally, she acknowledges the pivotal role of cultural festivals, such as Newroz, in shaping their cultural identity. Kani understands that adhering to traditions in their new environment is vital for inclusion, enhancing her sense of belonging and promoting social and national cohesion. While she acknowledges the need for adaptation and flexibility in navigating the differences

between cultural belief systems in the UK and their home country, these disparities do not weaken or diminish her sense of belonging. Instead, they reinforce her convictions, deepen her mindfulness, and enhance her sense of responsibility. By upholding cultural traditions, Kani believes it can contribute to the social and psychological well-being of her children, promoting their personality development and fostering diverse social networks.



Figure 34: Kani and her family are celebrating Newroz in London. The data is collected by utilising photovoice technique.

Similarly, Murad demonstrates his commitment to preserving Kurdish culture by actively introducing cultural events and significant days from the Kurdish calendar. Throughout the interviews, he elaborated on the benefits of these traditions and the sense of joy they bring, considering them essential commemorations for the Kurdish nation.

It is essential for me to educate my children about the significant days in our culture. They are already aware of the importance of Eid and Ramadan. They also have knowledge about Newroz, which is the most important day on our calendar. I took the initiative to organise three Newroz parties here in London, and I successfully obtained permission from the council to plant a tree in commemoration of Halabja in [...] ³⁴. This achievement is noteworthy as even the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) could not accomplish it (Figure 35) below.

(Murad - interview 1)

³⁴ I removed the name of the park to protect the identity of the participant.

Murad's endeavours encompass a spectrum of significant facets, spanning culture, identity, commemoration, community, empowerment, and resilience. His proactive involvement in educating his children about pivotal cultural traditions and events serves as an exemplary model for the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge and values. Through the organisation of Newroz celebrations and the active engagement of his children in these events, Murad ensures the perpetuation of cultural customs and fosters a cohesive sense of cultural identity among the younger cohort. By orchestrating and participating in cultural activities, Murad contributes to the cultivation of an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983) or 'imaginary homeland' (Rushdie, 2006), uniting members of the Kurdish community and beyond. These communal gatherings facilitate cultural exchange, interconnection, and the fortification of communal bonds. Notably, Murad's initiative in securing authorisation from the local council to plant a tree underscores his agency and empowerment in championing and upholding Kurdish cultural heritage. Such proactive measures underscore his steadfast commitment to advocating for the acknowledgment and representation of Kurdish culture, transcending institutional constraints.



Figure 35: A tree planted in a park in London in remembrance of those Kurds killed in Halabja. The colour of the flowers represents the colours in the Kurdistan flag. The data is utilised by the photovoice technique.

Furthermore, Murad's actions epitomise his determination to establish spaces and opportunities for the expression and celebration of Kurdish identity. By transcending external constraints, he contributes to the resilience and empowerment of his community. Murad's initiatives extend beyond the mere preservation of cultural heritage; they encompass active

engagement and empowerment of individuals within the Kurdish community. While his overarching goal is to foster unity among Kurdish people through such endeavours, the narrative primarily revolves around the individual, evident in phrases such as ‘my children,’ ‘I managed,’ and ‘I organised.’ Murad’s deliberate use of the pronoun serves to personalise the narrative, evoking compassion and storytelling, as advocated by Bramley (2001, p. 27). The tree planted by Murad in a London Park stands as a poignant symbol commemorating Kurds who perished during the Halabja and Anfal Campaigns between 1982 and 1988. In contrast, Hana highlights the significance of religious celebrations, expressing concern over the dilution of cultural traditions by political interference. According to her, the imposition of political agendas by certain factions has eroded the intrinsic values of many cultural traditions.

I don’t attend the Newroz gatherings because different parties hold them, and I am not interested in politics. However, we celebrate Eid, and the children don’t attend school. So, with a friend, we organise a day out for the children to get together, give them presents, take them to play areas, and follow with a movie and food. So, we spend the entire day out, so they know it is Eid, and then we let them do what they want³⁵.

(Hana – interview 1)

According to Hana, the significance and essence of celebrating traditions in the diaspora have waned compared to their pre-migration status. From her perspective, the absence of a unified association responsible for organising these events has led to fragmented efforts. Moreover, she observes that in the past, various political groups have exerted control over Newroz celebrations, exploiting them as platforms to advance their political agendas. Consequently, the direction of Newroz has shifted, and the celebration and tradition have become disengaged from Kurdish national identity, becoming entangled with political manipulation and deceit. Hana employs the term ‘politics dirty trick’ to depict the dishonest practices of Kurdish political parties that exploit public gatherings to campaign for their parties and gain popularity. Her emphasis on religious festivals underscores the significance of her religious identity. By prioritising and actively participating in the celebration of religious traditions, she not only preserves her cultural heritage but also imparts knowledge to her children. Through these celebrations, Hana cultivates a deeper understanding of Islam within her family, facilitating an enriching and meaningful experience for her children.

In summary, this section highlights the imperative of commemorating cultural traditions among Iraqi Kurdish individuals residing in the diaspora. The participants articulated diverse perspectives regarding the importance of observing cultural events in the UK, with a consensus emerging on the indispensability of participating in ritual practices and preserving elements

³⁵ For Eid celebration in the UK see Appendix 10.16.

from their heritage. Through the remembrance and engagement in these cultural events, individuals reaffirm their sense of belonging to a community united by shared cultural and religious affiliations. These traditions also serve as a conduit for maintaining ties with their country of origin. Embracing cultural practices not only bolsters participants' pride but also deepens their connection with the broader global community. Moreover, these traditions play a pivotal role in transmitting cultural practices to the younger generation, instilling in them a commitment to perpetuate the cultural heritage.

Furthermore, these traditions serve as a platform through which participants construct their identity and envision the Kurdish community through collective memories, rituals, ceremonies, symbols, and 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1984). Essentially, these ritual practices foster a sense of home and belonging in a space that amalgamates elements from both their native homeland and the diaspora, often termed as the 'third space' (Bhabha, 1994). By commemorating cultural traditions in the diaspora, participants not only bring forth their own beliefs and practices but also introduce other cultural assets that embody their individual and collective identities.

In addition to facets such as attire, religious beliefs, customs and food assume a pivotal role as a form of material culture in shaping the identity of the respondents. It holds significant importance in delineating the cultural identity of the participants. Subsequent sections will delve into the significance of food concerning the cultural identity of the respondents.

7.6 *Ritualising food*

At the forefront of the participants' narratives lies a profound cultural significance attributed to food, intricately interwoven with both individual and collective identities. For most participants, the act of preparing traditional dishes within the confines of their homes emerges as a potent embodiment of their ethnic identity, underscoring a tangible link to their cultural heritage. Their meticulous consideration of food choices, the synchronisation of meal timings, and the selection of settings not only reflects the role of nourishment but also the nuanced interplay of food as a conduit of cultural identity. This interplay plays a pivotal role in shaping their sense of self and fostering a sense of community. Additionally, the ritualisation of food consumption is a mechanism to establish cultural and collective identities. Rooted within the dynamics of family traditions, this ritual holds the dual purpose of rekindling ancestral ties and fostering a profound sense of belonging. The ensuing subsections will delve deeply into the data shared by the participants, offering an in-depth exploration of their food practices and associated rituals.

7.6.1 Food as an icebreaker in reducing social isolation

Throughout the interviews, a prevailing sentiment among the participants emerged, reflecting their deep fondness for traditional cuisine and their active engagement in cooking and consuming it. For the participants, food can function as an ice breaker in the context of social interaction. This means that, like other objects, food has the potential to initiate or facilitate communication between individuals and create a comfortable atmosphere, regardless of whether they know each other or not. While deliberating on this, one participant, Kani, eloquently described the atmosphere of their household prior to the impact of Covid-19, painting a vivid picture of the events she would organise to share her culinary creations with friends and guests. This poignant recollection serves as a testament to the social significance and communal aspect of food in her life.

I always try to introduce Kurdish food to my children because our food is the best and made from fresh ingredients which are not processed and full of vitamins. I also enjoy creating and cooking recipes I inherited from the elders and sharing them with people from my community and other cultures.

(Kani- interview 1)

Kani demonstrates a profound attachment to her Kurdish culinary traditions, marked by her resolute commitment to preserving them for the next generation and her evident eagerness to share her cultural heritage with others. This highlights the paramount importance of food as a potent tool for cultural expression, the forging of identity, and the cultivation of a sense of community. Her depiction reflects a strong desire to introduce her children to Kurdish cuisine, highlighting her belief in its superior taste and quality. This highlights her inclination toward utilising fresh, nutritious, and unprocessed ingredients rich in vitamins (Ensaf, 2021). Further, Kani expresses pride in her culinary expertise, enjoying the process of preparing recipes handed down from earlier generations. This underscores the significance of culinary heritage and the safeguarding of traditional wisdom within her cultural context (Kapelari *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, the act of sharing these recipes with individuals from both their own community and diverse cultures showcases both cultural pride and a willingness to engage in cultural interchange.

Similarly, Saman explains the benefit of cooking traditional food and sharing it with others in introducing his culture. In the following story, he exemplifies how food, and the act of sharing meals can serve as powerful expressions of cultural identity. He also demonstrates the interplay between cultural practices, personal fulfilment, and connections with others, ultimately contributing to a sense of belonging and cultural continuity.

Before COVID-19, we regularly had guests, and my wife would cook for them. Naturally, having good food cooked with fresh ingredients is beneficial for our health, but sharing specific recipes with people nourishes my spirit. It brings me happiness and satisfaction. It is a wonderful way to connect with people and celebrate our heritage.

(Saman – interview 1)

Saman begins by describing their pre-COVID-19 routine of regularly hosting guests and their spouse's role in cooking for them. This practice of sharing meals with others reflects the importance of communal gatherings and hospitality within their culture. It signifies a sense of inclusivity and connection to others, which are integral elements of cultural identity. He also acknowledges the health benefits of consuming good food made from fresh ingredients. This demonstrates an understanding of the 'link' between 'food and well-being' (Firth et al, 2020), indicating the value placed on mental and physical health within their cultural context. By prioritising fresh and nutritious ingredients, he aligns his food choices with the cultural norms and values that promote a healthy lifestyle. He also expresses the personal satisfaction and happiness he derives from sharing specific recipes with others. This highlights the emotional and spiritual significance of food in their life and underscores the cultural importance of culinary traditions. By sharing these recipes, they [Saman and his wife] actively participate in preserving and celebrating their heritage, reinforcing their cultural identity and sense of belonging.

Unlike Saman, Hana holds the belief that food does not necessarily determine an individual's identity or sense of belonging. According to her, people consume whatever is accessible, particularly when they lack the opportunity to prepare a specific type of food. In the following story, Hana shows the complex relationship between culture, identity, and practicality when it comes to food choices. She highlights the dynamic nature of food-related decisions and how external factors can shape individual food choices, even when cultural food preferences are present.

The food I eat does not define me whatsoever. I eat a particular food because I don't have other choices. For example, I ate a sandwich today, not because I like it, but because it's the only thing I can eat while working [...] I work full-time, leave home early, and finish late. By the time I get home, it is 6 o'clock and does (sic) not have time to cook Dolma³⁶, Kuba³⁷, or Kofta³⁸. These foods require time and energy, which I don't have after a long

³⁶ Dolma one of the most popular dishes for Kurdish people which consists of vegetables stuffed with seasoned rice which is cooked in a tomato broth.

³⁷ Kuba is made from cooked rice stuffed with minced lamb, sultanas, nuts, parsley and spices.

³⁸ Kufta like Kuba, but it can be made from rice or burghul stuffed with spiced minced lamb plus sultana, nuts, parsley or and spices cooked in a tomato broth.

workday. So instead, I prepare something that takes no more than forty-five minutes, like pasta or chicken sandwiches.

(Hana – follow-up interview)

Hana's statement emphasises the intersection of culture, identity, and practicality. While cultural foods may be connected to their cultural heritage, the speaker's daily realities and time limitations prevent them from preparing these dishes. Instead, they opt for more convenient and time-efficient options like pasta or chicken sandwiches. This perspective reflects the negotiation between cultural food preferences and practical considerations in the speaker's life. The choices she makes are influenced by external factors such as work schedules and limited time and energy resources. Although Hana acknowledges cultural food preferences, her circumstances and practical constraints take precedence in determining her food choices. Dolma is a beloved dish among Kurdish people as it carries cultural significance (Figure 35). It includes various preparations. One popular version involves stuffing vegetables like Swiss chard, onion, aubergine, courgettes, pepper, and optional vegetables with seasoned rice, served with chopped vegetables and meat. Another variation features vine leaves filled with rice, dill, spring onion, and natural yogurt. Dolma, in a Kurdish culinary tradition, highlights the skill of blending flavours and textures to create culturally important and delicious dishes.

Hana also mentioned another popular dish called Kufta (Figure 6), which typically consists of rice or semolina with stuffing. Some people prefer to combine both ingredients to create different flavour profiles. Additionally, Kuba was highlighted as another significant food item (Figure 36). Kuba involves cooking rice and stuffing it with ingredients like lamb mince or chicken breast, parsley or coriander, and nuts such as almonds, pine nuts, or walnuts. The stuffed Kuba is then fried in oil and served with nan bread, various salads, and turshi (pickled vegetables commonly found in Middle Eastern cuisines, including Kurdish, Arab, Turkish, Afghan, Balkan, Armenian, and Iranian cuisines). It is worth noting that Kufta and Kuba are popular dishes across the Middle East, with variations in preparation and cooking methods depending on the geographical location.



Figure 36: Different types of Dolma that are popular in Iraqi Kurdistan. The data is collected via the corpus of material objects technique.



Figure 37: Kurdish style Kufta and Kuba. The data is collected via the corpus of material objects technique.

In summary, participants demonstrated diverse responses to the preparation and consumption of traditional cuisine, influenced by individual preferences, societal norms, and time constraints. For individuals like Kani and Saman, sharing and preparing traditional dishes became a way to express their cultural identity, addressing feelings of displacement and providing a sense of normality and continuity in their lives, as discussed by Parasecoli (2014). Culinary practices not only served as a means of bonding within communities but also helped establish new connections. Moreover, specific types of food, especially traditional delicacies,

played a significant role in shaping the collective identity of the participants, a topic further explored in the following section.

7.6.2 Food sharing and performing identity

Some of the participants discover that preparing and indulging in traditional ‘cuisine’ carries symbolic and emotional significance, serving to interpret and reinforce their connection to their homeland and ‘[enrich] their cultural identity’ (Rabikowska, 2010, p. 382; Ramazanova, 2022; Reddy, 2020), and signifies a sense of cultural belonging (Poeggel, 2022). According to the participants’ accounts, particular types of food are intricately intertwined with specific memories, and the act of sharing meals plays a fundamental role in their overall well-being. However, while listening to the participants and engaging in discussions centred around food, a comment from Saman prompted me to reconsider the prevailing influence of traditional cuisine in shaping his identities. Saman's viewpoint is encapsulated in the following passage:

Food defines who we are, giving us a source of pride, and it is a vehicle for linking me to my culture and people from other ethnic backgrounds. We always like to share aspects of our heritage culture. For example, when we first moved to this flat, my wife cooked for our neighbour – a British couple, because she wanted to help others.

(Saman – follow-up interview)

This statement highlights the pivotal role that food plays in shaping cultural identity and building connections among diverse ethnic backgrounds. Saman recognises that food stands as a defining characteristic, evoking a sense of pride and serving as a bridge to his culture and the broader community. Sharing aspects of their cultural heritage becomes a means of connecting with others and bridging cultural divides. A poignant illustration of this intent can be seen in Saman and his wife’s act of cooking and sharing meals with their British neighbours upon moving to their new apartment. This act symbolises their desire to extend hospitality and promote intercultural understanding, providing a potent avenue for cultural exchange and mutual appreciation. Through the sharing of their culinary traditions, Saman’s family actively contributes to nurturing a sense of community and advancing intercultural dialogue. This gesture also reflects their dedication to preserving their Kurdish ethnic identity and cultivating understanding and admiration for Kurdish culture within their diverse family circle. Similarly, Omer’s narrative underscores the integral role of food in shaping and expressing ethnic identity within a multicultural family context. It also demonstrates the speaker’s commitment to maintaining their Kurdish ethnic identity and fostering understanding and appreciation of Kurdish culture among their family members. This contributes to the preservation and continuation of their ethnic heritage.

In our house, we established a little Kurdistan through the food we eat. This step is vital since I have a multicultural family. For example, my son's wife is American, and my daughter's husband is Iranian. So, we try to preserve aspects of our culture by eating Kurdish food and teaching our family members that we care about our heritage.

(Omer – follow-up interview)

Omer's statement underscores the pivotal role of food in establishing collective identities within the framework of a multicultural family context. Through their dietary choices, the speaker emphasises the significance of preserving their 'Kurdish heritage,' effectively creating a microcosm of 'Little Kurdistan' within the confines of their home. This illustrates a deliberate effort to safeguard and transmit their cultural legacy to future generations, fostering a distinct 'group identity' and a profound sense of belonging (Spears, 2011). Omer's diverse family dynamic, encompassing an Iranian son-in-law and an American daughter-in-law, offers an opportunity for intercultural enrichment. By sharing Kurdish cuisine and involving their family members in culinary traditions, they actively demonstrate their commitment to preserving and cherishing their heritage. Their devotion and pride in their cultural legacy are conspicuously evident through their relationship with food. By instilling the value and appreciation of traditional fare, Omer contributes to a collective understanding and acceptance of the array of cultural identities within their family unit. This engagement with his heritage fosters a profound sense of belonging, fortifies his cultural identity, and enhances the intercultural exchange within his household.

However, Kani holds a contrasting viewpoint where the flavour of specific foods or the act of consuming products is not necessarily entwined with one's identity. Instead, she associates it with a nostalgic yearning for home, a place where all the senses converge to evoke a profound sentiment. During her journey back to Suleimani, she brought along several food items, including Trkhena and Gazo (Figures 37-38). Trkhena is a traditional Kurdish dish crafted from fermented grains or dried wheat known as Brwesh and turnip. It can be prepared with or without meat, incorporating ingredients like green lentils, dried prunes, raisins, walnuts, hazelnuts, white beetroot, chickpeas, onions, beetroot, and various pulses. Trkhena is typically prepared in the summer but served during the cold winter months, making it a symbol of seasonal transition and culinary tradition. On the other hand, Gazo represents a sweet delicacy crafted from natural Manna. The production process involves dissolving Manna in water, boiling it to create a sauce-like consistency, blending it with a mixture of eggs and sugar, spreading the blend onto a plate, incorporating flour for texture, and then slicing it with a specialised machine cutter. Gazo exemplifies the artisanal craftsmanship and meticulous attention to detail required to create this delectable, sweet treat from natural Manna. Kani provides insights into these culinary treasures in the following excerpt:

In London, I have access to a variety of products, but they don't compare to the food I used to enjoy back home. The taste is distinct and nostalgic. If I cannot find a particular product here, I rely on my family to send it to me. During my recent trip to Kurdistan, I brought back several items, such as Gazo and Trxena. The reasons for acquiring these food items are manifold. Foods sourced from their original regions have a unique taste and appearance, as they are not mass-produced for commercial purposes. Additionally, these food items trigger memories associated with them whenever I see, touch, smell, or taste them. Cooking and consuming these items from my hometown evoke a deep sense of emotional connection and make them even more special to me.

(Kani –WhatsApp, follow-up interview)

Kani's statement highlights the emotional power of food in evoking a profound sense of home, igniting nostalgia and making a significant contribution to an individual's sense of identity and belonging. It vividly portrays her intense yearning for the distinctive flavours of her hometown and the deep emotional resonance connected to the preparation and enjoyment of these culinary delights. For Kani, the simple act of cooking and savouring certain foods serves as a catalyst for a flood of memories intricately intertwined with her home, loved ones and the innocence of childhood. The act of importing specific food items from her hometown not only triggers these nostalgic recollections but also symbolises her deep-rooted connection to her local community. Her unwavering dedication to transporting these cherished foodstuffs across long distances underscores a profound attachment to her place of origin, acting as a conduit that bridges the gap between her past and her new reality. In doing so, she actively nurtures a profound sense of identity within the context of her new surroundings.



Figure 38: Gazo, a traditional Kurdish sweet. The data is collected by the researcher using visual ethnography technique.



Figure 39: Trkhena – a traditional Kurdish food. The data is collected via the visual ethnography technique.

Omer also mentioned that eating a particular food (e.g., lintel) which reminds him of his grandfather.

Food could control our feelings and take us back to the past. Interestingly, eating lentils reminds me of my grandfather. He always said that lentils are blessed since prophets had eaten them.

(Omer – follow-up interview)

Omer's narrative demonstrates how specific foods possess the extraordinary power to conjure memories, shape personal narratives, and serve as a bridge connecting individuals to their heritage and traditions. The mention of lentils and their profound resonance with the narrator exemplifies a tangible connection to their distinctive cultural identity. In this instance, Omer's identity becomes indistinguishable from his familial and cultural roots. The belief in the spiritual significance of lentils, stemming from their association with prophets, adds a spiritual dimension to their identity signifying a profound link to their faith and cherished values. Furthermore, the reference to his grandfather and the connection to lentils signifies a deep-rooted tie to ancestral traditions and heritage.

This link to bygone eras through culinary choices further fortifies a sense of lineage and affiliation with a specific cultural or familial identity, as validated by von Essen and Mårtensson (2017, p. 210). They argue that diverse dishes and meals contribute to the rhythm of everyday life, while the consumption of specific foods can directly influence our emotions,

potentially evoking distinct feelings or memories. This interplay between food and emotions is a recognisable phenomenon as taste and aroma possess the potent ability to invoke nostalgic or sentimental recollections. In this regard, it is entirely feasible to assert that preparing and savouring traditional dishes extends beyond mere sustenance; it encompasses cherished individuals and the memories they encapsulate. This profound connection is vividly illustrated in the narratives of both Kani and Omer.

7.7 Chapter summary and discussions

In this chapter, I conducted an extensive examination of the significant role that material culture plays in shaping individual identity. In the comprehensive examination of individuals' interactions with material culture in unfamiliar domestic environments, detailed processes of identity formation were observed. The chapter commenced with a thorough examination of artifacts, including laurels, journals, and heirlooms, in relation to identity (see section 7.2). The focus then shifted to the notion of place, space and characteristics surrounding such concepts (see section 7.3). Following that, data regarding clothing and identity were examined (see section 7.4), with particular attention paid to the traditional Kurdish attire from Southern Kurdistan, the region from which the participants originate. This was followed by a discussion on cultural traditions such as specific customs in which the participants are engaged. The final section of this chapter was dedicated to the importance of food in relation to the participants' identity (see section 7.6).

According to the findings, materiality and material culture play significant roles in the process of identity negotiation. Participants employ various strategies to define their personas, and the objects they collect and utilise assist them in establishing, mediating, and facilitating the performance of their multiple and evolving identities. These objects do not merely represent personal identity but also serve as tangible links to diverse cultural legacies; they are more than just a medium of communication – they also help 'establish social meanings' (Woodward, 2007, p. 134). The deliberate selection and arrangement of items, spanning from family heirlooms to meaningful souvenirs, facilitated cultural preservation, ensuring the transmission of heritage across generations. These possessions also function as expressive tools, reflecting multifaceted identities shaped by individual preferences and broader cultural, familial, and societal values. In addition to their visual appeal, well-organised living spaces adorned with familiar objects cultivate environments conducive to comfort and nurturance, contributing to mental well-being and a sense of belonging. They serve as a medium through which participants negotiate and navigate their multiple realities. For instance, Kani's penchant for collecting objects that tether her to various social and cultural milieus correlates with the different personas she seeks to embody. Similarly, Saman's artistic endeavours aimed

at recreating and reviving aspects of the past, reflect his longing to delve into bygone eras, thereby revealing facets of his identity that may not be immediately apparent or visible.

The chapter also explored the concepts of place and space, examining the correlation between specific locations and how participants construct their identities through occupied spaces—both tangible (physical) and conceptual (imagined). The data suggest that place has multiple meaning; the participants' understanding of place is connected to their experiences with people, personal stories, and *small cultures* they belong to (Holliday, 1999). It is crucial to emphasise that objects situated within specific places have the potential to influence participants' identities, serving as tools to redefine their sense of self. For instance, Ari's affinity towards buildings, historical sites, and memories of loved ones along with Karim's attachment to a café table, serve as mediums through which these individuals navigate their sense of self.

Furthermore, the concluding section of this chapter examined the significance of food in relation to the participants' identities. According to the findings, food possesses the remarkable ability to nourish the mind and establish profound connections to specific experiences, memories, and places (Sthapit *et al.*, 2017). As articulated by von Essen and Mårtensson (2017, p. 210), a diverse array of dishes and meals intricately integrate into the fabric of daily life, evoking distinct emotions or memories. This interplay between food and emotions is a well-documented phenomenon, wherein taste and aroma hold the power to evoke feelings of nostalgia or sentimentality. For participants, their involvement in preparing and savouring traditional cuisine transcends mere culinary activity; it encompasses cherished individuals and the narratives associated with them (von Essen and Mårtensson, 2017). Essentially, their culinary choices bolster cultural, social, and familial bonds while significantly contributing to their personal, social, and cultural spheres. In this respect, the significance of Kurdish cuisine extends beyond its flavours; it embodies notions of freshness and nutritional value, symbolising the essence of their cultural heritage. It serves as a foundational element for transmitting their heritage to future generations and forging connections with individuals encountered in both personal (family) and communal (wider society) settings.

In conclusion, this chapter has delved into the role of material culture and materiality in the negotiation of participants' cultural identities. The aim was to examine the significance of material objects in this process. Based on the findings, it is apparent that expressions of identity extend beyond verbal communication (Appadurai, 1986; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Choices in clothing, cuisine, and home decor serve as potent languages, articulating our essence and shaping the intricate layers of our identity (Sudjic,

2008). These non-verbal expressions intricately intertwine with our personal narratives, reflecting the profound diversity and depth of our identities. Through such modes of expression, we adeptly navigate the intricate web of our cultural heritage, individual inclinations, and societal affiliations, establishing deep connections with others (Rapaille, 2006). Fundamentally, our material preferences become eloquent declarations of our varied identities, offering subtle yet profound insights into our essence (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981). This process not only reveals the remarkable resilience inherent in the human spirit but also underscores our extraordinary capacity to negotiate and express our personas, transforming unfamiliar spaces into deeply personal sanctuaries (de Blij, 2009).

It stands as a testament to the enduring influence of material culture, shaping, articulating, and conserving identity within diverse domestic contexts. This thorough exploration illuminates the intricate interplay between personal attachments, cultural heritage, and the indomitable human spirit in the negotiation and creation of spaces resonating with meaningful, identity-enriched narratives (Rapaille, 2006).

8 General Discussion, Implications and Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter is structured into three main sections: ‘General Discussion,’ ‘Implications,’ and ‘Conclusions.’ In the general discussion, I will review the primary study findings, with a specific focus on the post-colonial and nonessential perspectives explored in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven. Following this, I will analyse how these theories relate to the main findings and discuss the research contributions. In the implications section, I will underscore the practical outcomes and ideas generated from the research. Lastly, I will conclude the thesis by sharing my reflective insights gained from the study of Kurdish migrants.

This qualitative study delved into the real-life experiences of first-generation Kurds residing in the UK. It examined how a specific group of Iraqi Kurdish (im)migrants negotiated and navigated their identities within the context of multiple cultural affiliations. The thesis weaves together the theoretical framework (Chapter Three), the research process (Chapter Four), and the narrative of the research participants (Chapter Five, Six, and Seven). It presents an exploration of the main themes and sub-themes related to the lived experiences of first-generation Iraqi Kurdish immigrants in the UK. These themes include culture and identity, hybridity/in-betweenness and third space, home and sense of belonging, othering, material culture, and materiality. While there are existing studies on identity formation, home, sense of belonging, and cultural identity negotiation among first-generation Iraqi Kurds in the West (e.g., see Fox, 2021; King, 2005; Paasche, 2020; Zalme, 2017), to the best of my knowledge, no prior studies have exclusively focused on cultural identity negotiation and navigation within the first-generation Iraqi Kurdish diaspora in the UK. Furthermore, there is a gap in the literature regarding the exploration of material culture in relation to identity within this community in the UK (see Mahmud, 2023, 2024). Therefore, this research represents one of the few emerging research initiatives conducted by a Kurdish researcher to investigate the experiences of the Kurdish diaspora from multidisciplinary perspectives. By employing multimodal data collection techniques and conducting thematic data analysis, this research aims to contribute to scholarly knowledge across various disciplines within the social sciences and humanities. In Section 8.3, I will explain how the findings of this study contribute to the understanding of the Kurdish community and enhance the broader academic discourse. Before delving into that topic, the next section will be dedicated to discussing the key findings of the thesis.

8.2 Addressing the research questions

The study's main findings, as discussed in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven, are now subject to further examination. This section extends the discussion of these three key findings, thereby addressing the four research questions introduced in section 1.4 of Chapter One.

8.2.1 Addressing the first research question

This subsection discusses the first research question:

How do Iraqi Kurdish migrants to the United Kingdom (re)negotiate and navigate their identities in response to their new cultural and social context?

The findings demonstrate that all participants possess multiple and ever-evolving identities, which are complex and subject to transformation (Rosi i Sole, Fenoulhet and Gerdi, 2020; Norton, 2013; Hall, 1996; Mahmud, 2023a). The construction of these identities is not solely self-defined; rather, they are influenced by the 'small cultures' they inhabit (Holliday, 1999) and a variety of internal and external factors. Internal factors encompass the core elements of a specific cultural group, including ingrained beliefs, values, norms, traditions, and practices. These elements are exemplified in the participants' narratives within section 5.2, where they recount their experiences navigating multiple cultural realms.

External factors encompass elements that extend beyond the participants' immediate cultural sphere, arising from interactions with different cultures, the reach of globalisation, media exposure, and cross-cultural exchanges. Exposure to these external factors influences prevailing global cultural trends. Both internal and external cultural factors play pivotal roles in shaping the dynamics of the participants' multiple cultural worlds, their identities, behaviour and perceptions. However, despite most participants emphasising their possession of evolving identities, some encountered obstacles when attempting desired changes due to external influences, as exemplified by Murad's experience in section 5.4. This raises the question of whether these choices are discretionary or obligatory, and in either scenario, what potential solutions can address these challenges?

Additionally, the participants' specific life situations, the broader contexts that envelop them, and how others externally perceive them also influence this process. When the participants attempted to present specific facets of themselves within particular circumstances and situational frameworks, they encountered adversities and obstacles while navigating the complexities of their myriad identities. For example, subsection 5.2.1 illustrates how Murad identified himself with multiple attributes (human, Kurd, Muslim), which he believed defined his identity. However, a contrast emerges in section 5.4 where he expresses a lack of pride in

being a Kurd (e.g., ‘it was not my choice, I was born as a Kurd and a Muslim’) and explains that this aspect of his identity is due to circumstances beyond his control, being born as a Kurd and a Muslim. This highlights the limitation of the participant’s full control over his identity; while they can shape and claim aspects of their identities, the perceptions others hold about them also play a role in defining who they are. Moreover, a notable insight among the participants pertains to the discord stemming from the contrast between their ‘ascribed’ and ‘avowed’ identities, resulting in an ‘identity dilemma’ (Charmaz, 1994) and consequently leading to identity or role confusion.

While Classical Adaptation Theory, as proposed by Kim (1988), offers insights into how Iraqi Kurds negotiate their cultural identities to adapt to new cultural environments, the findings of this study reveal a far more complex and context-dependent reality. Positivist approaches to adaptation often overlook the subjective experiences and agency of individuals, neglect contextual factors and struggle to accommodate the diversity and dynamic nature of adaptation. Additionally, such models may lack predictive power and fail to capture the inherent complexities of migration contexts. Consequently, there is a growing recognition of the need for more nuanced and contextually sensitive approaches to understanding adaptation, as exemplified in the study by de la Graza and Ono (2015). Their work highlights the diverse ways in which migrants negotiate identities and navigate cultural transitions, which may not neatly align with predetermined stages or categories. In line with de la Graza and Ono’s (2015) findings, this research suggests that adaptation is an ongoing and iterative process characterised by fluctuations and setbacks. Positivist models assuming a straightforward progression from problem to solution may thus overlook these complexities, resulting in oversimplified representations of adaptation dynamics.

The concept of home also plays a pivotal role in shaping the participants’ identities. Their sense of belonging and perception of where they truly belong profoundly impact how they construct and manage their identities. The inconsistency in determining a definitive ‘home’ has led to complexities in integrating their various selves into a cohesive whole and in determining where they belong. However, most participants have struggled to define where home is. For them, home is both ‘real’ and ‘imagined.’ For instance, in section 5.3.1, Saman associates the notion of home with Kurdistan, describing it as ‘a memory’ that he cannot ignore or forget. Similarly, Kani views Kurdistan as home, which is evident in her discourse about home and her sense of belonging. She expresses, ‘there are nights when I wake up in the middle of the night, and as I open my eyes, I find myself asking, “What am I doing here?”’ On the other hand, for Nina, Kurdistan is a place where she can connect to her father’s memories; however, it does not provide the same feeling as her childhood house in Manchester. These instances highlight the malleability of the notion of home and how one’s sense of belonging can change based on

experiences, temporality, location, and space. These findings prompt reflection on the duality within identity. The concept of the 'duality of identity' suggests that an individual's self-awareness is not singular or unchanging (Howard, 2018). Instead, it encompasses a multitude of facets, with some remaining consistent over time while others undergo adaptation and change in response to experiences, situations, and personal growth (Fanon, 1952). This perspective sheds light on the intricate interplay between these enduring and evolving components within the participants' identities, emphasising the inherent complexity of self-concept.

The data presented in Chapter Five, along with the findings discussed here, reinforces the definition of identity as initially highlighted in Chapter Three, section 3.2.3, where I defined identity as a complex construct.

Identity is a complex construct, encompassing a constellation of definitive characteristics contributing to an individual's sense of authenticity. It functions as a valuable resource for individuals to communicate and express various facets of themselves, shaped through dynamic processes of social and cultural construction. This construction of identity unfolds within the contexts of local and intercultural interactions, where individuals engage with others from diverse cultural and social groups, negotiating and navigating their identities in relation to these collective frameworks.

The definition above underscores the complexity of identity within the studied population, highlighting its multifaceted nature and its importance as a means for individuals to express authenticity. It also emphasises the dynamic processes of social and cultural construction that shape identity, stressing its fluidity and evolution over time. Additionally, the paragraph focuses the significance of local and intercultural interactions in the construction of identity, where individuals negotiate their identities within collective frameworks. Moving forward, the next section aims to further explore the intricacies of identity negotiation and navigation by addressing the second research question.

8.2.2 Addressing the second research question

This subsection discusses the following research question:

What challenges do the Iraqi Kurdish migrants face in the United Kingdom, and how do they cope with them?

In the course of their adjustment to life in the UK, the participants constructed their experiences as a series of challenges. They claimed that these challenges significantly shaped

their assimilation and adaptation experiences. Chief among these were linguistic barriers, which presented formidable hurdles. These linguistic complexities stemmed from limited vocabulary and language skills which curtailed their capacity for effective communication. These linguistic challenges were further exacerbated by the diverse age ranges of the participants, intensifying the intricacies of their integration process. For individuals such as Saman, Kani, and Karim, the absence of English language skills at the outset of their migration led to uncertainty about how to navigate life in their new environment. For others, the lack of linguistic proficiency translated into experiences of being treated as outsiders, a phenomenon often referred to as othering (Said, 1978; Holliday, 2013). This phenomenon was manifested in explicit instances of ‘white supremacy racism’ (Cross, 2020), as evidenced in the cases of Murad, Hana, and Saman, as well as the subtler yet equally impactful phenomenon of ‘interracial othering,’ exemplified in Nina’s experience in Manchester town Centre, Karim’s encounter with his South Asian restaurant owner, and Kani’s incident on the bus, as discussed in section 6.3.

It is noteworthy that despite all participants experiencing othering and navigating through periods of uncertainty, negative experiences did not inevitably result in long-term isolation and stress. Instead, participants displayed a remarkable ability to transform these challenges into opportunities for personal growth. They confronted the initial shock of adaptation and developed heightened self-awareness of their identities. This process ultimately led to the formation of ‘in-between’ cultural identities (Zhodi, 2018), often referred to as ‘hybrididentities’ (Smith, 2018). Personal attributes, motivation, and the desire for acceptance and integration into the new society played pivotal roles in facilitating their successful adaptation. Furthermore, participants effectively converted negative experiences into positive ones through cultural learning and proactive engagement within British society. By embracing and interacting with the host culture, they fostered meaningful connections and gleaned insights from their experiences, resulting in enhanced adaptation and a sense of belonging.

For the participants, material resources played a crucial role in facilitating their adaptation journey. These resources, encompassing tangible assets such as wealth, housing, and access to social amenities, significantly alleviated the challenges associated with adapting to new circumstances. Participants without these privileges, as illustrated by Karim’s narratives in Chapter Six, section 6.3.2, experienced instances of interracial alienation. This shifts our understanding of othering from being solely a result of colonial powers imposing categorisations and privileges on certain groups over others (e.g., white vs. black), as postcolonial literature (Said, 1978; Gilroy, 1993; Bhabha, 1994) suggests, to something more subtle, which I term ‘interracial othering.’ This form of othering is extensively observed in the participants’ data in Chapter Six, section 6.3.2.

Furthermore, the findings highlight that othering can exhibit a ‘reciprocal’ nature (Rawls and David, 2005). This implies that participants not only experienced being ‘othered’ by others but also engaged in othering acts themselves against others. This is evident in the language and narratives participants employ to describe individuals from different minority groups (e.g., referring to a black man or black girls – as observed in Karim’s written narratives and Kani’s spoken narrative in section 6.3.2). For some participants, these negative interactions fostered feelings of alienation, isolation, and diminished psychological well-being. This finding is well aligned with the current literature (e.g., Berry and Hua, 2016, 2017; Perreira and Ornelas, 2013). Nevertheless, the overall outcomes of the data in relation to othering, adaptation, and well-being shed light on the idea that experiences of othering do not consistently result in negative effects on participants’ adaptation or well-being. Instead, the participants adeptly leveraged these encounters to mould and fortify their identities, leading to an ultimate enhancement of their adaptation processes.

The narratives of the participants underscore the significance of individual agency and proactive cultural engagement in shaping adaptation outcomes. The participants’ ability to navigate the complexities of othering and transform negative encounters into positive learning experiences speaks to the resilience and adaptability of migrants in multicultural settings. The participants’ capacity to create ‘in-between’ or ‘hybrid identities’ (Bhabha, 1994) showcases their resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity. Through the navigation of cultural encounters, they forged multiple selves that incorporate elements from both their home culture and the new environment. This process of self-discovery and identity negotiation empowers them to reclaim agency and assert their belonging in the face of external challenges.

8.2.3 Addressing the third and fourth research questions

This subsection discusses the third and the fourth research questions:

- How do Iraqi Kurdish migrants in the United Kingdom experience changes in their identity, and what is the role of material culture in easing this process?
- How do Iraqi Kurdish people define themselves in terms of nations and groups?

Chapter Seven examined the participants’ lived experiences through the lens of material culture. This exploration unfolds within the overarching theme of identity negotiation and navigation, and in this subsection, I will delve more deeply into the intersection of material culture and materiality with the participants’ cultural identity. I will also explore the notions of ‘place’ and ‘space’ in relation to their identity negotiation and navigation.

Central to this exploration is the recognition by most participants of the profound significance of material objects. According to them, these objects played a pivotal role as conduits in their intricate journey of identity negotiation and navigation. These objects facilitated a smoother traversal of the dynamic interplay between diverse spaces and places. Whether through the preservation of items from their places of origin or their re-contextualisation in new settings, participants were able to weave together identities that elegantly integrated multiple realities. A notable example is Saman's recreation of childhood memories through painting and Kani's collection of objects like the vintage telephone, camera, and transported food from her hometown. These instances underscore the capacity of objects to transform into powerful memory triggers. Functioning as efficient guides, these objects empowered the participants to construct 'in-between' identities that thrived amidst these periods of transition (Bhabha, 1994). The collection and creation of material objects by the participants served as a potent means to establish a 'third space' and foster a hybrid identity, enabling them to embrace a sense of belonging to multiple places and spaces (Bhabha, 1994). Through these thoughtfully curated objects, the participants engaged in a profound process of cultural negotiation, preserving their legacy and traditions in a foreign context. By surrounding themselves with familiar objects from their homeland, they created a comforting and empowering environment that anchored their identities amidst the challenges of adaptation.

Furthermore, the findings shed light on the participants' experiences, underscoring the significance of material culture not only within the context of identity negotiation and navigation but also in the profound construction of cultural identity, notions of home, and the sense of belonging. This process intricately weaves together the participants' diverse experiences and influences, resulting in a tapestry that encapsulated the essence of their multifaceted existence. The interplay of material elements in their lives, from objects to symbols, becomes intricately intertwined with the participants' personal narratives, forming a comprehensive portrayal of their complex and rich life journeys. The participants' engagement with these objects underscores their profound impact on personal growth and development. The transformations that individuals undergo are not mere imprints of their interactions with objects; they mirror their distinct personalities and identities. The objects, in a sense, act as reflective surfaces, revealing the intricacies of their dynamic journey of self-discovery. This intricate interplay between individuals and objects signifies a reciprocal influence. Just as individuals infuse meaning into the objects, the objects, in return, shape individuals' perceptions, personas, and behaviours (Mahmud, 2023). They act as mediators in cultural negotiation and identity construction, bridging the gap between past experiences and the present moment and providing a thread of continuity amidst the process of adaptation. In this context, the understanding of identity formation and adaptation transcends the simple

binary of subject and object. It embraces a symbiotic connection, where individuals and objects co-construct and mutually shape each other, blurring the lines between human agency and material influence (Mahmud, 2023).

The research question, ‘How do Iraqi Kurdish people define themselves in terms of nations and groups?’ led to a multifaceted exploration among the study participants, revealing a complex interplay of identities, often characterised by hybridity (Bhabha, 1994). For most participants, identifying as Kurds held a significant place in their self-concept. However, this identification was far from straightforward; instead, it often took on a hybrid form, in line with Bhabha’s notion of hybridity in cultural identities. This hybrid identity was marked by elements of both their Kurdish heritage and the cultural influences of their host country, the United Kingdom (Bhabha, 1994). The ambiguity and lack of clarity surrounding their identity positioned them in a ‘third space’ (Bhabha, 1994), a conceptual territory where they grappled with questions about where they truly belonged. This third space was a realm of in-betweenness, where they negotiated and redefined their identities, sometimes aligning more closely with their Kurdish heritage and at other times leaning toward an identity shaped by their experiences in the UK. Within this complex landscape, the participants’ perceptions of themselves as Kurds were not static. Instead, their identity seemed to shift and adapt depending on various factors, including their life experiences and social contexts. This fluidity and adaptability in identity formation align with Hall’s concept of identity as a process (Hall, 1990). In some situations, embracing their Kurdish identity served as a source of empowerment and connection to a larger community with shared experiences. However, in other circumstances, this attachment to Kurdish identity could lead to a sense of othering (Said, 1978), where they felt distinct from the broader society around them.

The research findings underscore the complex dynamics of identity among Iraqi Kurdish individuals in the UK, situated within a liminal space characterised by hybridity, fluidity, and a continual negotiation of self-concept (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1990). This lack of clarity stimulates ongoing dialogues regarding their sense of belonging, locating them in a third space where their dynamic identities serve as lenses for navigating life’s complexities (Bhabha, 1994). Their attachment to Kurdish identity offers both a sense of belonging and rootedness in some contexts, while in others, it unveils the intricacies of identity formation within a multicultural milieu (Said, 1978). In essence, the participants’ transformative journeys of self-discovery were significantly influenced by the concept of ‘hybridity’ (Grant *et al.*, 2023). This influence was notably facilitated through exposure to ‘liminal spaces’ (Shortt, 2014) and diverse interactions with people, entities, and environments. These transitional spaces held profound cultural significance, with the ‘third space’ functioning as a realm for unifying and harmonising identities (Bhabha, 1994). Within this dynamic platform, intercultural

communication and power dynamics underwent continuous (re)negotiation, giving rise to newly cultivated identities that seamlessly embraced the diverse richness of their experiences and backgrounds. The fluidity in constructing identities allowed them to transcend fixed classifications, skilfully navigating the complexities of cultural interplay (Bhabha, 1994). Despite their dedicated efforts, the participants' experiences resonate with Bhabha's notion that they are 'almost the same but not quite' (1994), reflecting the subtle yet impactful distinctions present in their narratives and journeys.

While initial observations may suggest similarities, a more profound exploration reveals intricate variations that distinguish their individual paths and perspectives. This realisation underscores the intricate nature of their stories and the multi-dimensional facets of their experiences, highlighting the unique contributions that each participant brings to the collective narrative.

8.3 Understanding the findings through 'hybridity,' 'third space,' 'orientalism' and 'stuff' theories

In the preceding section, I provided a comprehensive overview of the research questions outlined in Chapter One, Section 1.4. Now, I will delve into the outcomes revealed in the data chapters (Chapter Five, Six, and Seven) in relation to the theories and concepts explored in Chapter Three. Specifically, I will focus on the concepts of 'hybridity' and the 'third space' as introduced by Bhabha (1994), 'orientalism' as discussed by Said (1978), and conclude this section by examining the notion of 'stuff' presented by Miller (2010) in light of the findings of this study. The selection of these theories is based on their direct relevance to the findings of my research. They offer valuable frameworks for analysing and interpreting the complex cultural and social dynamics evident in the data, aligning with the central themes and nuances of my study. By scrutinising these concepts, my aim is to deepen our understanding of the complex dynamics of power, representation, and identity within the context of my research.

Postcolonialism, from my perspective, serves as a foundational theoretical framework that extensively explores the enduring legacies of colonialism and imperialism (Booth, 2007). It not only scrutinises but also critiques the socio-cultural, political, and economic implications of colonial domination, offering insights into the complexities of post-colonial societies (Hall, 1990; Said, 1978). Postcolonialism sheds light on the intricate processes of decolonisation, resistance, and cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 1994). It allows us to understand how formerly colonised nations navigate their identities and reclaim agency in the aftermath of colonial rule. Furthermore, postcolonialism provides a critical lens through which we can challenge and confront the lasting impacts of colonialism. It prompts us to question dominant narratives, advocate for social justice, promote equality, and empower marginalised voices. In

essence, postcolonialism is not just an academic discourse; it is a call to action, urging us to strive for a more equitable and self-determined world.

8.3.1 Hybridity and third space

Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) concept of the third space encapsulates a realm where cultural diversity converges, fostering hybridity and negotiation. Within colonial and post-colonial contexts, this conceptual framework offers profound insights into the formation of identity, processes of cultural adaptation, and modes of resistance. In my research, the intentional selection of Bhabha's theories on 'hybridity' and the 'third space,' as expounded upon in Chapter Three, section 3.4, is deliberate. These theories provide a robust lens through which to examine how my participants adeptly navigate the intricate tapestry of cultural identities while dwelling within the diaspora, thereby enriching the depth of my inquiry. Bhabha's notion of 'hybridity' (1994) posits identity as a dynamic and intricate construct shaped by diverse cultural influences, challenging the rigidity of fixed identities. This concept resonates with perspectives offered by other postcolonial scholars such as Hall (1996), who emphasises the fluid nature of identity, and nonessentialist scholars like Holliday (1999, 2011). Collectively, these perspectives underscore the dynamic and evolving nature of identity, accentuating the complexity and diversity inherent in individual and collective selfhood.

Perceiving identity as a perpetually evolving construct significantly enriches the depth of my research inquiry, aligning seamlessly with my findings. Each participant articulated their multifaceted, ever-evolving identities, intricately shaped by the dynamic interplay of socio-cultural factors. For example, in Chapter Five, section 5.2, Murad's narrative vividly illustrates this complexity, likening his identity to layers of an onion (e.g., 'we are humans, Kurds, and Muslims'). Each facet of his identity is intricately shaped by broader societal contexts. At the core lies the foundational layer of humanity, upon which participants construct their intricate and multifaceted sense of self. Navigating these layers of identity contributes to the depth and richness of their self-perception, with complex dimensions of being both Muslim and Kurdish interwoven into the fabric of their lives. These identities are not isolated but deeply embedded within broader societal contexts, influencing, and shaping their multifaceted selfhood. These observed layers of identity resonate with a profound tension experienced by most participants as they grapple with 'ascribed' and 'avowed' identities (Jackson, 2014, p. 133).

Bhabha's concept of the 'third space' introduces a conceptual realm where diverse cultural influences converge and intersect, offering profound insights into identity formation (Bhabha, 1994). In my study focusing on Iraqi Kurds residing in the UK, I have found that this theory serves as a powerful lens for comprehending their experiences. The 'third space' posits a conceptual realm where diverse cultural influences dynamically shape identities (Bhabha,

1994), proving invaluable in navigating and understanding the intricate dynamics present in the lives of my participants. For instance, Saman, one participant, vividly exemplifies this concept in his reflection on Kurdistan, his homeland. He eloquently expresses Kurdistan as a deeply cherished place, evolving into a constant companion in his memories even while residing in the UK. This narrative encapsulates the essence of the 'third space,' where Saman's Kurdish heritage harmoniously coexists with his immersion in British culture (see Chapter Five, section 5.3). Furthermore, his concept of home finds expression through the paintings he creates, wherein the 'third space' manifests itself within him. Similarly, Murad explains how his daily life in the UK combines his Kurdish heritage with interactions in British society (see Chapter Five, subsection 5.3.1). His experience reflects the complex interplay between cultural roots and societal integration. Despite his 22-year residency in the UK, Murad's thoughts are constantly drawn back to Kurdistan, highlighting the enduring connection to his homeland. While he desires to return, he acknowledges the significant responsibilities, particularly concerning his children, that come with such a decision. Murad's journey illustrates the ongoing negotiation between one's origins and current circumstances, revealing the intricacies of identity formation. This 'third space' provides a valuable perspective to observe the complexities that arise as individuals navigate cultural adaptation. Through their experiences, insights emerge that align with the principles outlined by Bhabha, offering valuable understandings into the realities of migration, colonial history, and cultural integration within the UK context.

Within the 'third space,' individuals often grapple with what can be termed an 'identity dilemma' (Charmaz, 1994), where ascribed identities clash with those they personally embrace. Shaped by factors such as ethnicity, nationality, religion, and familial expectations, these conflicts are further compounded by external perceptions that contribute to societal categorisations. This ongoing struggle between ascribed and avowed identities, external perceptions, and the ever-evolving nature of identity is a central theme. For instance, Nina's adolescent years were marked by significant inner conflict as she navigated her parents' attempts to align her identity with Kurdish societal norms. Her struggle reflects Bhabha's concept of mimicry, where colonised individuals imitate dominant cultural norms to gain acceptance. Nina's internal negotiation, epitomised in her reflection, 'It was hard to understand their ways of thinking. I thought, why can't I just be myself and live my life? It is my life. It is not yours!', illustrates the tension between personal identity and external expectations. This struggle resonates with many participants, shedding light on the intricate interplay of cultural influence and individual agency. Murad, another participant (see section 5.4), provides a compelling example of the interplay between avowed and ascribed identities. While acknowledging the ascribed nature of his Kurdish and Muslim identities, he

simultaneously avows them as integral parts of himself. This dynamic showcases the nuanced relationship between 'avowal' and 'ascribed identity' (Jackson, 2014, p. 133). These narratives collectively offer a nuanced understanding of how individuals negotiate their sense of self within the 'third space,' where identities continually evolve and take shape (Bhabha, 1994).

Bhabha's (1994) Hybridity Theory introduces crucial concepts such as 'mimicry' and 'ambivalence,' which illuminate the complexities and contradictions inherent in identity dynamics within postcolonial settings. 'Mimicry,' as outlined by Bhabha, involves the strategic adoption of elements of the coloniser's culture by the colonised, enabling a degree of acceptance while retaining a sense of difference, exemplifying the intricate nature of identity in colonial contexts (Bhabha, 1984). Another central concept, 'ambivalence,' captures the mixed feelings and contradictory attitudes experienced by colonised individuals, who are simultaneously drawn to and repelled by the dominant culture, leading to internal conflicts and uncertainties as they navigate their cultural identities within the colonial framework. Furthermore, Bhabha introduces the concept of the 'third space of enunciation,' a conceptual realm where cultural expressions and systems originate, emerging at the intersection of the coloniser and the colonised (Bhabha, 1994). This 'third space' gives rise to a distinctive cultural perspective and serves as a dynamic space for cultural 'hybridization' (Werbner, 2015), challenging conventional notions of fixed identities (Bhabha, 1994).

In my study of Iraqi Kurds in the UK, these concepts serve as a crucial lens through which to understand the participants' experiences. Positioned at cultural crossroads, participants embody Bhabha's theories, navigating identity dynamics where 'mimicry' – the strategic adoption of the coloniser's culture – and 'ambivalence' – the conflicting emotions towards the dominant culture – play pivotal roles (Bhabha, 1985, 1994). Kani's experience (see Chapter Five, section 5.3) vividly exemplifies Bhabha's 'third space of enunciation' paradigm. Residing in the UK, she grapples daily with a profound yearning for Kurdistan, creating a poignant struggle between belonging and longing. This dichotomy encapsulates the tension of 'mimicry,' where acceptance in a foreign land intertwines with an inherent sense of difference. Simultaneously, Kani's contrasting emotions embody the essence of 'ambivalence.' Her appreciation for certain aspects of British life sharply contrasts with feelings of foreignness, haunted by memories of her homeland. This internal conflict illustrates the intricate psychological terrain of postcolonial identities, showcasing the complex interplay of 'mimicry' and 'ambivalence' within the 'third space of enunciation' (Bhabha, 1994, 1984). Examining Kani's narrative within the context of Bhabha's concepts of 'mimicry' and 'ambivalence' illuminates the intricate ways in which these participants negotiate their identities. Kani's story vividly portrays the challenges and complexities faced by individuals positioned at the intersection of cultures, offering profound insights into the multifaceted nature of identity

formation and the nuanced dynamics of cultural adaptation and yearning within the realm of postcolonial identities.

In my exploration of identity within the ‘third space,’ it becomes evident that this conceptual realm not only challenges established identities but actively fosters the emergence of entirely new ones, enabling profound self-discovery and intercultural engagement. This transformative aspect, expanding upon Bhabha’s framework, resonates strongly with the experiences of participants like Kani, Murad, Nina, and Saman. For instance, Kani’s encounter with discrimination based on her Kurdish ethnicity positioned her as the ‘other,’ reflecting the intricate interplay of identities within the ‘third space’ (see Chapter Six, section 6.3). Moreover, Kani’s aspiration to preserve her cultural roots while adapting illustrates the blurred boundaries and hybrid identities inherent in this space.

Reflecting on the lived experiences of the participants, it becomes evident that the concept of the ‘third space’ encapsulates the nuanced interactions between dominant and subordinate cultures. In this dynamic space, individuals find themselves neither fully aligned with one culture nor the other, but rather existing in a state of cultural negotiation and hybridity, where meanings are perpetually contested and reshaped (Bhabha, 1994). Marked by ambiguity, ambivalence, and unpredictability, the third space challenges rigid binary oppositions and fosters a rich sense of plurality, multiplicity, and heterogeneity. Importantly, this negotiation sometimes unfolds internally within individuals, as they navigate their sense of belonging by reconciling past experiences with their current lived reality as evidenced in the narratives by the participants.

8.3.2 Orientalism

In Chapter Three, I examined Edward Said’s (1978) Theory of ‘Orientalism,’ which I find deeply pertinent to my study. Said’s seminal work underscores the inherent power dynamics in the colonial encounter, where the coloniser imposes hegemonic narratives and constructs representations of the colonised ‘other.’ This process of othering perpetuates stereotypes, distortions, and Eurocentric biases, shaping dominant discourses about non-Western cultures and peoples (Holliday, 2013). Said’s critique extends to the construction of knowledge and academic discourse, revealing how Orientalist paradigms have influenced Western scholarship and perpetuated colonial hierarchies. In my analysis, I engage with Said’s insights to explore how Orientalist tropes and colonial legacies manifest in the narratives and experiences of the research participants. Through interrogating power dynamics, representation and identity formation within the postcolonial context, I seek to uncover the ways in which colonial histories continue to shape contemporary realities and inform cultural

interactions, deepening our understanding of postcolonial subjectivities and the ongoing struggles for decolonisation, cultural autonomy and social justice.

In postcolonial theory, the concept of ‘othering,’ although not explicitly named, is inherent in the works of scholars like Bhabha and Said, where power dynamics, representation, and identity formation implicitly reflect the notion of ‘othering.’ This theoretical underpinning becomes profoundly evident in my study. A significant revelation revolves around the concept of ‘othering,’ elucidating the diverse forms of othering experienced by the research participants detailed in Chapter Six, section 6.3. Notable instances include Kani’s encounter with the headteacher, where ethnic discrimination placed her in the position of the ‘other,’ and similarly, Murad’s political party experiences and Saman’s interactions in the market - all exemplifying the intricate interplay of identities within the ‘third space’ (see Chapter Six, subsections 6.3.2 and 6.3.3). While some participants in this study may not perceive othering as damaging, it is crucial to emphasise that ‘othering can indeed be detrimental and consistently impact participants’ experiences negatively. What distinguishes these experiences is their transformative nature; othering does not invariably yield negative outcomes. To make their experiences more meaningful and avoid being affected by such acts, participants demonstrated resilience, transforming these challenges into opportunities for personal growth and adaptation (Mahmud, 2024).

The choice to incorporate Said’s Orientalist Theory (1987) is not arbitrary; it is rooted in the profound resonance between Said’s insights and the lived experiences of my research participants, Iraqi Kurds residing in the UK. Said’s theory is invaluable as it enables me to probe the intricate ways in which Western perceptions and representations have profoundly influenced the self-image and identities of Iraqi Kurds in the British context. By focusing on the construction of ‘otherness’ and its far-reaching impact, my aim is to shed light on the intricate dynamics of identity, power, and representation that form the essence of my participants’ experiences. Said’s (1978) ‘Orientalism’ critically examines how the West has historically portrayed and ‘othered’ the East, particularly the Middle East, constructing it as exotic and fundamentally different. This concept of ‘otherness’ serves to justify colonialism and the exercise of power over Eastern cultures. In my research, I explore how Western perceptions impact the self-image and identity of Iraqi Kurds in the UK, resonating with Said’s work on ‘Orientalism.’ Just as Said discussed how the West constructs an ‘Oriental’ otherness, my findings reveal how Kurdish culture and identity can be marginalised and exoticised in Western portrayals, leading to internalised stereotypes. These depictions often lead to the internalisation of orientalist stereotypes, creating a complex identity struggle as individuals navigate between imposed stereotypes and their genuine cultural identity. What is striking is how my participants actively resist or reframe these Western representations, underscoring

their agency in shaping their self-image. These narratives have significant political implications, affecting self-determination and political agency among the Iraqi Kurdish community, while also contributing to cultural misunderstandings.

Additionally, although Said's analysis of colonial otherness helps to explain the findings to some extent, there are certain factors not included in his idea. One theory that could help us understand other aspects is 'intersectionality' (see Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1990, 2015; Lorde, 1984; Hooks, 2014; Davis, 1981). For instance, an illustrative example of this intersectionality can be seen in Kani's incident on the bus, where her physical attributes, including her black hair and gender, led to racist discourse from two men. Similarly, Karim's status as an illegal migrant, his financial standing and social class/status resulted in discrimination by a business owner (see Chapter Six, subsection 6.3.2).

The experiences of othering are inherently transformative, revealing nuances beyond simplistic binaries while for some participants, othering does not always result in negative outcomes. Despite facing moments of doubt, participants in my study displayed resilience, using these challenges as opportunities for personal growth and adaptation (Mahmud, 2024). However, it is essential to acknowledge that othering is potentially damaging and can significantly impact individuals' self-perception and identities. Within minority communities, intersecting identities creates complex hierarchies of power and influence, vividly depicted in participants' narratives. These dynamics not only shape interactions and relationships but also profoundly influence processes of identity negotiation and overall psychological well-being. The insights gleaned from this study underscore the importance of recognising power dynamics, which extend beyond colonial contexts and intricately manifest within minority communities (Said, 1978). Understanding these complexities necessitates an embrace of intersectionality, offering deeper insights into contemporary experiences of 'othering.'

8.3.3 Stuff as material culture

Exploring the intersection of material culture, materiality, and human identity sheds light on the dynamic relationship between individuals and objects, emphasising the active role of objects in identity construction. Eliciting insights from Chapter Three (section 3.8) on material culture and materiality enriches our understanding of the roles played by objects within the studied community. Human identity and material culture are intertwined, erasing the boundaries between humans and objects and highlighting the active role of objects in identity construction (Woodward, 2007). The blurring of boundaries and emphasis on object agency are exemplified in specific cases, such as Kani's attachment to objects like the retro dial telephone, daf, and vintage camera, along with Omer's unique focus on the samovar (see Chapter Seven, subsections 7.2.1 and 7.2.3). The concept of hybrid identities, illustrated by

Karim's meticulous attention to journal writing (see Chapter Seven, subsection 7.2.2), also acknowledges the embodied nature of the self and the fluidity of identity, as evidenced additionally by Ari's deep attachment to place (see Chapter Seven, subsection 7.3.1). This perspective, which emphasises the agency of objects in identity construction, embraces hybrid identities, recognises the embodied nature of the self, acknowledges the fluidity of identity, and promotes ethical considerations in human-material-environment relationships. This in return provides a nuanced understanding of how technology, objects, and the environment shape contemporary identities. It advocates for a holistic and sustainable approach to human-material interactions.

Daniel Miller's (2010) viewpoint revolving around the concept of material objects and culture resonates with my own findings. Miller (2010) emphasises that objects transcend mere commodities; they embody intricate entities that extend beyond their physical form. In Chapter Seven, the findings generally align with Miller's (2010) assumption that objects and personal possessions influence our identity. However, they also introduce nuances that deviate from his argument. It is essential to recognise that while objects and possessions can indeed influence our identity, it is the participants themselves who imbue them with meaning and significance (Mahmud, 2023). In this context, neither the individuals nor the objects operate in isolation (Mahmud, 2023; Miller, 2010). Instead, they engage in a symbiotic relationship that intricately weaves across various dimensions (Mahmud, 2023; Miller, 2010). This intricate relationship becomes evident when considering the substantial time and effort participants invest in the creation of material artifacts. Several narratives in Chapter Seven, specifically in section 7.2, provide illustrative examples of participants actively involved in making and remaking material objects. These examples not only highlight the participants' active involvement in shaping their narratives but also emphasise the intricate interplay between personal significance and material creation within their lived experiences. These objects subsequently align with the thoughts and emotions of each one of us, potentially catalysing the emergence of distinct identity formations. These newfound identities, in turn, position each participant within their respective societal contexts, affirming the dynamic interplay between individual experiences and the material world. In the end, the accumulation of belongings, objects and personal journeys becomes the canvas on which participants' identities evolve and nurture personal, social, and cultural growth at personal, social, and cultural levels (Mahmud, 2023; Miller, 2010).

The thesis findings significantly contribute to our understanding of several key concepts discussed in this section, including 'hybridity,' 'third space' (Bhabha, 1994), 'orientalism' (Said, 1978), and 'stuff' (Miller, 2010). While the findings largely align with Bhabha's theoretical framework, they introduce nuanced extensions that broaden our understanding of

multicultural migration experiences. Through their stories, we gain a deeper understanding of how the ‘third space’ offers a platform for resilience and resistance, much like Bhabha’s notion of the distinctive cultural perspective arising from this space. My research also highlights the complexities, contradictions, and agency that characterise the lives of Iraqi Kurds in the UK, emphasising how, within this ‘third space,’ they assert their distinct cultural identity while challenging prevailing colonial narratives, offering a powerful narrative of cultural adaptation, transformation, and empowerment. Furthermore, the research delves into the significance of material culture and materiality, emphasising the blurred boundaries between humans and objects and the active agency of objects in identity construction. It underscores the significance of material possessions in shaping existence, transcending their physical form. Additionally, the study illuminates the dynamic relationship between individuals and objects, where both are intricately interconnected. Objects not only influence identity but also acquire profound meaning for participants, showcasing a symbiotic relationship across various dimensions (Mahmud, 2023; Miller, 2010; Woodward, 2007). Ultimately, these findings contribute to a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of how identity, ‘othering,’ and material culture interact within multicultural contexts.

8.4 *Research contributions:*

In this section, the contributions arising from my research findings will be elucidated.

Knowledge contributions

This thesis contributes to our understanding of migrants’ cultural identity from both post-colonial and nonessential perspectives. It employs a multimodal data collection approach, incorporating spoken, written, and visual data, while applying Hall’s (1991) ‘bottom-up’ perspective to examine the lived experiences of Iraqi Kurds in the UK (Mahmud, 2023). The study focuses specifically on identity negotiation and navigation within migration and diaspora studies, applied linguistics, and intercultural communication.

A contribution lies in diverging from conventional nationalist narratives dominating existing discourse on Kurdish diaspora studies. Instead, it underscores the pivotal role of material objects, materiality, place, and space in shaping identity negotiations within the studied population (Mahmud, 2023; Mahmud, 2024). By analysing participants’ personal narratives, cultural artifacts, and socio-cultural elements, the study offers a nuanced understanding of how migrants, especially those within the Kurdish diaspora, navigate and negotiate their cultural identities in new cultural landscapes, employing diverse strategies to facilitate successful adaptation.

Furthermore, this research extends beyond the Kurdish diaspora context to contribute to broader studies on migrants' lived experiences (Ameen, 2018; Ata, 2017; Badwan and Hall, 2020; Baser et al., 2013; Baser and Toivanen, 2023; Demir, 2012; Zalme, 2017; Enneli, Modood and Bradley, 2005; Wahlbeck, 1999; Alinia et al., 2014; de Haas *et al.*, 2019; Eliassi, 2013; Khayati, 2014; Eccarius-Kelly, 2002, 2010; Mahmud, 2018; Yilmaz, 2016, 2018; Ganassin, 2017; Holmes, 2015; Holmes and Rajab, 2022; Sprenger, 2024). It aligns with existing literature examining the universally relevant mechanisms and challenges of migrant adaptation and integration. Through its rigorous analysis and engagement with existing scholarship, this study enriches the discourse on migrant experiences, providing insights applicable across diverse cultural and geographical contexts.

Methodological contributions

This thesis employs a multimodal framework, departing from conventional approaches in both diaspora studies and the examination of Kurdish migrants, as evidenced by prior works (Mahmud, 2018; Moftizadeh et al., 2022; Paasche, 2020; Stefanovic, Loizides and Parsons, 2014; Zalme, 2017). While previous research on the Kurdish diaspora often relied on methods such as (auto)ethnography, semi-structured interviews, narrative methodology and surveys, this study integrates diverse data sources. This incorporates a 'hybrid narrative approach,' which combines diverse narrative techniques influenced by both the life story narrative approach (Atkinson, 1988) and Biographical Narrative Interpretive Methods (Wengraf, 2001), as elaborated in Chapter Four's research design and methods section (4.4). Furthermore, visual ethnography, photovoice (Harper, 2012), a collection of material objects and story writing were implemented to analyse participants' lived experiences. By adopting this innovative approach, the thesis aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of Kurdish migrants. This approach allows for a deeper exploration of hidden aspects within UK migrant communities (Holmes *et al.*, 2013; Badwan, 2015), enriching the analysis and offering a more comprehensive understanding of cultural identity complexities and identity negotiation within the Kurdish diaspora. Additionally, this study establishes a connection between narrative inquiry and the interpretive constructivist approach, combining the strengths the former in capturing personal stories with the analytical and interpretive depth of the latter.

Conceptual contributions

Within this study, two concepts are introduced: 'interracial othering' and the 'hybrid narrative approach.' 'Interracial othering' pertains to instances of othering within different minority groups, where one group gains dominance over others based on factors like race, ethnicity,

cultural background, and cultural/material resources. Additionally, the 'hybrid narrative approach' results from blending various narrative techniques from existing methods. This approach aims to eliminate redundancy in categorising distinct narrative types, offering flexibility and efficiency in data collection. Importantly, it challenges the prevailing consistency in avoiding 'why' questions advocated by narrative researchers, thus providing a deeper understanding of individuals' lived experiences in narrative research.

8.5 Research implications

Based on the findings presented in the study, several implications can be drawn which I will explain below.

8.5.1 Implication for further migration research

Advancing our comprehension of migrants' real-life experiences is an ongoing and essential endeavour. Although migration research has made substantial headway, there remains a substantial gap in our understanding of the unique viewpoints of Kurdish migrants. To effectively bridge this knowledge gap, it is crucial to prioritise a thorough examination of diverse themes and aspects related to Kurdish migrants' experiences beyond what has been addressed in this thesis. By delving more deeply into their narratives, challenges, and aspirations, we can acquire valuable insights into the intricacies and subtleties of their migration journeys. Recognising that individuals have distinct lived experiences, exploring these diverse facets contributes to more accurate and holistic migration policies, while also nurturing greater empathy and cultural sensitivity within society.

Importantly, comprehending the distinctive paths of Kurdish migrants extends beyond the confines of a specific geographical region like the UK. Instead, adopting a global perspective is vital to fully grasp the complexities of the Kurdish diaspora. By examining the experiences of Kurds across various countries and contexts, we can identify common patterns and unique variations, shedding light on the diverse factors that shape their migration experiences.

Furthermore, the findings of this study can provide a deeper insight into the challenges faced by different minority groups, particularly in my local area, which has a vibrant South Asian community. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct further exploration and analysis within these communities, emphasising the need to shift from current theoretical and population-centric approaches towards a more comprehensive one. This approach aims to uncover how individuals within these communities navigate similar issues and reveal distinct coping mechanisms and strategies.

The exploration of material culture and objects concerning migrants' lived experiences is not a novel concept, particularly within historical and archaeological studies. However, delving into material culture within applied linguistics has been relatively less common. Investigating objects in the linguistic field offers valuable insights into how language is used to describe certain items and the emotions attached to them. Additionally, understanding how migrants interact with objects in their daily lives provides valuable insights into how these objects can facilitate their adaptation experiences. Furthermore, objects play a crucial role as tools for navigating the challenges of a new culture and environment, informing strategies to support migrant integration. The study of material culture also reveals how objects contribute to migrants' well-being and resilience. Possessions with sentimental value or comforting attributes hold significance in maintaining emotional and psychological health.

Studying material culture uncovers the powerful symbolic value that objects hold, acting as carriers of personal and collective narratives of migrants. By capturing diverse stories and experiences, material culture research contributes to a more inclusive understanding of migration. It empowers migrants by giving them a voice through the objects they possess, fostering a sense of agency and visibility within society. Additionally, understanding the material culture of migrants promotes intercultural dialogue, facilitating mutual understanding and conversations about shared experiences, values, and traditions. Ultimately, this fosters social cohesion and helps break down stereotypes and prejudices. Moreover, research on material culture guides policy and design decisions that are more attuned to the needs and preferences of migrant communities, creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for them.

8.5.2 Implication for the policy makers

In Chapter Six, my research explored into the intricate relationship between language, age, and migrants' experiences. It highlighted the pressing need to address language barriers as a means of promoting inclusive environments for migrants, regardless of their age. This chapter emphasised the urgency of combatting racism and discrimination in all their forms. By acknowledging and addressing these challenges, societies can create more supportive and inclusive environments for migrants. These efforts, in turn, facilitate their successful adaptation and overall well-being. Policymakers must prioritise a comprehensive set of measures to promote inclusivity. This includes anti-discrimination initiatives through awareness campaigns, educational programs, and training, all aimed at countering prejudices and stereotypes contributing to othering experiences. Additionally, targeted interventions within minority communities should focus on fostering understanding and mutual respect among different minority groups. Policymakers should also design and implement social

support programmes tailored to address key areas such as language assistance, education, healthcare access, employment support, and community integration. Moreover, promoting cultural exchange programmes and community engagement initiatives can facilitate positive acculturation experiences and mutual appreciation of diverse cultures.

In conclusion, integrating research findings on othering experiences and migrant marginalisation into policymaking is paramount. It leads to more informed and compassionate approaches to addressing migrant challenges and promoting their successful integration. By adopting evidence-based measures and fostering mutual understanding, policymakers contribute to the creation of harmonious and inclusive societies, transcending geographic boundaries and cultures, where all members can thrive.

8.6 Suggestions for further research

The data in this study, like any research, are based on self-reported information, potentially influenced by social desirability bias. This thesis primarily examined the lived experiences of only eight individuals from Iraqi Kurdistan within the border context of Kurdistan. It should be noted that this region comprises various linguistic and socio-cultural groups with diverse religious ideologies. Consequently, the participants in this study do not represent the full linguistic and religious diversity within the entire Kurdish population. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalised for the entire Kurdish population, emphasising the importance of employing a 'bottom-up' approach (Hall, 1991) that recognises the diversity in individuals' lived experiences and which challenges Hofstede's (1980, 1991, 2010) value dimensions.

The qualitative nature of this research posed specific challenges, notably the accurate translation of spoken and written narratives from Kurdish Sorani to English. Achieving precise parity and equivalency was challenging due to linguistic differences, leading to the use of 'assumed' and 'directional equivalency' (Pym, 2010, p. 37) methods. These approaches allowed for flexibility in choosing suitable translation strategies while fulfilling the requirements of the translated texts. Although the translation aimed to maintain meaningful, transparent and culturally unbiased narratives, it was not always possible to find direct equivalents for certain Kurdish words and phrases in English. Another limitation of this study relates to variations in the number of interviews conducted. Initially, the plan was to carry out one primary interview followed by a single follow-up interview with each participant. However, some participants ended up being interviewed three to four times, either due to missing data or because they provided intriguing insights about specific experiences that warranted further exploration. These subsequent interviews were conducted informally, with participants responding to

inquiries orally or in writing through social media platforms like Messenger and WhatsApp (see Appendix 10.10).

To enhance the scope and depth of future research, several important areas should be considered:

- a) Including a larger and more diverse sample of Kurdish participants from various geographical locations within the Kurdish regional government, as well as from other parts of Kurdistan under Turkish, Iranian, and Syrian territories. This would provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Kurdish migrants.
- b) Investigating the professional identity of Kurdish migrants in the UK and conducting comparative research across Europe could offer insights into how individuals form and navigate their career objectives and how the country of residence influences their choices.
- c) Extending research to examine how second-generation migrants perceive material objects and their implications for personal, social, and cultural identities, which could shed light on the role of possessions in shaping identity across generations. Specifically, conducting in-depth investigations into the importance of ethnic clothing and food in relation to regional and national identity, involving both first- and second-generation migrants. This would provide valuable insights into how these two groups interact with these material objects.
- d) New research to investigate language and religious identity, experiences related to social class, national and regional identity, and other sociocultural aspects among diverse migrant communities beyond Iraqi Kurds could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding. A comparative study between different diaspora groups could offer valuable insights into the complexities of identity formation and interaction among diverse migrant communities.
- e) Investigating interracial othering, including racism and discrimination, in light of recent migration waves to the West could offer valuable insights into intergroup dynamics and social integration.
- f) Exploring perceptions of established migrants towards newly-arrived migrants could provide insights into intergroup dynamics and social integration in the context of shared migration experiences.

Addressing these areas of research will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences and dynamics of Kurdish migrants and other migrant communities, providing valuable insights for future studies in this field.

8.7 *Concluding notes and final reflection*

Towards the conclusion of my research journey, a profound realisation has stuck me – my exploration of the migration journeys of the participants from Iraqi Kurdistan had set me on an unexpected personal voyage. As I immersed myself in the stories of these individuals and delved into their experiences, I couldn't help but turn inward and examine my own beliefs and reflections on the very issues we were discussing. These issues, which had been lying dormant within me, suddenly surfaced, urging me to confront and understand them better.

Listening to the participants as they fondly recalled their childhood places in Iraqi Kurdistan and expressed their longing for the loved ones and their 'lived experience of a locality' (Brah, 1996), I yearned for the familiar 'sounds and smells' that once filled my days, the warmth of the sun and the subtle dust that adorned the air. I found myself yearning to revisit the places I once visited, to roam the very streets I had trodden countless times, and to don the garments that once carried the essence of my life. Essentially, my yearning was to rediscover the untold story of a life fully lived.

As I observed the participants grappling with aspects of their identity, I couldn't help but be reminded of my own lifelong struggle with this very issue. Having left Kurdistan over fourteen years ago, I find myself in a state of confusion, no longer feeling a strong sense of belonging to that community despite my efforts to maintain my cultural heritage by speaking the Kurdish language, wearing traditional clothes, and relishing ethnic cuisine. I no longer have a clear sense of belonging and the concept of home has become a conflicted notion for me, with happiness often tinged with uncertainty. There are moments when I feel content in my current surroundings but there are also times when I sense an incompleteness, even if I were to venture elsewhere. This perpetual uncertainty leaves me questioning where I truly belong.

Throughout the course of this thesis, as I delved into the concept of the 'dialogic self' (Hermans, 2011) and explored the idea of multiple voices, I began to unravel the intricacies of my own identity. I came to realise that the various voices and roles that coexist within me are nothing to be alarmed about. Embracing a fixed and unified identity, as Hall (1990) suggests, is merely a 'fantasy.' Instead, I've come to appreciate that my multiple, sometimes opposing, and contradictory identities reflect who I am, and make me unique. Without a doubt, my cultural backgrounds and differences have played a pivotal role in shaping me and I now understand that there is no singular 'cultural identity box' that perfectly represents where I come from, since I feel I came from multiple places and regions. I have learned to accept that being perceived as 'other' is, in fact, a privilege. Embracing this position has empowered me to cherish and celebrate differences, both in myself and in others, fostering a newfound sense of acceptance and belonging. I hope that this research has effectively contributed to our

comprehension of the intricate process of identity negotiation and navigation within the Kurdish context. However, it is crucial to clarify that the findings should not be taken as evidence for a generalised claim about the emotional experiences of all migrants. Given the current limitations, I hope that this study serves as a foundation for future research on diverse aspects of Kurdish cultural identity and other diaspora groups. By exploring how individuals construct their identities through the negotiation and navigation of different selves and personas, we can gain deeper insights into this complex process.

9 Reference list

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List of appendices

9.1 Ethical approval



Mrs Chra Mahmud

School of Language Studies and Applied Linguistics

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

14th October 2020

Dear Chra

Confirmation of ethics approval: Home or away-(re) negotiating identity through living in the 'in-between': A qualitative investigation of the Kurdish diaspora in the United Kingdom

Your ethics application complies fully with the requirements for ethical and governance review, as set out in this University's Research Ethics and Governance Procedures, and has been approved.

You are reminded that it is your responsibility to follow, as appropriate, the policies and procedures set out in the [Research Governance Framework](#) and any relevant academic or professional guidelines.

Any significant change in the question, design or conduct of the study over its course will require an amendment application and may require a new application for ethics approval.

It is a condition of approval that you **must** inform ethics@canterbury.ac.uk once your research has completed.

Wishing you every success with your research. On behalf of
Faculty of Arts and Humanities Ethics Panel christopher.anderson@canterbury.ac.uk

9.2 Consent form



CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Home or away-(re)negotiating identity through living in the 'in-between': A qualitative investigation of the Kurdish diaspora in the United Kingdom"

Name of Researcher: Chra Mahmud

Contact details:

Address: Centre for language and Applied Linguistics
Faculty of Art and Humanities
Canterbury Christ Church University
Canterbury CT1 1QU England

Tel: 01227 767700
Ext.2024

Email: cm644@canterbury.ac.uk

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. (If applicable) I confirm that I agree to any audio and/or visual recordings.
3. I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researchers will be kept strictly confidential and in line with the University [Research Privacy Notice](#)
4. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time, without giving a reason.
5. I agree to take part in the above project.

Name of Participant:	Date:	Signature:
Name of person taking consent (<i>if different from researcher</i>)	Date:	Signature:
Researcher: Chra Mahmud	Date:	Signature:

Copies: 1 for participant
1 for researcher

9.3 Participant's information sheet

Research Title: Home or away-(re)negotiating identity through living in the 'in-between': A qualitative investigation of the Kurdish diaspora in the United Kingdom"

A brief information about the research project

My name is Chra Mahmud; this study is being conducted in partial fulfilment of a PhD degree and this is a self-funded project. I would like to invite you to participate in my research. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with other members of family or myself if you wish. Please contact me if anything is unclear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of this study is to investigate the cultural identity of the Kurdish people in the UK; how they negotiate their identity in the in-between cultures and how they adapt the norms and values of the host country. I also look into the everyday experience of first-generation Iraqi Kurds and examine the challenges they faced since they relocated in the UK.

How will the results be used?

The data from this research will be used for:

1. PhD thesis
2. Academic research papers and presentations
3. A summary report to be circulated to all interested participants

Why have I been chosen?

You are being invited to take part in this study, as a Kurdish individual you are in a good position to offer insight into this topic. Additionally, you are someone who experienced the process of migration, and this is a chance to express views on the challenges that you have experienced since your arrival to the United Kingdom and explain how you coped with the challenges that you face while you live in between two cultures.

What will participation involve in face- to- face interview?

The interview can be carried out within the preferred and agreed locations; whichever would be more convenient for you. The interview will be based around a semi structured interview pattern and will take approximately 1hour. It is intended as an opportunity for you to express your views on the topic. The interview will be tape recorded, and later transcribed into text form. Interviews will be held in their preferred location. This could be your home, a coffee shop, a park or any other preferred location which affords privacy and security. You would be

very welcome to a copy of the final report if you want to, this might be done by contacting me or the department (see below the contact details).

As part of the presentation of results, your own words may be used in text form. This will be anonymised, so that you cannot be identified from what you said. All of the research data will be stored as hard copy at my private files for at least one year after the research has finished.

Please note that:

- You can decide to stop the interview at any point.
- You need not answer questions that you do not wish to
- Your name will be removed from the information and anonymised. It should not be possible to identify anyone from my reports on this study.

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw from the study at any time until the data are reported, without giving a reason. If you withdraw from the study all data will be withdrawn and destroyed. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form.

What are the risks (if any) of taking part?

You may be asked to recall memories which could potentially be upsetting; however, you will not be expected to disclose detailed, potentially sensitive or distressing information. You may decline to talk about any aspect you feel uncomfortable with. If you were to become upset due to the recollection of such memories, the researcher can provide information on groups who can be contacted to help discuss these issues. Furthermore, contact details for the researcher and their supervisor are included on this information sheet.

Who will have access to information about me?

- The data collected for this study will only be accessed by the researcher Chra Mahmud and her supervisors Christopher Anderson and John Kullman.
- Transcribed interviews will be stored securely in password protected files on a password protected computer. Any hard copies of data will be secured in a locked filing cabinet.
- Information on you will be kept confidential and anonymous. This means that the researcher will protect your identity as a participant by ensuring that you remain unidentifiable in the research. As stated above, the only people who will have access to the personal information you discuss in this study, is Chra Mahmud and her supervisors Christopher Anderson and John Kullman. The information you provide will not be disclosed to any third party e.g., other members of the Kurdish community. When discussed in the research (e.g., quotes) you will be given a pseudonym (a false name) so that you remain unidentifiable.
- In accordance with Canterbury Christ Church University guidelines, the data from this study will be retained and securely stored by the principal investigator - for at least two years. After this period of storage, the data will be securely destroyed.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should speak to the researcher who will do their best to answer your questions. You should contact Chra Mahmud on **cm644@canterbury.ac.uk**. Alternatively, if you do not wish to speak to the researcher directly, you can contact their supervisors Christopher Anderson at christopher.anderson@canterbury.ac.uk, and John Kullman at john.kullman@canterbury.ac.uk

If you remain unhappy about the research and/or wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the way that you have been approached or treated during the course of the study, please write to Paige Stitson who is the University's contact for complaints regarding research at the following address: -

Paige Stitson

Graduate College Administrator

The Graduate College

Canterbury Christ Church University

North Holmes Road

Erasmus ER.0.32

9.4 Interview reflection worksheet.

Name of institution:		Principal researcher:	
Interview date:		Interview no [...]	
1. Did I feel comfortable going into this interview? (Why/Why not?)		2. How do I prepare for this interview?	
3. What would I most like to improve upon before my next interview?		4. What would I do differently in terms of the interview techniques and why?	
1. In general, how did the interview go? Did it proceed as you had expected or were you surprised by the process in some way?		2. What is the most memorable part of the interview? (Maybe something the interviewer revealed or an event of some sort that occurred during the interview.)	
3. What would I most like to improve upon before my next interview?		4. What would I do differently in terms of the interview techniques and why?	
Other comments:			

9.5 A sample of the interview transcription – Hana’s interview

The researcher: Please tell me the story of your life, all the events and experiences that have been important to you personally; how it all happened?

Hana: I'd like to thank you for reaching out to me and inviting me to take part in your research programme. I am just an ordinary British Kurd female that lived half of my life in Kurdistan and the other half in the UK. So, I moved to the UK when I was 24, knowing only a few words in English, like yes and no. I was scared to go on the bus alone, and now I go around the world without being scared anymore, so there is a big difference, yes, just an ordinary female.

The researcher: Tell me about your migration experiences; how did you decide to migrate?

Hana: Oh, that was a family decision. It was kind of, you're a female; in our culture, we are not the one who makes a decision. It is the family, so I just came with them; it was a family decision. The reason behind making such a decision was the warzone. You know, I lived through three wars: Iraq and Iran, the Gulf War, and the fight between the Kurdish parties. So, it was my family's decision, not particularly my decision.

The day I arrived in the UK was very exciting. It was a rainy day; the weather wasn't very good. I think I came with a lot of hopes; you know, things would be better. I mean, since I was a kid and growing up, I always felt that when I became an adult later on in my life, I would be doing great things. I didn't know what I would be doing and why I will be doing it. It was a determination inside me to spend my life on something good. So, when I arrived here, it was like doors of opportunities opened up. It was open for you to do whatever you wanted to do. So, I would say that that day was probably full of hopes that I could do things that would be different and have more impact. I achieved what I was hoping for through a lot of hard work but enormous hard work. It wasn't delivered to you on already dish through backbreaking work.

The researcher: Can you recall the day you arrived here – in the UK? What memories do you have?

Hana: I haven't dealt with all these things; it was more like a family thing they were dealing with. Even I hardly remember anything before I turned 32 because I believe that's where my life mainly started. When I think back before I turn 32, I can't remember much because there's kind of, you know, when you are not in charge of decisions making, you just don't overthink. You just sort of lead rather than lead, but after I got married, it was different because my husband was more open-minded. I got my freedom if I wanted to travel and do anything. He was a lovely person. He was kind of giving me all the space. I can't remember that he ever said to me that you have to ask my permission to do anything. So, my life started when I became more of a decision-maker and more in charge of what I wanted to do. But before that, I can't remember much about what I did. The only thing I remember is that I focused on my study when I came here, but that's all why I remember from these days. I concentrated hard on my studies because I wanted to understand the system. I wanted to know how the pupils were living, how they were progressing, how they were managing their life. I knew there was a lot to learn, an incredible amount, because it wasn't just in English. I never thought the language was the barrier, but it's more about knowing the system. The system of living and running your

life is entirely different from previously, so I thought by overcoming the language barrier then, the doors would open for me. But I hardly remember anything else about you know. I'm 50 now, by the way.

The researcher: Can you describe your experiences in relation to language?

Hana: Learning the language was a challenging process. I had to work on techniques, basically, how can I leap and learn the language, because when I arrived, first they put me in a class called ESOL, if I remember, English for speakers of other languages. In that course, everyone just knew as much as I did basically, and it was complicated to communicate with them during the break time. Lunchtime, it's just like if you have one Kurdish person, then it's enough for you not to learn any English because you'd be communicating all the time in Kurdish or Arabic. After all, I speak Arabic as well. So, it was kind of how much I would learn from that, so I had to make a quick decision, and I did. I jumped and said, "Okay, I'm going to do A level because, through A level, I will update my knowledge and be in a class full of English-speaking people. So, after six months, I registered for A level and skipped all the roots of doing years of ESOL. They told me you needed levels 2 and 3, and I was okay.

Then I started to focus on whatever the teacher was saying a sentence I pick up that one if I go to a shop and somebody's talking in English. I pick up the whole sentence, not the words because it will take your brain time to connect the words, and by the time you want to say something, you forget where else actually what you wanted to say. So, I just picked up the sentence; whenever I come to that situation, I say the whole sentence. So, for example, if I received a letter this morning, that's it. I won't change it to say I had a letter this morning or any other way. Do you know what I mean? I adopted one style of saying it. Then, I moved to A level, which made a significant change because I started to make friends. They were English speakers, native English speakers, so when I spent my break time and lunchtime with them, I picked up more English and enough like fast-tracked my process of overcoming, and that's why I came over that barrier much quicker than others. They were about 18, 19 years old. I went to college rather than sixth form because there's a difference.

In college, you probably have even 20, 21 years old because there would be like other people outside of six forms that come and attend, but I remember I there was one Iranian girl, she was born here, she was doing her A level and keep repeating it because she couldn't pass and get the grade her family wanted. Also, there was one Indian and then a few other Eastern European that were not necessarily 17 or 18 years but 18, 19, and twenty and I was 24. So, there wasn't a massive gap between us, and we became friends. One girl from the United Arab Emirates; she was from a very senior wealthy family. She came here to study, and her English was perfect because she travelled a lot. So, that's how I overcame my English. Then, I spent about until May in that course, and then I realised I wouldn't be eligible for the government grant because I haven't been here for three years.

Some rules didn't apply to me. So, I withdrew from the college; I didn't complete the A level. Then, I started to look for funding to do a master's degree instead, and I tried to self-fund myself, but it was very difficult for me to study and work. So, I gave up the idea of doing the master's degree, and then I started to teach in Manchester. There is a school called the Arabic Squares, a Saudi Arabia school, so the ex-pats from Saudi Arabia come here to do their Ph.D., they have children, and their children have their school. So, there is plenty of them because

Saudi Arabia would only send their Ph.D. student to Manchester University. After all, they had some sort of agreement at the time. So, there were more than 100 children in these families, and they had this school and ran the same kind of lesson programmes as their country. So, there were three days a week of school for them when they came in and learned a proper subject. I started teaching there, and after six months, the head teacher told me there was a programme where you could apply for funding for your master's degree, and I immediately picked up on that. Then I went and applied for the fund. There was a career development loan where the government gave you half a grant and the other half from a bank, but zero percent interest, and you only pay back after graduation. I took the grant, and I applied to Manchester University because I did my A level, and they knew that I got good grades because it was modules, and I got good grades in the exams I took during A level. So, they accepted me for a master's degree immediately. It was like peeping through the situation; otherwise, getting my degree from Iraq recognised by Manchester University would have been tough. So, I did a master's degree in chemistry here in the UK and graduated from Saladin University in 1992.

The researcher: Tell me about your daily life; what do you do on a typical working day?

Hana: My daily life depends, and it changes year after year, but most of the time, I am working. Due to the pandemic, everything is changed now, but if it were not the pandemic, I'll be travelling around almost every week once or twice I was in London. I also travel to many destinations across the world. So, I am travelling a lot and as part of the travelling you start to see more and do more stuff. I try to go to the gym, but I'm not perfect. I pay the monthly fee from my account, but I'm not using the service. I try to walk, so we go for a walk with my sister, and she takes me for an hour and a half walk once a week if we manage. If not, I will go with my children since they've grown. If I don't find time to walk, I work out at home in the evening. But outside the pandemic, we played badminton with my son whenever we found time. I'm not an active person outside of my work; I am a very dull person. Talk to me about work; I tell you a lot. But, for me moving to the UK and exposing me to British culture wasn't shocking because I've seen the country before. So, I came here for a holiday, and I think it was 1990 when the Iraq and Iran war stopped and before Gulf War started. I was here when the Gulf War started, so we came here for a holiday, and I knew what to expect. So, it wasn't like I'd never seen it, and I didn't know what to expect, and I think that made a difference probably. I just came with the family, so the family arranged everything. I'm a British citizen and gained my status a long time ago. I can't remember what it was, but my family set everything here.

The researcher: How do you define yourself at this moment in time?

Hana: I find myself equal half British, half Kurdish because if you're travelling around for work, say I was born here and grown up here, and I am British, then I'm travelling in the world, I go on a couple of years in America and a couple of years in Germany or somewhere else. You would enjoy your time and learn from their culture more than we did. Because when you come here, and you know that you're going to stay here for a long time and probably a lifetime, then you stick so much to your culture because you feel that you'll lose your identity if you let yourself go. So, I think it's a significant barrier for the Kurdish people when they come here. They feel that if they let themselves go, they lose their identity, and their children will lose that because they know that they are not here for a short time. If they come here for a short period, I think they will pick up the culture, learn more, and improve much more if they know that they're here for a few years and go somewhere else.

The researcher: What does the word Kurdish mean to you?

Hana: The word Kurdish means a lot. Whoever asks me who you are, I say I am Kurdish from Kurdistan. Because it's not something that you can even argue about because even in the Quran, it says [...] nations and tribes. Well, we are a nation, so it's not something you know, but then again, equally, I have lived here for more than 24 years. I have lived in Iraq for 24 hours now. I'm nearly 26 years here. This country has given me a lot, and for me to say that I'm only Kurdish, I don't think it's right because you know it is possible to be both. It is likely not to lose your identity as an original, where you come from, and who you are. Still, it is a good part of us belongs here as well.

I've got two daughters. They're 12 years old; they are twins. I will tell you something. My daughters will know the word "harm" but don't know what "ayba" is because that's what I go by. If something is "haram," they don't do it because it's Haram. They don't even see any Kurdish people, so "ayba" for who "ayba." The English people don't care whether they wear short or long skirts. So, it's a point where you get them to understand where those wrong things come from; then, they won't do it. I don't need to force them; I just need to tell them once, and then they will pick it up from that, okay? I worked a lot on myself until I gave up all these things because I've heard a lot in my life, but I didn't want to take my children through that route, okay? One of the people that I have listened to a lot to educate myself about our religion and to separate my religion from my culture is Mustafa Husni because he gets you to understand why we don't do something and why we do it. It separates the culture from the region, and when you know your religion properly, you automatically don't do it because you understand it; no, if you tell me don't do that because of somebody else. Who that somebody else is like? It automatically generates something inside you, and you ask why somebody else needs to control your life.

The researcher: Now, tell me about your relationship with religion.

Hana: I tell you, OKAY! In the last seven years, I started to understand my religion far much better than before. I used to pray because I was told to pray. I used to read Quran because I was told to read it. After all, it's a good thing, but I never knew why it is good to pray and why it is good to read Quran. This morning when I came here, the first thing I have done is I played sorat al kahif twice this morning while I was doing my work because today is Friday, and I prayed and said allahoma nawarli ma bayna jom3atayen. I never knew to do this before. I've learned it, and I know why I'm doing it, and it impacts our life. So, before, I used to do all these sorts of things because I was told to do it. I didn't spend time to see why it is important, so I think these are the things that if we separate if we understand our religion correctly, all these cultural issues would probably become meaningless to you. So, by saying that, I think religion is important to me now more than before. But I don't need to pass it on to them. For example, if I want my children to pray, I tell them it's Zuhr. I don't go back to them and say have you done it? Have you done it? I just need to remind them. My duty as a parent is not to question whether they have done it.

The researcher: How about your children?

Hana: My children pray, but they're not 100% on all the time but on and off. For them to be Muslim is absolutely fine. So far, I've never heard my children having trouble with this because our religion is a religion of peace. It makes you a better person and has better relations even with the British people because if you are practising your true religion and being a truly good Muslim, I think they will love you much more than the person that you stick to your culture. Many cultural influences are important to me, for example, being part of our Kurdish nations, speaking in Kurdish, laughing, dancing, partying, and all the lovely food. It's amazing; it's truly amazing. I have a group on Viber from my friends back in when I was in high school, I haven't seen them for 30 years, and they found each other, and they found me, and they added me to the group. It is so much fun, so being a part of your nation and culture is amazing. I think what I heard from our cultures is if we can put that aside. Otherwise, we are a lovely nation and can enjoy our time much more.

If you had conducted this interview with me ten years ago, you would have seen a completely different person sitting in front of you and talking entirely differently. But I'm incredibly changed, massively, going through the journey of setting up this business and getting myself out of the shell that I was in. I have changed because I've realised and reached the stage where I know my values as a Kurdish person are not different from those of a British person because what matters is your values as a human. Once you realize you have come to that stage, you know that you care about being a human being and respecting whoever you come across as who they are. You just find all the values are the same.

The researcher: What does the word Kurdish mean to you?

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The researcher: You invited me to your workplace; can you tell me what you do in terms of occupation?

Hana: Before my twins were born, I was a researcher and lecturer. I was working for two universities at the same time. Manchester University and Kingstone University. Manchester University set up a lab for me at Kingston University. I managed to work for both Universities at the same time, and then that was until 2008. When my twins were born, I left academia. I stopped working for both universities, and then I set up a legal consultancy firm, so I took an exam in law and started my legal consultancy. Then I dealt mainly with the Kurdish and Arabic communities and Middle Eastern for about five years.

When my twins started to go to nursery, I was looking for a new business idea, and then I looked at my field to see what other people were doing. You know I have a Ph.D. in chemistry. I don't want that to go down the drain. Then I looked to see what other people were doing in my field. So, I realised there's a great business, a good gap in the market. I spent 12 months mapping the global landscape to see what everyone was doing in our field, what products made it to the market, and what failed. So generated my directory and my plan. After that, I started to network. I go to conferences and workshop exceptions. Even if I travel for three hours to go on the same day I come back, I will go until I see if the demand from the industry reflects my research findings. I discovered that the demand is far more than the gap.

In the beginning, it was just an idea. I was scared to talk about it to anybody; if I did, people might say she's mad; what was she talking about? She's been out of her field for five years. People don't get a job, let alone set up a company. So, through networking, I came across Jeff Pedley, who is currently working with us. He said why are you here, and I said I have a business idea, but I don't know if it will remain a dream, but I mean, nothing stops me from thinking about it. He said what is it? I said I need to set up a company in my field, sole gel technology because I could see a significant gap in the market. He got his card out and said we just go for coffee. You don't need to arrange it; I'm not far from you. I'm just around the corner from where you are. So just come along for a coffee, and we will chat. Then I kept going to see him because of his job; he was looking after the businesses in Southeast. He was the manager of the enterprise Europe network, so I kept going to see him regularly for six months, and then we built on the idea.

One day he asked me what exactly you needed and where are the gaps. He wanted me to narrow my focus and pinpoint where the areas were. Then after a lengthy discussion, he finally said OKAY, the idea is clear now; let us start and apply for some grant. Then we applied for a grant in the UK and made the first product in 2015. After that, we paid the university with the grant so that I could use their facilities. So, after we tried them, they were successful. They are not perfect, but they were successful. The grant was finished, and I had nowhere to do anything. I couldn't access the lab.

So, after two years of trial and slips, talking to my family, and trying to find a place, we eventually found this place. My family funded it so we could set up what you see now and be completely independent, and I have access to my lab. So, we set up this lab, which was brand new at the time. So, I come here every day on my own. This place was like a nightmare, this garage size when you come in, so all these walls need painting, everything was done by me.

So, I ripped off all the old stuff myself. I ripped up everything on my own, like big pieces, tables, and everything stuck on the wall. I had to peel them often and take them all out. After I brought in a company to set it up for me, I ended up with no funding again. Then I spoke to the investors and said that if this pattern dispels, they can raise investment. So, I returned to my family, said 10,000 pounds, and we're off to the investors. So, my family funded the other £10,000 for the first IP, and then we managed to raise 175,000 thousand pounds immediately after that, and we got some investors on board to work with me. It was perfect because we could use the fund, we managed to get [...], leave her job in London and bring her here, we started the development work, and then we travelled to Malaysia to make our prototype, and then we learned a lot from there, a lot of challenges. We came back here, we tried to solve it, and are now working in Europe trying to complete the development stage, and then we did this second round of funding now, so we have half a million pounds to take us over the next 12 months to complete the development and if we do that hopefully will be going to revenue stage where we start and generate money from sells basically.

The researcher: What are the motivations behind your business? What do you want to achieve in the end?

Hana: It's the impact and the goal that's what motivates me. It is like, the impact our business will have on people, the planet, marine life, the wildlife, it will be enormously huge, and it comes to the point like people asked me why do you do this? I don't even think about it because it's my duty. I have to do it because you get the knowledge, you get the qualification, and you get to the stage where you have all the means. It just doesn't make sense not to do it because you are not bothered. Do you know what I mean? You have a duty towards society to contribute because even in our religion, you know you'll be asked on the day of judgment. What did you spend your life on? So, it's a duty. I think the best achievement I am looking for is to see this product in the market and see people drinking from cups that will not harm anybody when they finish their coffee. We can't be that human to pay such a huge price just to enjoy 5 minutes of coffee. After all, we are paying the price because we are all blamed for the damage to this planet, so we need to enjoy our coffee without feeling bad about enjoying the coffee.

The researcher: Have you experienced any other difficulties apart from the funding and place to work?

Hana: There are always people who will challenge you, and they will be the devil act where they challenge you with questions, are you really is your technology really can do this? Can you do this? Investors are the best to challenge you on that because they will question you because they don't want to put their funds into something that will not work, and within these questions that challenge you, you would evolve and be better. As you try to answer these questions, these challenges that you will try and analyse every time you or somebody else doubt. If I am answering this one and if I say we can do that, then you will have to go back to your key USB. What is it that you have and somebody else doesn't have in this world can achieve the same thing that you can achieve? Once you know your USB, you can go back to them and regain that confidence; I think that is important.

The researcher: You said setting up your business was challenging, and it changed you somewhat. How much have you changed?

Hana: I changed a lot. My children changed me into the best; they make me feel that I have a massive responsibility because these three children will make three families in the future. They need to be prepared for that, and who else would they look to if there's not their mother? So, I have to be the person to do precisely what I'm saying because I can't tell them something when I'm not myself. So, that made me work on myself far much more than I would have done otherwise because you would see there is a reason you would see it in them because you usually look at the children and reflects the environment that they are in. I still do, and by the way, as humans, we will never reach that level where you say that is perfect because there's no perfection. Even if you reach that stage, your environment has changed, so you have to evolve. Even if you become 70 years old, you still have to improve yourself and work on yourself, and I will never reach a stage where I would say I have arrived at this stage because there's no perfection. Human beings are all prone to mixed emotions and blood; you get angry, tired, and out of control. So, you can't blame people for what they have said, they have done at the breaking point, but rather give them a hand and help them come out of that stage. So, that's why you're not a person that you're working on yourself to make yourself perfect. Still, you are trying to evolve every day to be a better person to fit with the environment that you are in, and you make an impact not just on them to make you who they want you to be, but know you have a huge impact on the people around you.

So, you lead by examples like them. If you are learning something new or good, let it shine so that other people also take advantage of it. I think it's a continuous process; we will never reach that stage, but my children are the drive for me to improve myself so that they can pick up from that. My children changed me and my identity, especially after my son became five or six years old. It is a big responsibility because they start to pick up whatever from the environment after three years old.

The researcher: So, you have three children, am I right?

Hana: Yes, I have three children: my son, who's 16 and a half, and I've got my two daughters, who are twelve. I don't think I've given them anything, not yet. I mean, love, security, like I haven't given anything special. Also, there is a limitation on how much you can give to the community because it depends on how many opportunities are available and if they come at the right time for you to share. Maybe I haven't done anything now, but perhaps I'll do it in five years or maybe tomorrow. So, it's to my opportunities; when things come and knock on your door, it's how much you have worked to prepare yourself to be ready for these opportunities to respond to it, I might have done nothing, but when I am 60, I'll be doing my inputs. So, that doesn't hurt me if I haven't done much for my community. I think I have given only one thing to my family and community. I'm not causing harm, just the best thing I've given them.

The researcher: Do you have any regrets about any decisions you have made at some point in your life?

Hana: I always question why I was waiting for these days. I always had inside me that there's something that will happen when I am in my late 30s or 40s. It was always inside me; I don't know why, but I recall it seemed like something on the horizon I was looking for and working toward. I didn't know what it was; I didn't know what you would be by which sinking like

there's something good in the future that will happen. My life's most crucial learning experience is setting up this business, which completely transformed you. Do you know why? It's extremely tough that it gets you out of everything you have seen and makes you face the reality of who you are and why you are on this planet. It's so tough, trust me; there are so many nights that you don't sleep that you don't like; there's so much uncertainty that it pushes you beyond any boundaries. It's so tough, and I think that is completely transformed. But I don't regret anything I have done. I don't. There are a lot of ups and down, and many things that are gone anyway that it doesn't want to, but they will all happen for a reason. Everything that has happened made me what I am today, to be in this position. So, we don't understand that when it occurs at the time, and it causes you a lot of pain, but slowly, slowly, you realise why they happened, then what piece of the puzzle landed into the correct place. So “al hamdolila” for everything.

I do not regret any decision, even my family's decision to move to this country. They made the right decision about moving to the UK because I would probably have been completely different if I had remained there. It scares me if I think of that; it would frighten me if I had thought about the idea. If I had stayed there, what would have been? I don't think it would have been good. I don't think about going back to Kurdistan, and I passed that stage to think about going and settling in Kurdistan. I think I have reached a stage wherever I live is no longer a problem for me because I could be here and someone else next year. That doesn't matter to me anymore. So, I passed these barriers to make movements and decisions in life. I think I've passed that stage. So, it doesn't frighten me into going and living anywhere in this world because I've grown out of that thinking. To me, a place is a place. You matter, and if I keep working on myself, then the place is just a place. So, the place doesn't make you; you make the difference. Yes, I'm in the UK, and you might say the opportunity we have here made me who I am, which is true. But there are hundreds of Kurdish famous here in the UK, and they still live in the same style; otherwise, they would have been living in Kurdistan, hardly any difference, and that is painful to watch sometimes.

The researcher: Have you experienced any other challenges in life?

Hana: If I talked about my life when I was working in the University and I was like employee versus now I own my own business, the difference would be that at the time, if there was any fault, it was in me, not in the system, it wasn't racism. I couldn't deal with such a situation because similar people would be exposed to what I was told to, no matter where they were from. It's not because I'm Kurdish. I am Muslim, and I am particularly targeted. Anybody not British white would probably experience the same thing, but each person will deal with these issues differently. So, if I suffer if I've been in a situation where I didn't deal with it properly, it is a problem for me. Because we will always encounter these situations, we must evolve, work on ourselves, and say, "Okay, that happened, but it won't happen again. Also, you need to know why it happened and how you are fixing yourself to deal with it with minimum impact next time, and then slowly, slowly, that will level out.

But you will always experience them even in business. Recently we sent a shipment to America last year; it was coming from Ismael to Mohammed. The parcel was held in America for a month. They wouldn't release all we did was a couple of pieces of paper that were cut without coating like a passport application. That is a typical example because when we sent it to another name within the same company, that wasn't Mohammed, even though it was going

from Ismael. That's a typical example of how racism could occur, but we didn't take it personally. It is just like moving on. You don't want to be stopped by this because it becomes a silly thing to you.

The researcher: What do you want to achieve in a few years?

Hana: God knows, one thing I need to achieve in the next few years is commercialising our technology. That's a key thing for me, a responsibility on my shoulder, and we have to get to the bottom of this. It's so crucial because it's no longer about me, it's no longer about my family, it's about the whole world that it's relying on our technology, hoping it would be commercialised. Because it genuinely will have a meaningful impact on human health and the environment. It will change many things, and it's a big responsibility on my shoulder.

The researcher: How do you define your identity and personality?

Hana: I might come across as a very boring person to others, so many people don't enjoy socialising with me because I work a lot and study a lot. I enjoy my time more in a group of men than women, I am this type, so do you know what I mean? Because I like getting things done, rather than having sat down and talking too much and not doing anything. I don't enjoy shopping, and you know it doesn't mean I don't have female friends. I have plenty, and I'm in several groups. I have a group of female friends here who are not mainly Kurdish but Arab because we don't have many Kurdish in our area. At the University, I was told I was like a mum; you just give, ask us to do this and do that, correct us, and not let us go. Even though I'm their friend, they always refer to me as the mother because of my personality. So, I am a bit boring to them.

Luckily, my daughters are not dull like me; they're adorable and like people who love to be around them and with them. I certainly do; I think other people anything other people do as well. They just turned 12, so it's too young to say, but they're very good girls. I must say it's a blessing from God. My children are close to me equally. I'm probably closer to my girls, but my son is closer to me, if you know what I mean. So, he's such a good boy. You know the two girls, if I don't spend time with them, they will look for somewhere else, and it's not right. Because this is the only time I'm at home, and if they come to me, I don't give them the time. But the quality of time I spend with my son is completely different from that of my daughters. It's completely different.

You know, I love my mum so much, beyond any description. It's probably among my siblings. I'm the only one. I love my mum so much, and the rest love my dad more. Because I love her so much, I never wanted to see the pain in her eyes. I never wanted to cause any pain. So, I was a good girl trying to do what she wanted. Although sometimes we clash a lot, like if she was to invite somebody to our house and I want to have my rest. These are everyday things, but I've never done something to cause her pain or harm. I was 30 years old before I got married, I went for a day out with my friend, and [...] was with me and two of her younger brothers at the time, they were little, and Shella was 13. So, we went out, and we went baling. I came back, and my mum was crying. I went out, and we returned late afternoon, around eight o'clock. It was summertime, so eight was still daytime. She cried because she was too worried that I would go out alone. Although my friend was 'mohajaba,' and she's a very good lady, and I had them with me, it was a complete nightmare for her. She thought I would be turned to

Shakira or something. So, I've always tried not to cause her pain, so I was like, in our term basically, we called a good girl not to cause any problem.

I am a girl she was told when she was very young, like very young, probably 3, 4, 5, 6, or 7 during this time. I was so much told that I am so clever and capable, and that resonated inside me all the time. It helped me overcome fears and not be scared to do things that no one else has done. That is why it's so crucial what we tell our children. I'm always careful because I don't know who was telling me. However, their voices are still resonating inside me; even before I go to school, I still remember that "she goes to school, she will have no problem with that" I always had this feeling inside me that I am capable more than anybody else.

The researcher: Then, how do you define yourself?

Hana: I describe myself as a mother of three, trying her best to change herself and the world through herself. Because you can't change anybody, you can only change yourself. When you change yourself, it automatically reflects on others, and people will look. You don't need to tell them to look; they will look without anybody telling them. So, I'm just making the change by changing myself. By saying that, I wouldn't say I'm a proud person, but I'm a person. When I say "al hamdolila" for what I have, I genuinely mean it, which gives you a lot of strength and confidence. If I met you today, ten years ago, and before that, if I meet you today and you say something even though you don't mean it, I walk away, and I'll probably torture myself trying to explain what you have said. Do you know what I mean? Like it's a word, and it probably had no meaning, and you didn't mean it at all. But I will take it heavily, heavy-hearted with it, walk away, cause myself pain, and examine why she says this. Why does she do that? That was what was happening at the time. Because I was uneducated, I had to work on myself to get educated. Because it's not your problem, it's my problem to understand that it's not personal. I came out that thing is like a lot of stuff happens around you. They are not important or personal. You know what other people's situation in life is; there could be so much insecurity inside them. So, it's got nothing to do with you, yet we take it so personally, and that's imposed on us by a culture that I had to break in my life. That's the most significant difference in me.

However, my life is not fulfilled yet and will never be. It will only be fulfilled when you're ready to say goodbye to the world. As a human being, you have a responsibility because you have to surround yourself with it, whether it's your children, siblings, or neighbour. You should be part of this world and still must keep fulfilling yourself to be ready to deliver on these responsibilities. You can't turn out of sudden turned to a person that you say, okay, I've reached perfection, and I've got a stage where I have done what I wanted to do, and now it's for the world to look after me. Because that's not right, you have a responsibility and need to deliver, even if it is a word that comes out of your mouth. You'll be sitting and doing nothing, but you are saying one word; you have no idea how this word changes and transforms the life of a person in front of you in a good or bad way, and that's a responsibility.

The researcher: What are your relationships with cultural traditions? Do you celebrate any special occasion that marks the Kurdish culture and nation?

Hana: To be honest here, I can't attend the Nawoz party because it's either held by different parties, so there isn't like independent Kurdish where you go on your not labelled as a particular, so there's not one umbrella that gets the entire Kurdish community where it holds

and a big party for all the Kurdish community to take part, and that's a disadvantage for the whole Kurdish community. I have no interest in any politics whatsoever. Also, the work and lifestyle here are generally not on the same day the Nawroz parties occur. On the 21st of March, we don't go for a picnic, we don't go like what we did back home, we don't go to the breeze like what we celebrated or like do the fire, so I have to be honest now we haven't celebrated Newroz. However, we celebrate Eid. The children don't go to school. With a friend, we organised a whole day out for the children to get together, and we gave them presents, and we took them to play areas and then followed by a movie, food, and so we spent the whole day out, so they know it's Eid and then we let them do what they want. Eid usually is on working days, so we book the play areas where we have complete freedom because everyone is at school so that the children can have a lot of fun.

The researcher: What is your home language? Do you speak Kurdish with your children?

Hana: At home with my children, we speak in mixed Kurdish English so that the same sentence would be done in the old languages. I can express myself in one language because I have to force myself to speak in one language. In Iraq, I was forced to change languages because we were studying Kurdish, then turned to Arabic and Kurdish again. So, it was like a roller coaster. It wasn't like an education in one language because you're not my generation. At my age, we were governed by Saddam during high school; all the education changed several times depending on how the relationship goes with Kurdistan and the Kurdish parties. And then, when I came here, I was exposed to an entirely different new language, so I found it difficult even to think in one language. Yeh, with the children here, we speak in other tongues.

The researcher: If you decide between religion and your identity as a Kurd, which one do you pick or prefer?

Hana: I think it is probably religion because religion governs my life and actions. Everything that I do is governed by that rather than being Kurdish but having said that, I'm a proud Kurdish as well. So, I tell everyone I am Kurdish because I am Kurdish. The last time I visited was probably six years ago, in 2014. I took my son only. I went back home ten years ago because I wanted to open a branch of my legal consultancy in Kurdistan, and we stayed there for about seven months, but not like we set our house there. I went there with the girls; they were about two years old then. So, it didn't work for us, and we had to come back, so I left everything and came back. The last thing I would like to say is when you start and truly engage with something that you're passionate about in life, where it combines all the things that you feel, you know, your knowledge, and your passion together, you see a different person in yourself.

9.8 Story writing sample – Hana.

11th January 2010

I sent a shipment to America last year. I must have an Islamic/Muslim Surname and the staff member it was being sent to also had a Muslim Surname (Mohammed). This company is a huge billion dollar company, we had been working with them for a few months now, it just so happens that this time round the shipment was going to be delayed.

The shipment was stopped by customs for more than a month because they wanted to see the ID/passport of the person before the shipment was released even though we had sent a similar package a month before but to some one with a western name (there were no issues then, the package was released + delivered to the company without any request for ID).

9.9 A sample of the written narrative – Omer.

يەكەنكە لە ھۆكارە سەرەككەيكەنى ھاتتەم بۇ بەرىتانيا، تەواوكردىنى خويىندىن بوو. دواى ئەوھى سالتىك زامانى ئىنگلىزىم خويىندى و دوايىش چەند مانگىك ئايەلتس، بىريارم دا دەست بەخويىندىن بكەم. داواكارىم بۇ چەند زانكۇبەك پىشكەشكردىن. ھەندىككەيان لەسەر خويىندى رۆژ ھەلاتى ناو ھەراست، ھەندىككەيان لەسەر عىراق و جىنۇسايىدى كورد و تاد. لەچەند زانكۇبەك بە مەرج و مەركىرام، ھەموويان داواى 3 يا 4 مانگ خويىندى كۆرسى زامانىيان دەكردى، بەلام كىشەكە ئەو ھەبوو پارەھەكى خەبەرئايان داوا دەكردى، زياتر لەپارەى خودى ماستەرەكە. دوايى لەزانكۇى برونئىل تەلەفونم بۇ كرا، ھەندىك پىرسىاربييان ھەبوو لەسەر داواكارىيەكەى من. گوتى ھەز دەكەى بىيىت رووبەر و قسە بكەين، يا ھەر بەتەلەفون؟ گوتم: نا، ھەز دەكەم بىم. مەو عىدمان دانا، لەكاتى ديار كراو بەئوتومبىل لەگەل ھاوسەرەكەم چوويە زانكۇ. لەوئى، چوومە ناو پاركىكى ئوتومبىل لە زاكۇ، كە دەركايەكى تاييەنى ھەبوو و دوگمەيەكى زەرد لەسەر ئەو ئاسنەى سەر كۆنترۆلەكە ھەبوو و دامگرت و دەركامان بۇ كرايەو. ھاوسەرەكەم گوتى، پىياسەكەى ناو بازار دەكەم تا تو تەواو دەبيىت. منىش رۆشتەم بۇ مەو عىدەكە.

مەو عىدەكە لەگەل پىروفىسور ئىك بوو، لەتەلەفون پىنى گوتىووم پىنج تا دە دەققەمان پىويستە، بەلام ھەر لەسەرەتاو بەبابەتى گشتى دەستمان پى كورد و قسەكان دوو سەعاتى رىككەيان خاياند. ئەو پىروفىسورە زۆر تامەزۆى كۆمەلىك زانىارى بوو لەسەر كورد و عىراق، بەلام ئەوھى خۆش بوو ھىشتا ھىچ پىرسىارى تاييەت بە خويىندەكە و داواكارىيەكەى لىنەكر دىبووم. دواى دوو سەعات، دياربوو پىيان گوت مەو عىدەت ھەيە! گوتى: ئەى خوايە، سالتىككە دەبيىت ھىندە چىژم لە قسەكردىن مەنەگرتووه. زۆر داواى بوردىنى كورد، گوتى و مە لەگەلم.

لە ئەوھى يەكەم بووين، چوويە خواروھە بۇ ئەوھى سەر زەوى. لەوئى چوويە ژوورى تۆمار كرىن. ھەر بۆخۆى فورمىكى لەدۆلابىكى ژوورەكە دەر ھىنا، ھەندىك چوارگۆشەى بۆخۆى پىكر دىنەو. دوايىش ھەندىك پىرسارى لىكردىم و ھەر بۆخۆشى وەلامەكانى نوسىن و لەخواروھەش واژوھەكى كورد و بە بەرپىرسى ژوورى تۆمارى گوت: پۆستىك ئەدەين بە ئىبراھىم. ھەموو كارەكانى بۇ تەواو بكە و ھەر ئىستا كار تەكەى بۇ دروست بكەن. فەرمانبەرەكە پىرسى: ئەى ئايەلتسى ھەيە؟

بەر لەوھى وەلام بەدەمەو، بۆخۆى وەلام دايەو و گوتى: راستى ھىچ مەركىكە لىپىرسىو، (تەماشايەكى كرىم) ناشزانم ھىچى كەمە يان نا، بەلام لەماوھى دوو سەعات قسەكر دىنمان، لەزۆر شت بە مامۆستاي خۆمى دەزانم. ئىنجا خۆم رووم لە فەرمانبەرەكە كورد و گوتم؛ بىگومان ئايەلتسەم ھىناو. لەو دەمەدا، بە زەردەخەنەيەكەو، پىروفىسور تەماشايەكى من و فەرمانبەرەكەى كورد و (چاومەكانى دەيگوت من لەخۆرا بىريار نادەم)، ئىنجا مۆلەتى خواست، باوھىشكى لىگرتەم و گوتى: شانازى دەكەم بە خويىندكارى وەكو تۆ. من و پىراى ئەوھى كە زۆر سوپاسگوزار بووم بۇ ئەو پىروفىسورە. لەخۆشبييان وەختابوو دلم بوھستىت. ھىندە بە مەركرتەكە دىلخۆش نەبووم ھىندەى بە ھەلوئىست و پىرسىارەكانى ئەو پىروفىسورە دىلخۆش بووم. چونكە ئەو كەش و ھەوايە بوو كەمەن خولياى بووم. دوايىش بۇ دكتوراكەش بەھەمان نەفەس، بەبى چەند و چون داواكارىيەكەى منى قبول كرىد.

كە ئەو رۆيشت فەرمانبەرەكە پىرسى پىشتەر پىروفىسورت نەدەناسى؟ گوتم: نەخىر، يەكەم جارە دەبييم. گوتى: زۆر بەز محمەتە لە مەركرتى خويىندكار، ديارە قسەى زۆر خۆشت بۇ كرىدون.

گرنگ ئەوھى، ئەو كاتە، كارەكەم تەواو بوو كە تەماشاي مۆبائلم كرىد (بىدەنگم كرىدبوو)، ھاوسەرەكەم شازدە جار تەلەفونى كرىدبوو. تەلەفونم بۇ كرىد و گوتم مەروھە لای ئوتومبىلەكە. كەچووم غەرامىيەكى شەست پاوندىيان لەسەر جامى ئوتومبىلەكە دانابوو. كەس بووہ دلى بە غەرامە خۆش بىت؟ باو مەركەم، بەلام من لەخۆشبييان دلم بەو غەرامىيە خۆش بوو. ھەر لەوئى تەلەفونم كرىدو پارەكەم دا.

بەوجۆرە، رەنجى ھاتتەم بۇ بەرىتانيا و پلانەكانم و دە وردە كەوتتە سەر خەتى ئاسايى خويان. بەوجۆرە كاروانەكەم بەدروستى كەوتە رى. ئىستاشى دەگەلدا بىت ھەر سوپاسگوزارى ئەو پىروفىسورم.

ئەمە يەككە لەمۇ چيرۆكانەى كە بېرم ناچىتەمە و خەونى سالانتيكى ھىنامە دى

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(1) ئەگەر ئەمۇ رېككەتەى سەمەش گوجاۋ ھېت، ئەمەشېيان رېككەتەى سەپپىي و ئەزمونى خۇمە لەگەل كەسكى كەشمىرى لە لەندەنستانەمە لە رېككەتەى: 2017/8/20.

مىستەر ئەدفايسەر

رۇژىكىيان بەرېگادا دەروېشتم، كورېكى ھىندى بە تەنكە رېشېكەمە دەرگاي ماسدىسە سپورتىقە مۇدىل نوپىيەكەى كرىدبومەمە و دەستى خستېومە سەر دەرگاكە و دەنگى رېكوردەكەى دەگەيشتە بەرى عەرش.
ھەر لېي نىزىكېومەمە دەستى بەرزكردەمە و گوتى دەتوانم پىرسىارېك بىكەم؟ مېش سەپكەم بۇ لەقاند و گويم بۇ شل كىرد. بىمە بىمىكى لېومە ھات، دەنگوت لەژىر ئاۋ بىقان دەدات. پىم گوت: بېورە لىت ھالى نېم، دەتوانى ئەم دەنگە كىز بىكەى، چونكە زور نىز عاجە و لىت ھالى نېم؟ ھەلبەت كە تەماشاي ژورومەى ئوتومبىلەكەشم كىرد كچىكى لەتەمەنى خۇ لەناۋ ئوتومبىلەكە دانىشتىوو.
كورەكە خۇ چەماندەمە و ھەندەك دەنگى كىز كىرد و گوتى: لىگەرئ، دەمەئ بەم بەيانىيە تۆلە لە بەرىتانيا بىكەمەمە، ئەوان دەمىان سال نىمەيان نىز عاج كىرد، چ دەبى ئەگەر ئەمىش ئىومە نىز عاج بىكەم؟
بەدمە جولانەمە گوتم: تو كەنجى كچىكى جۋانىشت لەگەلە، بىرۆ بەدۋاي ژياندا بىگەرئ، چ كارت بەم كارتە سوتائومە، ئەمە رابىردوو.
گوتى: ئەمە دەزگىرانمە، ئەمەى دەگوزەرىت ھەممو خەتاي نىنگىزە كە كەشمىر لەژىر دەستى ھىندستان دەنالنى.
گوتم: ئومە، خەلكى كەشمىرىشى؟ وردە وردەش دور دەكەتەمە.
بانگى كىرد و گوتى: مىستەر ئەدفايسەر پىرسىارەكەم؟ ھەلبەت بە پىكەنېنەمە!

وەستام، ئەوجارە ئەم بەدۋايمندا ھات و گوتى: تو عەمبىت؟

گوتم: نا، ھىندىم

گوتى: برادەر، جۋىنم پى مەدە

پىم گوت: كوا جۋىنم پىداۋىت؟

گوتى: دەى ئەمە ھىندىيەكان و لاتى مېيان داگىر كىردومە، توش كە دەزانم ھىندى نىت، كەدەلنى ھىندىم واتە جۋىنم پى دەدەى؟!

لەمە لاما پىم گوت: دەى ھىندەى عەمبى عىراقى بەسەر نىمەى ھىناۋە، ھىند ھىندەى بەسەر ئىومە نەھىناۋە، توش لەخۆتەمە جۋىن بەم دەدەىت!

گوتى: ئەستەغفىروللا برادەر، داۋاي بوردن دەكەم، بۇ تو كوردىت؟

گوتم: بەلئ، چۆن زانىت عەمب لەعىراق زولم لەكورد دەكەن؟

گوتى: برادەر بەرىتانيا دەستى لە دابەشكردنى كوردىش ھىمە. مەن ھاورى كوردم ھەن، باسېيان لەدۇخى كورد كىردومە لە عىراق. مەن كوردم خۇش دەۋىن.

تا ئەوقسانەمان كىرد، كچەكە لە ئوتومبىلەكە دابەزى و بانگى كىرد. بەرەم لاي كچەكە گەر اىمە، مېش كەتەمەمە جۋلە، ناورىكى دابەمە و گوتى "مىستەر ئەدفايسەر پىرسىارەكەم.

مېش پىكەنېم و دەستىكەم بۇ بەرزكردەمە و رۇشتم

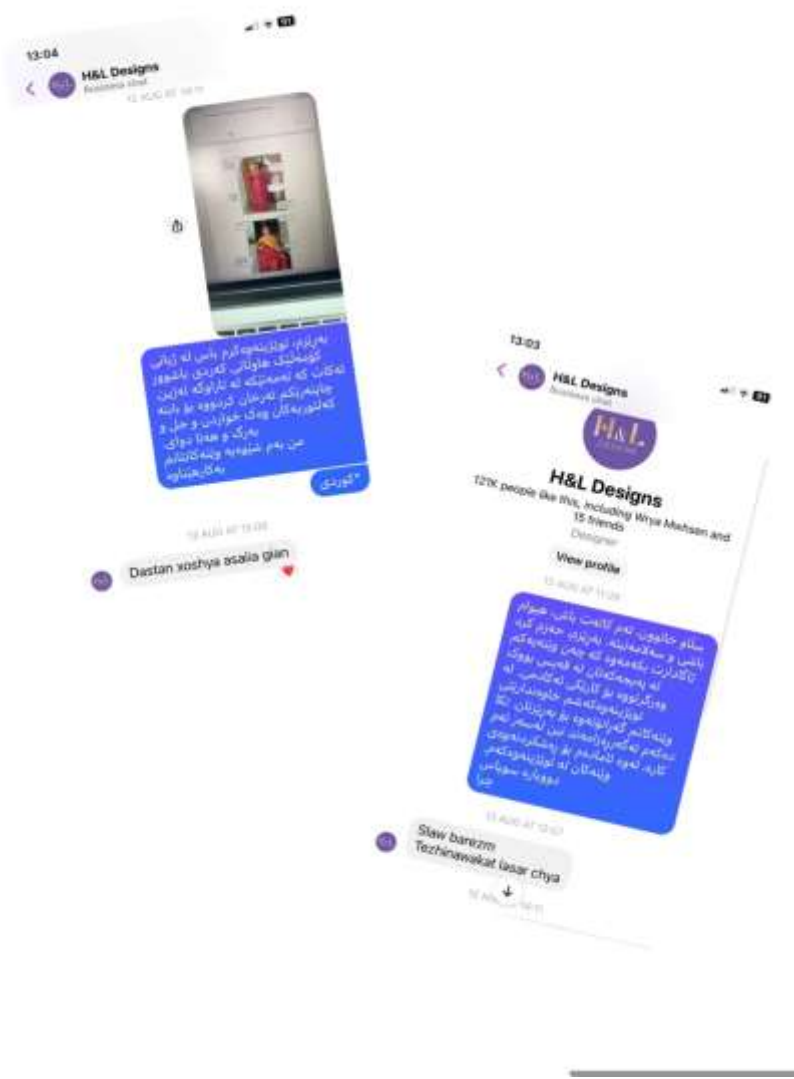
ئەۋىش سۋارى ئوتومبىلەكەى بوومەمە و رۇشتن

ئىدى لەۋىومە زانىم دونيا زور بچۈوكە، نىمە بە زەبەلاھى دەبىنېن. ھەر نەشمزانى پىرسىارەكەى چى بوو!

9.10_A sample of the follow up interviews on WhatsApp.



9.11 Permission granted from the H & L Design via Messenger.



9.12 Traditional Kurds clothing for men – Additional items can be worn by men.

klash – *handmade traditional shoes*



kalw - hat

jamana

feqiane – *sleeves of a white shirt.*



9.13 Halabja at the time of the attack.

Figure 1:



Figure 2:



9.14 Graves of Halabja victim

Graves of the Halabja victim. The grave includes remains of the victims of the chemical bombardment that hit the city on the 16th of March 1988. Even after thirty-five years, the people of Halabja continue to suffer from the long-lasting effects of the monstrous attack that occurred on March 16, including significantly higher rates of serious diseases such as cancer, congenital disabilities, and miscarriages. Since the establishment of the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq, March 16 has become a day for people to demonstrate respect and solidarity towards those who lost their lives in this horrific incident.



9.15 The Anfal campaign or the Kurdish genocide³⁹.

Figure 1



Figure 2:The discovery of sites of mass graves that belong to the Faily Kurds and victims of the former Iraqi government (the Baath regime)⁴⁰.



³⁹ The image is derived from <https://pydrojava.org/english/anfal-genocide-victims-commemorated-in-southern-kurdistan/>.

⁴⁰ The image is derived from the Shafaq News website. Available at <https://shafaq.com/en/Iraq-News/iraq-discovers-faili-kurd>.

9.16 Celebrating Eid in the UK

A group of Kurdish families celebrate Eid in the UK. The women are wearing traditional ethnic clothing to mark the day.



9.17 Samawar & Art work



(1) سهماور

نەمە يەككىكە لەو سېمبۆلانەى كە لەمألەو هەمىشە پاراستوومە. زۆربەى ژيانى مناليم لەگەل باپيرەم كە خاوەن ديوەخان بوو، بەردەوام سهماور لەديوەخاەكەماندا دانەخرا. سهماور بەو بۆنەيەو هەمىشە لەيادەوهرىمدا سېمبۆلىكى جوانە و بەستر اوەتەو بۆكۆمەلنىك يادەوهرى دىكەو، بەتايەتتېش باپيرەم كە لەر استيدا ئەو كاريگەرى راستەوخۆى لەسەر ژيانم هەبوو. جگە لەو هەش تەعبيرە لە دونياى شەرقى و تەقلیدىكى جوانى كوردەوارى و تاد.

(2) قه‌لا و ماره‌ی چۆلی



ئەمەشییان سیمبۆلی منارە ی چۆلی و قه‌لاتی هه‌ولێره. زۆرترین ژبانم له‌هه‌وای به‌ریتانبیا له هه‌ولێر بووه. له‌وێ و هه‌كو چالاكوان، و هه‌كو پارێزه‌ر، و هه‌كو مامۆستا و و هه‌كو رۆژنامه‌نوسیش كارم كردووه. له‌سه‌ره‌وه‌ی هه‌مووشییانه‌وه تا ئه‌مه‌رۆش دایك و باوم له‌هه‌ولێر داده‌نیشن. هه‌ولێریشم به‌بۆنه‌ی دایك و باوكه‌وه هه‌ر خۆش ده‌وێت.

